Voices of SJC: Oral History

Fall 2018

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: Sister Mary Florence Burns
Interviewer’s name: Alondra Caba [Rodriguez Cruz], Pamela Castillo, Dhiraj Kumar Chaudhary, Santiago Marin Araque, Fatou [Tyma] Ndiaye. St. Joseph’s College Honors Program Students
Date of interview: Thursday, December 6th, 2018 at 3:00 pm
Location of interview: Founders Hall, St. Joseph’s College, 232 Clinton Avenue, Brooklyn, New York

List of acronyms: AC = Alondra Caba [Rodriguez Cruz] (interviewer), PC = Pamela Castillo (interviewer), DC = Dhiraj Kumar Chaudhary (interviewer), SM = Santiago Marin Araque (interviewer), FN = Fatou [Tyma] Ndiaye (interviewer), MFB = Sister Mary Florence Burns (interviewee), MM = Mayumi Miyaoka (moderator), RA = Rose Aime (moderator)

Recording Link: https://archive.org/details/SMaryFlorenceBurnsFall2018
MM: Don’t be nervous. Any question before we [Laugher] start in a few minutes?

FN: Yeah, so… about the house. So, you said it was built by the person who built the Pratt Institution.

MFB: Yes, yes.

FN: Oh, okay, cool.

AC: So, it used to be their campus or it was a house, like where they used to live in?

MFB: This was simply their house, this is where they lived… and because they came and they were wealthy; they were in the oil business, it attracted many other wealthy people. Whoever was who founded the Singer Sewing Machine Company lived down on the next block; a whole series. So, look at some of those houses and know that wealthy people built them, and continued that way for some time. He established Pratt Institute, I think around… I should know, around 19…-1988. [1888s]. So, Charles Pratt moved here in roughly 1874, and 20 years later, almost, decided to take one of the buildings -it’s still one of their buildings-, and it looks like a factory, and that’s what it basically was, and he decided to take that and to turn it into a school. He would see how it went, if it didn’t work, it would go back to being a factory. So, that was the beginning of Pratt Institute, and when Jerry Pratt -it was J. Richardson Pratt- was president of Pratt, he was a very gracious man, and part of the time would live across the street, but his home wasn’t really here. He took over Pratt at a difficult time, at the beginning of the 70’s [1970] and restored it, but… he became friendly with Sister Elizabeth who you met a few minutes ago, they got along very well together, did a few things together. So, he told us a little bit about it: when he was a little boy, he lived in this house, grew up in this house, and then by the time he was twelve, they moved. But he had memories of it, and he came back one day and asked.. you know, I was invited in to see the first floor and the second floor so… [Everyone talks]...

[Setting up an iPhone in the background] RA: Oh… you’re missing a part of it.

SM: Yeah.

RA: Okay.

SM: I think I forgot it.

RA: Okay.

MFB: Now, are you all in first year?

AC: No, I am in my Junior year.

MFB: Junior year, oh, alright!
FN: Junior.

PC: Junior year.

MFB: Junior year!

DC: First year, first semester.

FN: Junior.

MFB: Junior! Alright, three Juniors and...

SM: I’m a sophomore.

MFB: And you are a sophomore, okay, so got one, two and three [Everyone laughs].

AC: Right?

SM: Almost done.

MFB: Alright!...And you are in the Honors Program, is that right? [Everyone responds yes]. Good, good! Means you work a little harder [Everyone laughs].

AC: Yeah!

MFB: That’s good too.

MM: Any other question [Laughs] before we start? Or anything you wanna ask her?

RA: Are you missing the attachment for your phone holder?

SM: No, there are other attachments to the trifold, but it’s okay, it’s gonna be alright without it, it’s fine.

RA: Okay!

SM: Let’s check the volume... [Everyone laughs].

AC: He needs to focus [Everyone laughs].

MM: All your phones are silent.

AC: I have marbles here [Everyone laughs]. I mean, I am Child Study Department, so we do a lot of… [Everyone laughs and says okay]... yeah! They all fell.
MM: Okay, so, great. Thank you, Sister, for participating again, and again. Okay, so, you’re ready to start officially? Okay... alright... all yours.

MFB: Well I’m very happy to welcome you [Everyone says “thank you”]. It's now called Founders Hall, we still think of it as St. Joseph's College Convent, but it was Sister Elizabeth Hill as President who gave names to some of these buildings, and so she decided it was appropriate to call it Founders Hall. Let’s begin there.

