Voices of SJC: Oral History
Spring 2019
St. Joseph’s College
Transcribed by McEntegart Hall Library/Archives
Preface

*Voices of SJC* is an oral history project curated by McEntegart Hall Library/Archives in collaboration with St. Joseph’s College Brooklyn Campus Honors Program. The project was inaugurated in the Spring 2017 semester as a part of the College’s centennial celebration. Led by the Library faculty moderators, students engage with the College Archives to develop a strong understanding of the history of the College and conduct an oral history interview. Interviewees include but are not limited to the Sisters of St. Joseph, current and former faculty/staff members, and alumni. The students develop interview questions, discuss the theoretical implications of capturing histories orally, in addition to gaining interviewing skills.

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**Interviewee’s name:** S. Elizabeth Hill & S. Loretta McGrann  
**Interviewer’s name:** Omila Harilal, Peter Maxham, Erika Gottlieb. St. Joseph’s College Honors Program Students  
**Date of interview:** Thursday, May 2nd, 2019 at 1:30 pm  
**Location of interview:** Founders Hall, St. Joseph’s College, 232 Clinton Avenue, Brooklyn, New York

**List of acronyms:** 
EH = S. Elizabeth Hill, LM = S. Loretta McGrann, OH = Omila Harilal, PM = Peter Maxham, EG = Erika Gottlieb, MM = Mayumi Miyaoka (moderator), RA = Rose Aime (moderator)

**Recording Link:** https://archive.org/details/SElizabethHillSLorettaMcGrannSpring2019

**Keywords**
Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph  
- Sisters of St. Joseph  
- S. George Aquin O’Connor  
- S. Helen Prejean (Author of “Dead Man Walking”)  
- S. Margaret Buckley  
- S. Mary Florence Burns  
- S. Virginia Therese Callahan
EG: This recording was made as a part of the oral history project Voices of SJC by St. Joseph’s College, Brooklyn Campus honors program students in Spring 2019 semester. It was recorded on Thursday, May 2nd at 1:45 pm in Founders Hall located at 232 Clinton Avenue, Brooklyn, New York. The interviewers are Erika Gottlieb, Omila Harilal, and Peter Maxham. The narrators are Sister Elizabeth Hill and Sister Loretta McGrann.

We like to start by thanking you for welcoming us into your home and giving us the time to ask you questions.

EH: Well we're delighted to be here and looking forward to having a nice conversation with all of you.

PM: Thank you, so we’ve listened to your previous interviews that you guys had done and in it you both mentioned that you were good friends since the day you entered the convent. Would you please share with us, how did you become such good friends?

LM: We started out as enemies [laughs]. We first met when we went out for our interview for the Sisters of St. Joseph and we were both sort of ambivalent about joining the Sisters of St. Josephs or doing any of this; and Sister Elizabeth had a car, and back in the day that was unusual. My response was very pushy, asked Sister Elizabeth when she was driving us home. So she and Sister Mary Florence would drive us home and that is how we met and we did not like each other because she wanted to take Mary Florence to lunch and now she could not and I was unhappy because I had gone to Brentwood so it was just a miserable beginning.

EH: However as time went on, that was in June. Then in September we entered and we quickly realized that we both had graduated from college and we were only a very few, there were only three of us in the whole group of us out of 49 so we were kind of together a lot. Because the girls were going off to college classes and we weren’t. So we because aware of the fact that we better
stick together because there was nobody else. And then over time it has been now 53 years and we’ve got to -I am kind of kind fond of her- I guess, yeah.

PM: So you guys were both English majors in your undergraduate studies?

LM: Yes, we were.

PM: Sister Loretta, you’ve mentioned that you’ve studied African American Literature- what was your main-

EH: Why don’t you talk about that, why did you pick African American?

LM: At that time I was working in the parish in Bushwick, and I was working with a number of different groups but particularly these African American women who were part of the choir and we all sang together and we had a party together and we had a very good time together. So, when I was invited to come to the College, I was trying to tie both pieces of my life together because they were so dis-group; College was one thing and working in a city parish was another so I tried to get them together in some way and that is how I thought I got them together, I tried [laughs]

PM: And did you find that by studying African American Literature, it kind of gave you a common-like, it gave you more of a familiar experience what they may have possibly went through in their lives. Was there any similarities between what you read and what you were witnessing as their friend in their parish?

LM: Yes, I think that- I guess when I read the novels and things and it was Toni Morrison's novels, I recognized the community I was living in, you know, they were fun, they were marginal in a way-

EH: Deeply religious.

LM: Deeply religious.

EH: Deeply spiritual people.

LM: And they had a great sense of community, more than in your- maybe in other more stayed proper churches. There was a lot of working together and trying to keep the parish open and trying to keep the school open. We were always raising money and trying different things to keep the place going, and it still is going, the school had to close unfortunately but-

EH: Parish is strong.

LM: Parish is doing fine, and Cristo Rey took over the school. Cristo Rey is another program for poor children as the Bishop’s baby, I think.