[5:17]

PC: Thank you, Sister. This recording was made as a part of the oral history project by St. Joseph’s College Honors Program students in Fall 2018 semester. It was recorded on Thursday, December 6th, [2018] at 3pm in St. Joseph’s College Founders Hall located at 232 Clinton Avenue, Brooklyn, New York. The interviewers are: Pamela Castillo, Alondra Caba [Rodriguez Cruz], Santiago Marin Araque, Dhiraj Kumar [Chaudhary], Fatou [Tyma] Ndiaye. The narrator is Sister Mary Florence Burns.

AC: As part of the first question, and before I start, I just wanna say that we are honored to be here and we are thankful that you let us into your home. You attended St. Joseph’s College in 1940’s. Specifically, why did you choose St. Joseph’s College among so many other colleges?

MFB: Well, there weren’t quite so many other colleges back then, we can start there, the whole Brooklyn College for instance, Hunter College… Hunter was in existence, Brooklyn wasn’t, and Hunter was well up into the city as you know, it still is; and the community college system did not exist, but apart from that, back in that period of time, I started here in 1943. The Catholic Church in this country was heavily emphasizing Catholic education and there was no Catholic college for women on all of Long Island, except for this one. Molloy College, which is now at the Rockville Centre area wasn’t instituted until into the 1950’s. So, it was the only Catholic college for women, and the church was emphasizing Catholic education, starting with the grammar schools, and it was an emphasis by the bishops in this country from early on. I think it may well… the United States may well have been the only country in which there was almost universal Catholic education starting with the grammar schools, moving up to the high schools, and then eventually, moving to the college level. Now, St. John's College for men had been established at a much earlier point, very much earlier; and Fordham University, up in the Bronx, was established very much earlier, but a college for women, did not come in to be until St. Joseph's College in 1916. So, with that kind of emphasis from the bishops, and with the emphasis on Catholic elementary, and high school education, the move, if you could do it was into a Catholic college. And so, that was it. Now, the other piece of it, and I think you come to it later here is that not that many women went to college. Starting 1916, very few, and even by the 1940’s, relatively few; and keep in mind that the years -the early 40’s- were the war years. I mean, you have zero recollection of that, but the early 1940’s, every fellow as he came to the age of eighteen had to sign up for the draft, it was universal draft, and by the time we were really into War World II, most of the young men, were in the Army, or were on their way into it. So, the
boys colleges; St. John’s remained a boys college -until-... and St. Francis College remained a boys college until 1970, and that’s when things really began to change radically, it was a whole new world we were moving into. So, choosing St. Joseph’s College, I don’t how much of a choice it was. I mean, it was what was expected, it’s what we did, if you could do it, and the tuition if -I think I’m correct, I have to go back and look, but I think I’m correct in saying that the tuition was one hundred dollars a year, I think- [Students say whoa].

AC: Yes. I think I saw it while doing the research, I came across that and I told Mayumi how I was like, what?! I couldn't believe it, it’s such a big difference. Of course, the year difference and all of that.

MFB: It did not go to a thousand dollars, well it went to a thousand [Laughs] under sister George Aquin O’Connor, and it had to, I mean, we couldn’t go on as you can imagine, it had crept up, but I think she had to… she came into office in 1969. So, in the 69-70 year she held a meeting with the whole student body, and told them she was very sorry but tuition would have to go to a thousand dollars for the following year. And that was the beginning, it moved a long way from there [Laughter]. And there’s just no way to control it, you know it’s… and we’re relatively reasonable compared to most places, and that’s the effort that the College has made all through the years, to make this education available to the students, but that’s it, it was unthinkable. There was no Brooklyn College… and it was unthinkable... I would have gone to Hunter because while I was in college, in my four years of college, I went to Hunter College one summer, and by that time, there was Brooklyn College because I went to Brooklyn College one summer; I made up six months, that’s really what I did. The total number of credits was 128 and I made up the eight credit or so, and did it by going to Hunter College and Brooklyn College in the summer, and those credits were added, so I graduated then in June of ‘46, but college was not universal, until after War World II, and then, and again, it’s a part of history, at the end of World War II, the country, I guess, established money for veterans, and so, they had some money and could go to some colleges, could afford to go to college, but that wasn’t much of a choice [Laughs].

AC: Yes.

[12:12]

PC: You have just mentioned that you had the opportunity to visit different colleges while in St. Joseph’s, so how could you say that the education was different in the colleges back in the time?

MFB: How was education different?

PC: Yes.

MFB: It wasn’t very different one from the other, the difference between a Catholic college and the others was that religion tended, as it does not today, it tended to permeate, so there was… we had mass on campus every single day, you didn’t have to go, but it was here, you had sisters wearing habits, or you had brothers, the Franciscans, or the priests of incensions wearing cassocks. The whole atmosphere of it was different, and the religion courses were built into the
program, they were required, and they were specifically Catholic, so that there were not very many students that seems to me, who came to the Catholic colleges than… who were not catholic, they were almost all Catholic. These days, St. John’s University, I think, at this point, if it has a 50% of the students are Catholic -that’s more than I think it is, I think it might be close to a 48%. It’s a whole other world, it really is… Does that answer your question?

PC: Yes, thank you very much.

MFB: I get off on something else [Laugher].

FN: Thank you Sister, you kind of answered a little bit of the second question, but in the early 20th centuries, high education was not like accessible, as it is today. Nowadays like people require at least a college degree to get like most of the jobs it requires a college degree. What is like back in the 90’s, like what was it like to get a college degree?

MFB: To get a college degree put you in a different category. It did, and… I would say in those days the college was emphasizing elementary education and secondary education, but doing it within the liberal arts framework with a much stronger emphasis on… Students were required to take a year of English literature, a year of History, a year of Math. The whole curriculum was spelled out and it seems to me -I counted up one time, I think something like 72 credits were specifically required, there were no choices,- now, whether you took math in first year, you see, then you probably, you might have taken English in second year, or might have taken Science in the second year… but you took it, and everybody took exactly the same thing, and that was true in this country; it wasn’t just the Catholic college, we added [Laughs], the Catholic colleges added some, in those days called religion, it wasn’t even called theology yet. At a later date it became theology and I’m not sure what we’re calling it now, but... that was an add on, but the curriculum was very much the same in every college across the country. There was very little professional education, very little. You could… medicine was in a separate category, they were the science majors, and they took the courses that would enable them to go to medical school, but apart from that here, the emphasis was very heavily: if you’re thinking of a career, and our students were, it was heavily into teaching; and the only time that… that wasn’t true was in the 1930’s when we were in the depression, and they would cut backs even in education, even high schools. And, at that time a number of our graduates went into like community service, they were into social work, and that has continued through the years, we still have people in social work and teaching, but now with the number of majors you have now, and the heavy emphasis moving into computer work… we are in a different world [Students laugh]. And it has to be different.

[16:49]
PC: Okay. Going back to a previous interview that you did in the past, you said that you decided to enter the Convent after you graduated college, and I just wonder how that decision impacted your life?

MFB: Well, I guess that decision made my life [Students laugh]. You know… it was a very formal program, it’s a little less formal today, but today nobody practically speaking is entering the Convent, but back then it was a whole… the first three years were years of.. you are making a decision… Is this what you want to do? Is this what you think you’re called to do? And the congregations, whichever the Dominicans, the Sisters of Charity, the Mercies, the Sisters of St. Joseph's were making the decision about whether this life was right, whether they thought it was right for you. So... it’s a major decision, it was certainly a major decision back then, and in fact it did determined everything else that followed. I was prepared to teach high school. When I finished college, as I was finishing, I had not yet worked up to telling my mother that I was going to go into the Convent, and I knew that my mother was not happy. I found out later, my father wasn’t happy either, but he hadn’t said anything, so I didn’t know that. But anyway, I therefore, I delayed so that I needed an extra year to allow the family to adjust to that. So, for the extra year, one of the sisters on faculty here, Sister Joseph Immaculate Schwartz encouraged me to apply to St. John’s for a fellowship, which I got. And I went to St. John’s, tuition free, and did a little work for them, but basically it was one year, got my master’s degree, in that year, and then entered in 1947. And, at that time, expected that eventually I would go into high school teaching because I was prepared for it; understood that I might very well start in grammar school, and that’s where it started. My first year after novitiate was at St. Michael’s 43rd St., here in Brooklyn, and I taught the sixth grade, made a mess of it [Students laughing], learned more geography because I had to teach geography and I didn’t know any geography. I was up nights trying to figure out which countries were next to, and what product went with which... with which states, I mean, was awful. And the students thought that I loved geography because I spent so much time on it, but it was because I didn’t know any [Students laughing]. So, there we were. But at the end of that year, then a sister who had just… who was here, and who had gotten her doctorate from Columbia, was asked to go to Puerto Rico, to the recently established University of Puerto Rico, and she left, and it left a place here, and they needed somebody to fill in, so it was really almost by accident. If she had not been asked to go to Puerto Rico, I would not had [Laugher] been asked to come, and I wasn’t asked, I was told to come here [Laugher]. So, this is where I came, that was 1950.