PM: Did you do a special concentration of what kind of literature you studied?
EH: Well, I really was just a general English major and I went on to get my masters in History so it was sort of ambivalent about the two. But while I was here, I took a number of courses. And the next question you are going to ask me about Sister Mary Florence, so I'm going to jump ahead because I took everything she taught. I took Chaucer and Shakespeare and she did not teach Milton but Donte, medieval. She was a wonderful, wonderful teacher, very demanding; one of her typical-our quizzes would be- for instance for Shakespeare we read a play a week and then we would have two hour quizzes and then the final. Our quiz would essentially be a long quote from a current critic that she would have called from someplace, and the question would be “Support, modify, or refute using direct references to the text”, that was the question. You either sank or swam [students chuckling] you had to know your stuff, she was one tough teacher. But she was also a brilliant, interesting, inspiring and my classmates till this day always ask me “How is Sister Mary Florence? How is Sister Mary Florence?” and she had just been so popular and dearly beloved by so many.

OH: I’m actually curious, if you were to go back and change your major what would you change it to?

EH: Oh, there are so many new options today that is a really hard one to answer. I really don’t know. I might do something in Communication, or I might do something in Global Studies something like that because I’ll be always interested in travel and seeing new places and learning about new cultures and doing things so that might be-

LM: Not Science or Math.

[Laughs]

EH: That is clear, and not in Computer Science I’m sorry to say that.

[6:43]

OH: [chuckles] No offence taken. So Sister Loretta what would you change your major to if you could?

LM: I don’t think I could [laughs]. I always say to my mother when she was living, I get paid to read and I feel like the English major you're touching every field because you have to read all kinds of things, fiction, nonfiction, essays, novels, plays and in doing that you really learn a lot. I couldn’t imagine focusing on another field that kept you sort of focused on that field. All due respect to those in other fields [students laughing].

EG: In the previous interview Sister Mary Florence mentioned that three sisters from this house were once in the General Congregational business of the Sisters of St. Joseph; Sister Vincent Therese Tuohy, S. Virginia Therese Callahan, and S. John Raymond McGrann. Did you both live with some of them in this house, and could you share some of the memories you have with these Sisters?

EH: Okay, I'll start with that one, yes and no. I did live with S. John Raymond for a number of years and Sister Vincent for a very short time and I never lived with Sister Virginia. But let me
explain to you who they were, Sister Vincent was the President of the College from 1956-1969. She was here for thirteen years- she really built the Library and she built the Dillon Center and not physically herself but she did raise the money to get the buildings done. Sister Vincent Therese was a professor of Chemistry and was taken from that into administration so she eventually became the first Dean of the Patchogue campus. She was very, very dynamic, vibrant women who died much too young. I often wondered what the College would’ve been like if Virginia had lived longer because she was so creative and had so much energy and such a vision. But things happen and we cannot do anything about them.

And then the third one, S. John Raymond was at the College for many years, she was also for a period of eight years our General Superior, and that’s the person that is head of our Congregation. For those eight years she was living at our mother house in Brentwood, but they were all very, very different people. Sister Vincent was very formal, I had known her when I was a student and I remember when I first saw her I used to think she didn’t have feet, I thought she just glided. She was so regal, she was tall and very regal and I saw her ironing and I thought, “Oh my God, she gets wrinkled”. Vincent’s dress gets wrinkled! I mean who would’ve thought such a thing. As I said Virginia was a very different kind of person, Virginia was very engaging, and full of ideas and from time to time she would just say, “Let’s go have a Gypsy weekend!” And so she would gather up folks and you’d jump in the car and go off to Western Vermont to the Priory or someplace else. And she had this very warm and engaging person, and S. John Raymond was a very wonderful women a little bit formidable. Would you say sister?

LM: Yeah, I would say.

EH: Always very formal and she just worked very, very hard as the head of the Secondary Department. So, she prepared so many students for generations, I mean decades. I was out in California one time, and one of our alums out there told me she was a high school principal and she had been walking down the hall at her school and she heard this teacher teaching and she said, “That sounds just like somebody from St. Joseph’s College” and it was. And that teacher said that everything she knew she learned from S. John Raymond. So I am sorry you don’t have the opportunity, but you do have Sister Margaret Buckley, who is a second Sister John Raymond so pay close attention to what she tells you because she is just the same background as- right. So those are the three amazing women, strong women, it was an honor to know them. They gave so much to both the College and to our Congregation.

LM: S. Virginia Therese invited me to teach at the College, I was working in the inner city and I pulled up to a Congregational meeting one day parked my car, got out, and she parked her car behind me and they were just starting on Brentwood campus before they moved to Patchogue so she looked at me and said, “Would you like to teach at St. Joseph’s College?” and I was unhappy with my situation at the parish because there has been changes in the administration, so I said, “Oh yeah” and I’m thinking here”, right? [EH Laughing] I say “oh, yes”. And she goes “okay very good, go see Sister John Raymond she will give you a test or something”. Next thing you know, I'm in Brentwood and then I’m in Patchogue and I’m like “What!” [Laughter] Because I was really a city girl, so that was a little difficult. I got a little used to it.
And Patchogue at that time was a huge building, it’s a huge high school building. It was Seton Hall high school, and empty. You know, I was there at night- like once the students would go home and there were only three hundred students. Now there are like four or five, four thousand-something- there were only three hundred something students and the convent I was there, another sister who worked in the religious ed. in the local parish and another sister from the College but that sister’s brother got sick in Florida so she went to Florida six months the other sister was out a lot of night because she was in parish, you know, teaching the people to set and the other thing, so I was very, very lonesome there. So I stayed the year and moved back to my parish, Lourdes, which is the end of Inter-Borough Parkway and in exchange for continuing my work in the youth group in the choir, the pastor gave me a car and paid for my transportation back and forth.