FN: You mentioned… sorry… You mentioned that you went to St. John's for your master’s...

MFB: Yes!

FN: For one year…

MFB: Yes!
FN: So, back in the days, is master’s degree considered as one year or two years, or was it like you were just in that special program?

MFB: Well, I would say that because I had only one year [Laughs]. [Phone rings]... I’m sorry, let me just try to turn that off… and I… I’m not good at this… How do you turn this thing off? Off, end!… Okay, sorry. And, let me… I do know how to turn it off if I think about it… [Phone beeps]… Fff! Sorry. Now, would you repeat the question?

FN: Yeah, sure. You mentioned that you went to St. John's for your master’s...

MFB: Yes.

FN: And you said you only spent one year and you get your master’s degrees…

MFB: Yes.

FN: Was it like a special program or is it like back in the days you only need to spend one year to get your master’s because now is after you get your bachelor’s, you need to spend two years to get your master’s.

[21:56]

MFB: Well, I think you could probably still do it in a year if… [Phone rings]... I turned that off you saw me turn that off [Students laugh]. Oh…

RA: I like how it waits for her to finish the question.

MFB: Well, let’s let it ring out, it will stop at the end of 4 or 5. Would pretend it’s not doing that [Students laugh]. Anyway, it’s easy to let it ring out… [Students laugh]. Stop it. Okay [Phone beeps and students laugh]. A grace note…

You can still do it, I think in a year if you’re willing to work day and night. Now, most of you, if you go on for it are probably getting a job, and you’re doing it part time, I was doing it full time…

FN: Ah, okay.

MFB: In one year, and was lucky enough to set… well, Sister Joseph Immaculate Schwartz, professor of English had suggested a topic to me, and therefore, I had a topic for the master’s and it was acceptable to the professor I was working with. So, I could get started on the master’s essay, the thesis, almost at the beginning of the year. So, my time, it was full time study and full time into doing the course work and into doing the thesis, so I was able to finish in one year.

FN: Okay.
MFB: Yeah.

PC: How was it possible to manage to do all of that? Was it the same workload that we have now to work in a thesis and other projects as it was in the past?

MFB: Oh, I think so, I mean, was heavy going. I think today, as I look at it, faculty and administrators are much more conscious of the demands on students than they were back then. Most students, most, back then were full time, and it makes an enormous difference. If you know you’re working with students who are full time, you may have a little part time job, you work in a store on Thursday afternoon that was the pattern. Now, as I look at it, and as I watch the program even here, the schedule, in which there are very few classes on Fridays, which means they’ve all been pushed into Monday to Thursday, which means people are working on Fridays and Saturdays, it’s all together different. And look at the tuition... now, a hundred dollars back then was a lot of money, believe it or not. It took me a long time to realize that ten dollars wasn’t a lot of money, so it was a different world. You just understand that all of these things take a lot of money. A hundred dollars was real money back then, and it wasn’t likely spent. I’m sure if you decide that if you want to go on a ski weekend, you put together two hundred and fifty dollars to go do something, and say well, I would do without something else. You couldn’t do it back in those days, I mean, many many things have changed, including the whole attitude towards money. I’m not sure I’ve answered your question but...

PC: Yes, you have, thank you very much. And now that we’re talking about money one more time, you previously mentioned that the tuition went form one hundred dollars to a thousand dollars. How did that impact the St. Joseph’s community and the College?

MFB: Well, it went from a hundred in the 1940’s to a thousand in 1970, you've got 30 years in between there, and everything had been... had been going up. So, it did not affect the attendance because I think people, the students understood that they had been getting more than a bargain. And it just couldn’t go on that way. That’s all. There was an understanding on that.

[26:24]

PC: Thank You! Today we were hearing this building and I am curious to ask that when you decide to move to the Convent if you came to live in this building?

MFB: No, [Laughs] No. When I decided to enter the Convent, I went out to Brentwood, which is where the mother house of the ...

PC: Yes!

MFB: You been out there?

PC: Yes! It’s beautiful.