So, during the week I was at the College and on the weekends I was in the parish, it was much better for me I could not, you know, live alone. I was a city girl born and bred and there is no- I was not happy on Long Island, it took me a while. For a few years I did live in Port Jefferson which was very pretty and near my sister which was alright but I preferred Brooklyn, you know, to anything.

Sister John Raymond was very very good to me. You know when I went there, I was afraid of her [laughs] because I had worked in the inner city and I had done a couple of things that are a little outside the box and she was sort of in the box kind of person and I thought this was going to be terrible but the minute I walked in and I was the Dean that was it for her. I was the Dean she would do what I told her to do, imagine that? I didn’t tell her to do anything [laughs]. But that was step aside, and hold the door for the Dean, step aside for the Dean, make sure the Dean gets- and I’m like, “who are we?” [Laughs]. She’s very sense of-

EH: Authority.

LM: Authority, hierarchy.

EH: Right, right.

[14:15]

EG: So you both worked and lived with S. George Aquin O’Connor over the years. I was wondering if you could share any memorable episodes about her?

EH: Oh well sister George was my boss for 17 years, I worked every day with her. I mean I have so many stories, most of which are not publishable but she was a very brilliant woman. She had an idea a minute, so one of the things I realized about the first six months was that she would throw an idea and I would take it seriously, and I’d go off- “I have to do this!”, and then two days later, that wasn’t happening. After about six months of this I finally said, “Okay, you don’t do anything for a week, then you find out what is really going to happen. And then-” I learned how to pace myself.

This College would not exist if it were not for S. George Aquin and I say that it’s not an exaggeration. She took over in 1969 and many colleges like St. Joseph’s were failing. Notre Dame
on Staten Island, Good Counsel, Ladycliff, it could tip them off. And our College was in peril because the enrollment was down and there was no money. There’s no money. She’d tell a story about when she first took over, she came directly out of the classroom into the president’s office, she had no administrative experience prior to that. So, it was all, kind of, literally flying by the seat of the pants, as they say, and she figured it out. But one day this very nice man came from the bank, and “what is this nice man coming to see me from the bank” but turned out he was saying, “well Sister, now, what are you going to do about the unsecured loan?” “Loan?” She said, “We have a loan?” “yes, Sister, you have a loan, and we were wondering how are you planning to discharge it?” “Oh! She said, “Well, I will get back to you on that one.” [People laughing] Well, I mean, she had not really been briefed about that properly which was a mistake on somebody’s part, but anyway, so she said to her credit paid back every penny of that loan. She managed to create a new school really, out of ashes because she went and she got, what they call then, Bundy money. Which really enabled the school to continue. That was money from the State that was really supposed to support private schools a little bit in comparison to what they were doing for the public universities. Really it was much less but at least it was good, it was helpful.

The second thing she opened up the adult division. The third thing was they moved to Brentwood, and then to Patchogue. Through all these different things, she really turned the school around. So by the time she finished in 1997, 28 years later, had gone from a school with about 400 students, to more than 4,000; had gone from school from only traditional undergraduate programs to undergraduate and graduate programs and new disciplines such as, well not you, but you too [chuckles]. A much more diverse population, a much more diverse board. She really just transformed the place. I learned from her day by day, sitting literally across the table from her watching her as she thought through things, worried about them, handled them. When I became the President, I think of the best possible training that anybody could have, because you know she shared everything, she’s very generous. So that’s my George Aquin story.

LM: I found her to be very freeing. She put people in place if they showed they could do the job that was it, you would do the job she never interfered. Probably the funniest stories, the first year I was there, at Patchogue at that time we used to have graduation on a lawn between the library and the school- it’s small, but there was a small class, right? They had all the chairs set up everything ready to go, we had no other place to go. That is the only place we had, that or maybe the auditorium, which was not great at the time. She came, and it was like, it rained, it stopped, it rained, it stopped, we’re wiping the chairs, we didn't know what I was going to do. So, she said to me “what do you want to do? Go inside or outside?” I looked at her and said, “I’d like to go outside” she goes “okay, we’ll go outside”, which meant she will be sitting in a puddle of water too [laughs]. So we went outside, I mean that was it, you made the decision she knew you had all the facts, and she did not second guess you or- that was a good day to second guess.

EH: What happened?

LM: It didn’t rain, it held off. But we did literally have to wipe down all the chairs before anybody came.

EH: But in that same vein, when I became president, Sister George choose to stay living here. I mean, we were living across the street at the time, so I saw her all the time. She is a very strong,
very strong opinionated woman. I mean she had been the boss for 28 years so, I said, “how is this going to work?” I mean, I’ve been her assistant, she’s been my boss, now I’m the boss- she was magnificent. She never once interfered or second guessed, not once. I’m sure there were millions of times that she was disagreeing with what I was doing because she was a child of the depression. So her father had been a very successful contractor and he lost everything and in the Crash of 1929 when she was just a little girl; so she was brought up where every penny counted. I was not brought up in the same environment, so I was much more, as my mother would say “fairyulach” [LM chuckles]. My father used to say the first words out of my mouth were “charge it”, and I said “no, dad, the first words were ‘let's take a cab’”. But George had that background of being very frugal and I’m thinking you know, when I was loosening the purse strings a bit and letting people do some things that I think she was going “oop” but she never said a word. She was a great lady. We have a saying that we borrow from some famous- that we are the pygmies standing on the shoulders of giants, and really that’s how I feel about it. These women were the giants they built the place and we were able to I think, do some things and-

LM: Keep it going-

EH: Keep it going but really without them, we wouldn’t be here.

[20:50]

EG: And then I have another question for you Sister Elizabeth. So you have a Juris Doctorate degree, and I was-

EH: I do.

EG: And I wanted to ask you about your law school experience, and where you went and what you specialized in? And if you practiced after and do you think you're legal knowledge had helped you during your presidency at the College?

EH: I went to St. John's Law School, you don’t specialize in law school, it is just a general curriculum. When I left law school, I did work for two years at the Catholic migration office. So I did practice immigration law from 1978-1980 and I found it very, very difficult. Because I was working with clients basically who were wonderful people but were not wealthy. For the most part they did not have the skills or the resources that our law required for people so they were part of that family structure that meant waiting, in some cases, endless years. A lot of my clients came from the Islands many were women who were here, basically to find work taking care of children while their own children were back home in Trinidad or Jamaica. Their hearts were there but they had to be here because they wanted to be able to bring their babies up to give them a better life, so it was a very, very stressful thing. I found it so, so difficult not to be able to do more, so after two years Sister George offered me a job as her assistant and I was grateful to actually, frankly leave that world because I just knew- I mean I would have seven interviews a day and if I could help one person a day, that would be a lot. That wears you down, after a while, you get this feeling, “what am I doing?” So I came to the College, for the first 17 years I was here, my law degree was very useful. I reviewed contracts, I dealt with insurance companies, I handled any kind of civil rights cases that we might have, I did as a general, kind of, in house counsel. And when I became
the President in 1997, I stopped doing that because you cannot be your own lawyer, it is not a good idea. But the law is a very useful tool because it is a discipline of the brain. I wasn’t focused on any specific area it does give you a way of approaching things, it’s very analytical and- so it was helpful over the years.

EG: And I was going to ask you Sister Loretta, have you ever gone to Sister Elizabeth for any legal advice?

EH: I keep her out of jail all the time! [Laughs]

LM: When I was in administration, things would come up with students, faculty, and staff and yes, I would. But when Sister Elizabeth was the President, we had an outside lawyer who really advised us a lot because again, it would be a conflict of interest. Because usually, the person I would look at you had either done something worthy of death or, [laughs] or they were looking at us and saying, “you had done something illegal” and it affected me. So in that case, we had this outside person who was extremely generous and extremely good and did it all pro bono. It was a lot because the school got bigger, and bigger, and bigger. But Elizabeth would be my first touchdown, “this is what happened, you know, what should we do? Should we call the lawyer? Should we not?”

EH: Tell them about the license plates.

LM: Oh! [Laughs]

EH: This is a Sister Mary Florence story.

LM: When I first went out to Patchogue, I guess I was the Dean or whatever- the first two weeks at Patchogue are horrendous for parking. Because nobody knows where they’re going, people come in for books, professors are coming to run things off. So, people are on campus who don’t have class particularly but are on campus. In Patchogue because it's a little bit more- what? The students have been a little more sheltered? Sometimes their mothers would come with them and they would have a car too [chuckles] and you’re like “ehh”, so they kept getting parking tickets and this and that. Finally, I said I am going to put their- cause they weren’t paying, they were ripping them up and throwing them- so, I’m going to take their licenses write them down, and put the parking fee on the bill- their book bill, or their tuition bill. So if you had $25 parking fee it's going to go right on the bill with your tuition. But I said to Sister Mary Florence that I am going to take their licenses and I am going to, you know, bla bla bla- well, she thinks I am going to take their license plates off, so she says to me, “would you want to run that by Sister Elizabeth”, I thought “okay, I mean I do not see any problem” [laughs]. So I say to Sister Elizabeth, I just want to write down their license plates, match the name-

EH: You probably said I want to take their licenses down- I think you used the same phrase

LM: Well-

EH: Which I understood, but Sister Mary Florence took it quite differently [chuckles].
LM: She thought I was going to go out there with a screwdriver and take off everybody's license plate. [Laughs]

EH: So we tease her about that little joke.

LM: I did not know her very well and she knew me slightly through Elizabeth but she felt like she did not know me, but I felt like I knew her because of Elizabeth. I do not need an in depth whatever I think. She is a good person, a good mentor, a good educator, so I had no- but she did not want to swelch me [laughs] she did not want me to feel that she would say no to everything I wanted to do, she wanted me to think that she was my advocate, my hero, and she is; so, I said alright, I’ll go to Sister Elizabeth, and ask her.

EH: But then we realized what she was saying, and we got hysterical. That is one of those, “Remember the license plate?” kind of story.

[27:00]

EG: Alright, and I have another question for you Sister Elizabeth. When you became President of the College, much change had happened and there was higher enrollment, new majors added and much more. I wanted to ask you what your opinion is of the Global Studies program and what it offers because at the end of this semester, I am traveling to Italy as part of the honors program and it probably wouldn't be possible without the expansion of the Global Studies program.

EH: I am delighted for you.

EG: Thank you.

EH: I am so happy, because that really- is this your first trip abroad?

EG: Yes.