MFB: Well, the mother house of the Sisters of St. Joseph’s, they didn’t have all of the buildings they have now out there. We had a big old framed house that was the novitiate, and I think all
together there might of been... there was certainly a hundred of us all together, now that was for three years. My own group... there were thirty six who entered when I did. So, we spent two full years in Brentwood, coming to understand the religious life, coming to understand what it meant, what would be required, but the real purpose of it, and then we went to... we called it “going out on a mission”, and we were assigned to various schools, and so my first mission was St. Michael's 43rd St. where I taught 6th grade, and at the end of that, I went back and that summer, and it was up to me, did I... if I wanted to stay, then it was time to make first vows, if I didn’t wanna stay [Laugher], it was time to go. And so, I made first vows that summer, we renewed them each year for two years, and then, in the 6th year, you made another decision, do you wanna do this forever? Or is this the time to leave. These days, if someone could of extend that for 9 years, but that was unthinkable back then, everything moved on a fixed schedule. So, 1953, I guess I made final vows.

PC: And, what was it like to live in the Convent with other Sisters?

MF: You mean when I came back here?

PC: When you left, started in Brentwood. You just mentioned that you lived with another 100 sisters.

MFB: Well, we were all young people, you know, I was in the older part of the group, I was.. they were eight older than I, when I entered, which was surprising, and one even had to get an exemption, she was over 35, but there were eight older than I, the others were younger, and it went down- the youngest in my group was 16, which again was by way of exception, we didn’t usually do it, and there were special circumstances with that, and in the end, she didn’t stay, in the end, she left, and it was probably better. But you spent... you spent those two years out there getting to know one another, I didn’t know anybody in the group, and you got to know one another, and you moved.. I mean, a little like the Army, not... not, not really, but that sense of you joining a group of people you don't know, moving into a system that’s a fixed system, so you’re the one who has to make the adjustments because the system is not going to change, this is the way it works, and if you don’t want to do this, then that’s what you discover, and you leave. But you see, given World War II, given the devastation, which... we weren’t seeing it because there was no television, you see, at most we were hearing it on the radio and reading it in the newspapers, but between the Germans, followed by the Japanese, and the horror stories that came out, you had the sense of a world in which there really was evil, I think we’re... once again [Laugher], in a world in which you can believe there is evil [Laugher]. And yeah, I think you can’t help but say that: people I don’t understand are out there, I don’t know how they think, I don't know why they think the way they do, well, it was that much worse than... and we were limited in our understanding, and the movies, even, the war movies gave you this terrible picture of Germans and terrible pictures of Japanese, and I suspected a lot of it was true, but... no, I’ve lost the question [Laugher].

PC: [Laugher] Yes... so when did you move to this building?

MFB: Oh, when did I move to this building?
PC: Yes, to this building.

MFB: Alright so I had two years in Brentwood, one year in St. Michael's 43rd, which is still there, and came here in 1950.

PC: Thank you!

MFB: That’s several lifetimes ago.

PC: Yes, so you’ve been part of the St. Joseph's College’s history for a long time, so I am curious on how you graduated from the College, and then you went to finish your master’s programs and then you came back to teaching…

MFB: Yeah.

PC: … Here at the school. So, how did you feel for you going from an SJC student to going to being a professor?

[31:40]

MFB: Well, number one, it was a surprise. Number two, it meant an enormous amount of work because I wasn’t prepared for that. I was prepared for high school. I was not prepared for college so it was every minute, and we did not have many free minutes, but every minute I had just went into preparing. I mean, constant preparing for classes because I wasn’t prepared to do it. I was in the first year, filling in for somebody else. And one of the first courses I had, God help me, was Chaucer. And with Chaucer you probably don’t, Chaucer is Middle English, people frequently say Old English. It’s not Old English, it’s Middle English. So you can read it. But even the pronunciation is different. School didn’t begin in those days until the end of September. I came here probably very early September, maybe the third of September? Third, fourth, fifth of September and had until, probably the 28th of September. And I spent time down in the basement with a phonograph and two records of scholars pronouncing Chaucer's English and I was listening and trying to get it so that eventually, I was comfortable saying things like the opening lines of the Canterbury Tales “Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote, The droghte of March hath perced to the roote, And bathed every veyne in swich licour, Of which vertu engendred is the flour.” [Reciting in Middle English] and it goes on from there, yes? [laughter] well, by the end of sitting down there with a record, Harry Ayres, God bless him, on a record, I could say it. I didn't start graduate school till that January, God help me, and was in a Chaucer course, I opted for that because I needed to know more about Chaucer, but I had-- and his name is escaping me and I know it as well as my own- I had a famous Chaucer scholar and I did not know- I realized when I had to sign in to the course, that I was in the back of the room in full habit, and there were at least 30 people ahead of me but when the list for me to sign came, I don’t think there were more than 15 names, and I was puzzled. Well, the others all knew, because they knew other people at Columbia that Professor Roger Sherman Loomis would take
the list and call on you in order by name. They didn’t want to be called on because they knew it was terrible. I didn’t know that, so here's my name on the list, and he would call on you, “Read, translate, and interpret”. Everyone else understood, but I didn't understand this was what was going to happen. Well, so one of the first classes he called on somebody who mangled the pronunciation and finally there was a man who is-- I was the youngest in the class at that time. People did not start graduate work at 22. They didn't. It's very different now. So I was probably the youngest in the class, but a man who was easily in his 40’s staggered through couple of lines of Chaucer and I’ll never forget Professor Loomis saying “Sir, go home and learn to pronounce it.” [slams table] “Next!” So when it got to me and [laughter] I had learned, I was thrilled to death that [laughter] at least this much I knew how to do…