EH: Well, open your eyes, and see everything, and just love it! Try everything, and eat everything, and go every place and just enjoy it. I mean, I’m one who really believes that travel is a fabulous way to learn. As our world has gotten smaller, for a while it seemed as though we were really going to building more bridges. The last few years, that has seemed to be- not the case.

LM: Building walls. [Chuckles]

EH: We are building walls. I really do hope that through the Global Studies program, and study abroad, that students will be aware that the world is, you know, a beautiful, a beautiful place, filled with beautiful, beautiful people. And that we really want you to explore, appreciate it, love it, and then take very, very good care of it. The best way to take care of it, of course, is to cooperate, to work with others, to know them better. As Sister Loretta was saying, as she got to know Sister Mary Florence better, she felt more comfortable and she could feel more at ease about, and I think that is true of everything.
EH: I’m delighted, I have been working for the last five years with a consortium of Catholic colleges. There is this study abroad component to a group where they are so enthusiastic about trying to get the students to travel abroad because they’ve all experienced it themselves and they know how transformative it could be. You know, if you go away and if you see things from somebody else's perspective, it's just kind of “oh, I didn’t realize that before. Now I understand why”- whatever; and that is so important in our world today that we really do try to break down those barriers. To me, that is a very delightful and a wonderful thing, and I hope you both have- have you ever had a chance to travel?

OH: Yes, I’ve traveled to Greece.

LM: Oh, nice!

OH: Yes, last summer.

EH: Did you go with Dr. Turgeon?

EG: No.

EH: No? Okay.

EG: But it was an eye opening experience and I think the more opportunities we have as students to travel, it does give us a different perspective that we’ve never seen before. And I remember initially I was a little worried, I was nervous it was the first time I ever traveled abroad. I was lucky enough to be able to go with my sister because she was graduating at the same time so she barely made it. It was amazing to see- our experiences in Brooklyn we’ve never really traveled anywhere else, it’s only in the States so to see Greece for the first time, and to study the literature at the same time, it was a different experience all together and I was really grateful for that. I can completely resonate with why travel is so important and it is something that is important for every student.

EH: So Peter?

PM: [laughs] No, I have not had the chance to go-

EH: But you will.

PM: I fully plan on going, yes. Just not had the chance yet.
LM: There are as you probably heard, Fulbright Scholarships. Yeah, I do not know on this Campus if anybody minds that, so you speak to the Dean and say if there is anybody on this campus in charge of Fulbright. Because one or two students, I know at Patchogue, we had somebody who had a Fulbright so he was gung-ho. You know, so I think one of two of our students did go abroad on a Fulbright, and that was a really a big thing; it's not easy to get but if you're working hard and so on, you should be able to do something. Whatever you can do to get abroad, but it's better. Save your pennies, what do I know [chuckles]? Go on a cargo ship, do something [laughs].

[31:33]

PM: Sister Elizabeth, you mentioned in previous interviews that you have created the Council of the Arts to enhance cultural life on Campus. Now we have Dr. Boomgaarden as the President and he had several piano, and violin concerts he's organized for the Campus. How does it feel to see what you have started turn it to what it is today, having a president who has such a strong interest in the arts?

EH: Oh, I think it is wonderful. Unfortunately, I have not been able to get any of Dr. Boomgaarden’s concerts. But I understand that they really had been so interesting, and he is both a good teacher and a good musician. And again, I feel like the arts are just so important in the development of the whole human being. It is a way for us to express - as Sister Loretta said earlier, English, with the words that we use, they are both definitive, they are evocative, they're defining, and yet they open up your mind to all kinds of different things. The same is true when I think of art and music. We live in the most culturally rich city in the entire world, and to have the opportunity to just go to some of the museums, just to wander into some of the galleries that are free just to get a sense of what is happening in the art scene. When I used to be the advisor, I used to say “you should know what is the current big show at the MET. You should know what is happening in the Metropolitan Museum, you should know what is going on at MoMa, because you never know when somebody is going to want to talk to you about these things as a client, or potential client, or potential employer” and they looked at me like, “what, lady are you crazy?” but I said, “this is the kind of world in which you want to be living. A world which you are comfortable with and attuned to. All these different beautiful things in componence of our human experience”. And so I think to have this becoming more and more alive. I also think what Ramona [Candy] does in a little art gallery we have. She brings in these different exhibits showing local artists and sometimes student work, all of that is grist for the mill and again, hopefully opening minds and hearts to seeing things in a new way. Getting out of our little boxes and maybe not into somebody else's little box, but maybe working down some of the size of the boxes.

LM: Is it true, where is Frida Kahlo, is that her name?

EH: Yes.

PM: Brooklyn Museum, yup.

LM: Make sure you get there.
EH: Interestingly, she was for many years, considered not an artist; because she was a woman, And so her husband was a great muralist, Diego, he was the one who was- and she was always in his shadow; and only many years later did they began to say, “you know, she really got something herself”. And it's wonderful to see that she has now become a-

LM: A real figure

EH: A real figure, a real star. And the Brooklyn Museum, again is another wonderful place because it's one of the best Egyptian collections in the entire world. Now, I don’t know a lot about Egyptians. I mean, I think they all look the same, to me [laughs], but they tell me it is one of the best exhibits.

LM: Take the Art course. Take an Art and a Music course with Jane Beckwith. Who is the music person here?

EH: Leon?

LM: Leon. Take it and just pay attention.

EH: I think sometimes when you start something like that, all of a sudden you say *gasp*, “I never knew how beautiful it was, or something like that”. Just looking at it when we were young, we were teaching together at our academy out in Brentwood, and she told me that she wanted to give her students a touch of rhapsody. I have never forgotten that, because I always said that is a wonderful thing; to be- some sense of lifting themselves out of the normal world a sense of the wonder. Isn't this amazing? We should live our lives amazed.

OH: Sister Loretta, you mentioned in your previous interview how you made efforts to push the mission of the College while you were provost what core values of St. Joseph's College do you most resonate with?

LM: Oh, dear.

[Students chuckling]

LM: I guess- well the four, or five if you want to count intellectual, spiritual separately. But we have a professor at Patchogue- when I first got involved when mission driven, you know, centered institution- it was not always forefront in any institutional hospitals or hot colleges or. In the 70s or so everybody wanted to become mission driven so, I followed the fad [chuckles] and went to this mission driven thing. The first one, I would have people in Patchogue when I was the Dean there. We would have convocation and in that convocation one member of the faculty would give a talk on the values that were on the mission statement. The first one was Dr. Paul Ginnetty from Psych and he gave it on integrity. It was the most wonderful talk I had heard, I had published a little book so all incoming freshmen could read it. You know. and it was all about having a oneness and being who you are in a very integral way so that your mind, and heart, and spirit, and etcetera, were all focused on the same values- it was just wonderful. I guess if you want to say which of them I would like [laughs] if you can make a choice here, I’d start with that because that seemed to have pulled them all together, especially the way he spoke about it, it was really excellent. Then,
each year at the Honors Convocation we would have professor talk on one of the values and tie it
to the- and the banners, we had the banners made. What we wanted to do was pound the mission
to the head of the students, I do not know if I had succeeded. I have always been trying to pound
everything in the head of my students but that does not work [laughs]. It probably works better
here because it is smaller, out there it is really commuter you know, you drive in, you drive home,
that is it. Because you are driving and not public transportation, you often go home in between
classes. I wanted to say, “You are supposed to be in the Library. Why are you going home?” But
they would go home. If they had class till 11 and not another one until three, they would go home.
That is the way it is out in suburbia I guess.

[38:32]

PM: So Sister Loretta, Do you live here full time now?

LM: Now, I live here full time, I retired. I fell and destroyed my body. So I was going to retire and
teach part time and do something else I had in mind. So I have to get better before I can do that, I
am almost there. I came here. And they have an elevator, and nice people who could put up with
somebody who is limping around. I enjoy like going to your Common Hour things, or going to
your night things. Or going to the Library. So it’s got enough stimulation for me that I am not- I
do not think I am getting too demented, just a little bit, no too-[chuckles]. I knew the sisters here,
of course, from teaching at the College, and Sister Elizabeth and I had been connected for over 50
years, too much to our surprise. [Students laughing]

PM: Do you miss Patchogue at all?

LM: I miss the people in Patchogue, I have never become a suburbanite. I go to Patchogue, I’m
happy, I love the faculty there, I love the students there, but the atmosphere- it's kind of an isolation
because everybody gets into their car and goes home. They don’t hang out in the school really,
unless they are in the sports team. They pretty much go. It’s like that everywhere. You walk the
streets there and there is nobody out there strolling with their dog, their kids in carriages, and all
that kind of stuff. That's not out there. The streets are empty, its cars, cars, cars, all the time. So I
found it very lonesome. I don’t like suburbia. I like a little more excitement on the street.

EG: I have another question for you Sister Loretta. I saw that you awarded Esse Non Videri
nonviolence award to a detective Steven McDonald in 1995 when you were the Academic Dean.
I was wondering if you can give the background on the award and explain how detective Steven
exemplified the qualities to which the award is reserved for.

LM: Actually the Dean, previous to me, started, I guess- Sister Helen Prejean, who you may have
heard of, is the person who works with prison population; and she wrote Dead Man Walking, and
if you see the movie and if you don’t read the book it is very good. She is very devoted to justice.
But her real ministry was to people who were on death row. Sister Jean invited her when that book
came out Dead Man Walking, she invited her to Patchogue to give a talk. It was a wonderful talk.
I thought, this is a good idea to have somebody- and then Sister Jean gave her some kind of a little
thing that said Esse Non Videri on it and then the next year I was going to be the dean and I knew
that at that time. So I thought, “we’re gonna continue this and keep it going.” We took some local
people who worked the blood bank. We didn’t always go for a big name like Helen Prejean- was one of our biggest.

And then Steven McDonald. Of course we asked him because even though he was severely injured, his whole message was forgiveness and peace and he really embodied what we were trying to do with that Pax Christi Esse Non Videri award. Let me tell you, he is, he was the handsomest guy I ever met, you don’t get it when you see him on TV. I was waiting for him and the elevator door opened and the wheelchair came out and he was breathing, and I took one look and he was so remarkably handsome, it was incredible. I was like [gasp] [laughs]. He had the most gorgeous face, and he gave a very good talk on forgiveness, and then we kept trying to go on that direction of peace and justice and all that, left-wing pinko stuff [chuckles]. That is how it began, it began with Helen Prejean, and then went to Steven McDonald, and then we started to look around for other people. The way we search for the graduation speakers was a big search for Esse Non Videri award [laughs].

[43:07]

OH: You’ve both been at the College for many years, based on your experiences at SJC, what does Esse Non Videri mean to you?

EH: I think it is the heart of everything. To be, not to seem to be. It was selected really, by the students. The first motto of the College was not Esse Non Videri. It was… what was it… It was my mother’s. “Verum ad Finem” - True to the end. In the 30’s, somehow the students decided that they were going to change it. And so it became Esse Non Videri. And I think it really just says very simply what we try to be, who we are, honest, straightforward, no guile, just to be good people, just to be present to people, just to be what we say we are. It really calls for every decision to be made in the light of that so that- one very simple illustration for many years if a student did not have all of the requirements completed by graduation, he or she could not walk across the stage. Sister George was absolutely vehement about that and she used to cite Esse Non Videri; because, if you walk across the stage, that means you are graduating, that means you have satisfied the complete requirements, and if you haven’t, you haven’t, and if you have, you have, and there is no two ways you can slice and dice this. That would be one very very simple thing.

Another time, and this is kind of a ridiculous one, I got a phone call, I was her assistant, from the electrical company and they wanted to give us a lower rate on our electric bill because we were a religious entity; and I said, “no, thank you very much, we don’t want the lower rate because we are not a religious entity, we are an educational entity”. But at St. Joseph’s College, Sister George Aquin is the President, and Sister Elizabeth Hill is whom I’m talking to… The man is totally confused he can’t figure it out, “What? How can this be possible”- and I said “no, our charter is under the education law, we are an educational institution. Thank you very much, we prefer to pay the higher rate.” I think he probably went home and said to his wife “I spoke to this stupid nun today”. [LM Laughing]

But that was basically her and what she passed on to me. Very much a sense of- You know, you live with integrity, and that is the loadstar. I guess you test every decision- big decisions and little decisions. I think it is a way to keep the tradition alive, and it’s a way of keeping the place alive
because it is that kind of special quality that justifies the place like St. Joseph’s. Why do we exist? Because our 5,000 students could be absorbed by many, many schools [snaps] like that. So we exist because we want to be different, and the motto helps us to different; the motto helps us to be true to that integrity that is at the heart of everything. You want to add to that? [Asks Loretta].

LM: I was going to say, do you think that? I mean, do you experience that? At St. Joseph’s with faculty, staff, administration, by your fellow students? Is there a sense of- even if we don’t- even if we, sort of speak, “betray” the motto on an occasion. Do you feel that sort of permeates the air or, students are aware of it?

OH: Personally, that was the reason why I decided to come to St. Joseph’s College. I heard of Esse Non Videri and I wanted to know what it meant, and when it was explained to me- because my sister was already a sophomore here. So she explained to me what it meant, it was a little tough for me to make my decision at first, and I've always been indecisive. I wanted to make sure going to college would be the best option for me. I was thinking about it, and in the world we live in today, it is really hard to upkeep integrity, I believe. Because you have so many people telling you what you have to be like and then you have your own perceptions of who you really are. Sometimes you try to mold yourself to what you think people are asking of you and then you still want to be yourself. That was one of the main reasons why I wanted to come to St. Joseph's College, because I've always been very shy, it is actually a great opportunity to be doing this interview right now. Usually, I would like to keep to myself, I would rather research whatever question I have. When I came here, everyone was so open and if I would stutter, and if I would be a little shy, or keep to myself, I was never told that I was wrong for doing that. I was more helped into becoming who I really wanted to be which is someone who is curious, who wants to ask questions, and who wants to be free and learn more. That is one of the reasons why I ended up taking the travel abroad course because I wanted to expand my options and go out more and see more things, learn more things. Yes, I do feel a lot of the faculty and staff and students here do embody that motto Esse Non Videri.

LM: Aw, I am so happy to hear that!

EH: Glad you had that good experience.

LM: Did you ever look at that Nicaragua trip?

OH: No.

LM: If you save all your pennies, you can go to that one too [laughing].

OH: I think I am planning to go to Japan now within the next semester.

LM: Wow, that’s far.

OH: Yeah.

LM: That’s airfare.
OH: If you would had to describe SJC in one word, what would it be and why?

[Students laughing]

EH: We are English majors, we cannot do anything with one word.

OH: Or even in a phrase.

LM: I think I would say basically, an academic community.

EH: A good school.

[Students laughing]

OH: What advice would you give to students who are trying to find themselves during their time here in SJC?

EH: Talk to you [LM giggles] because what you just said, I think it was a wonderful way of encapsulating so many of the hopes that I would have for our students.

OH: Thank you.

EH: That you will be willing to risk, to stretch, to be open, to take chances, to leave your comfort zone- that famous thing- and to explore. I think college really should be a time of just getting out there. Sometimes your parents get nervous and they really want to sometimes- and this is frankly much true in Patchogue than it is here. I had parents there, who wanted their children to graduate from St. Joseph’s and then, to live in the same town they had grown up in and like, two blocks away from mom and dad. There is nothing wrong with that. But there is a whole world out there. I mean Massapequa is not the be all and end all of the earth. So I think that, to me, would be, use these times, use these years well, and just don’t be afraid.

LM: Patchogue students, because their parents and grandparents moved out there, because they were afraid of difference of any kind and the city was rapidly changing neighborhoods. So they moved out, and now they live in the little cul-de-sac, and everybody in the cul-de-sac has the same language, looks the same, acts the same, and same values. My nieces and nephews were fortunate because the heart of the family stayed in the city. So they would come in the city all the time and they still do that whenever they can they are in the city they are not out in suburbia- where there is not much to do, that is why those kids are always in drunk driving accidents, I think. They haven’t got much to do out there.

EH: We had a program I thought it would be wonderful, we called it “Semester in the City”. And it was going to be, I thought, overwhelmed with students coming in from Patchogue, who’d want to spend- and we had to design the curriculum so they would really use the city, museums and the Yankee Stadiums, which I thought it was terrible because I am a Mets fan [student laughing] not the point. But it didn’t happen. The students either- of course the financial factors were significant,
but many of them were just not interested. There was no reason to come to New York. People travel from all over the world to come to New York, you are 45 minutes away!

LM: And they also were, I mean, because they are also working class kids and they have jobs. They leave school and they go to work, summers they work, they work. They work too much. Like you, 40 hours or something and you’re like [gasp], no wonder you can’t get a reading done. To take even a semester and come in the city and give up your job. As well as, not just the school, but that work that paid the tuition. They had that. That was one great anxiety they would express, I would try to push them to do this- that they had to work. They couldn’t leave work and come in to the city. But the ones that did, the few who did had a wonderful time they really did. They stayed in the dorm and they came over here and they did.

OH: In between balancing work and going to school, for some students trying new things brings on the fear of failure. Do you have any advice that you would give about facing that fear and become fearless.

EH: Well, the thing is, you are going to fail. We have all had failed something in our lives. Nobody goes through life just like on a cloud floating along like a nice little cushion. It's not so much about being afraid of failure, it is how you handle failure. And I think that does require having enough self-confidence. Saying this is not the end of the world, and what can I learn from this? How can I move on from this and not be paralyzed by the fact that what I hoped and dreamed for- like, I didn’t get that scholarship, I didn’t get the job, or didn’t get that promotion. Well, why didn’t I? What do I need to do to improve? I think just to have that sense of, yeah, it is okay not to be perfect, it’s okay to fail. How can I pick myself up and use this with a degree of grace and courage to move on.

LM: Might just change your path and put you on the right path, you know? You might be failing because you might be going the wrong direction or something, you know? When you fail, you have to say “what are my other options?” and sometimes the other options are the things that will bring you grace, success, and happiness, and all the wonderful things you want. But you’re still determined to, you know- my family always wanted me to be a- and I’m going- and then you find out you hate being a- and you fail at it, and you go off and you become who you are really supposed to be. I read a beautiful article- if I didn't have early dementia I could remember the name of the title, something about very famous rich person talking about his failures and if the failures led to his successes. That is what happens in science, right? If it doesn’t work you see what is wrong and try it again, and you try to add something else and you- so life, I guess, is an experiment, right?

EH: It’s all a work in progress. Nobody that I know who is still breathing is quite finished yet.

OH: Well, thank you so much for letting us feel so welcome and answering all of our questions.

LM: Thank you.

EH: We probably took more of your time, becoming conscious of the time going so quickly. What time until we got home, Mayumi?
MM: It is 2:30 but we have until 3:00. So keep talking!

Everybody: Oh, okay!

LM: We don’t have to keep going [laughs]. We can have early dismissal if you want to.

EH: I am very grateful for your questions and your interest-

LM: Yeah, and your attention.

EH: And looking forward to seeing, as you leave us, how you go out and bring the good word to St. Joseph's College to wherever you go. So, thank you.

Students: Thank you.

LM: And keep those values things moving. I am not sure every graduate from College is leaving with the sense of values, as well as, I got this education now, I can get a good job and go here and go there. For us, at least for our idealistic moments, the values are more important than the information you get, or the skills you achieve, or those kinds of things. They should know, right? Passing that classroom is that that’s somebody from St. Joseph’s College? I can tell. That is what you like to happen everywhere. Okay?

MM: Okay, Well thank you, yes. Thank you very much everyone.

[57:21]

[Recording ends]
Informed Consent/Release Form

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- To introduce students to the concept of oral history, the construction of social history, and the process of creating oral histories
- To collect and preserve testimonies pertaining to the history of St. Joseph’s College through the experiences of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the SJC faculty and staff members, and develop a St. Joseph’s College Oral History Collection
- To showcase the SJC Oral History Collection on an online platform as a part of the centennial celebration.

Recordings and transcripts resulting from interviews conducted for the project will be deposited in the oral history collection of the McEntegart Hall Archives, where they will be made available for historical research and public dissemination. Participation in the project is entirely voluntary.

I, the undersigned, have read the purposes of the project and the use of the recordings, and I have agreed to be interviewed/to interview.

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Interviewee/Interviewer’s signature  
Sister Elizabeth A. Hill, CSS

Date 5/2/19

Interviewee/Interviewer’s name (please print clearly)  
Sister Elizabeth A. Hill, CSS
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Date 5/2/2019

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Interviewee/Interviewer’s signature

Erika Bottles

Date May 2, 2019

Interviewee/Interviewer’s name (please print clearly)

Erika Bottles
Informed Consent/Release Form

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Omita Harilel
Interviewee/Interviewer’s signature

May 2, 2019
Date

Omita Harilel
Interviewee/Interviewer’s name (please print clearly)
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Interviewee/Interviewer’s signature

Peter Maxham

Date

5/20/19

Interviewee/Interviewer’s name (please print clearly)

Peter Maxham