[35:57]

SM: Would you say that, that was the most challenging study that you did as a student during those years as a masters or undergrad? Would you say that was the hardest one you did or there is another memory that you have about a big challenge as a student?

MFB: No, the English department was demanding and we had some very strong teachers, some very good people. They were all sisters and they just made us work [laughter] and you just accepted it. There weren't all the alternatives that there are today, so therefore there weren't the distractions, you know, you didn’t think about doing something else, and there weren't all these gadgets. When I see all of you come out of the library walk down the street, two together, each one has the gadget and I just call them gadgets, but what are you doing?! To whom could you be speaking, and here's somebody right next to you, walking with you, and the two of you --I don’t think you're talking to one another-- , but you have that, and I don’t think you have any --I’m not saying we shouldn't have these things, I’m not saying that at all, there's no going back, none- but I don’t think you have any idea of, from my point of view, how distracting that is. I mean, these are the years where you ought to be talking to one another. When you ought to be, kind of learning from, well maybe you are, on these gadgets, but I doubt it [laughter], I really doubt it. I don’t know to whom you’re talking, and maybe to somebody who is all alone is doing it just so he or she doesn't look all alone. I think that's a possibility, but anyway, we didn't have those distractions. Now, could you go off and read a book you that weren't supposed to be reading? You know, could you be reading fiction when you should have been doing science? Yes. I mean, was there goofing off? Yes [laughter]. Yes, there was goofing off. You know, there was social groups, there was hanging out in the rec [recreation] room as we called it, there was. And people just sitting and talking, but you were sitting and talking to one another because there wasn’t anything else. Radio was very limited. When I look now at the TV sheet in the New York Times and it is a full page of the New York Times and I say “what in the world are all of these programs?”. You know, there was nothing like that. And so, you talked to one another -is really what you did- and learned a lot, I think, from one another.
FN: Thank you, Sister, now that we just, talking about technology. Before technology was available back in the days, like, how do the professor communicate with the student? Let's say nowadays if a professor want to come to class they just send an email and you all get it within two minutes. So, what do you guys…

MFB: Back then, the faculty member gave an assignment, you went off and did the assignment. And if you needed help, you went to the faculty member’s office. And that worked. I mean, faculty members had office hours and they were there and you can go and get help. Or you can stop at the end of class and say “could I talk to you about something?” and that faculty member would make time for you. I think that's still true today. I think we have that kind of faculty. They will make time for you. But that’s how we did it. There was no other way to communicate. Faculty members did not have telephones in their offices.

DC: Do you think that the gadgets that have been invented right now are a positive change or a negative change? The technology.

[41:05]

MFB: There’s no withstanding technology and I think that much of it is wonderful. I think to be able to see things, to see what is happening in Iran, in Iraq. Now of course, it’s being filtered. Are there other things we could be seeing? Yes. And of course, right now, there's all this fussing over what kind of direct information are we getting. So there are distortions, there's no question about that. I think we’re living in a very real transition period right now. I didn’t think that 30 years ago, but I think it now. And I’m not sure where it’s going, but it's going to go. There is no withstanding that kind of change and I think people who try to resist it are making a mistake. I think what needs to happen is that intelligent people need to learn to control how much of it they’re influenced by. You can’t stop it, but how much of it are you really going to take in? How much of it are you going to believe uncritically? I’m astonished now to see that Facebook is in such trouble. And it's getting worse by the day, isn't it?

DC: Yes.

MFB: I mean, it’s moving from mistakes that they made, and I took it, in the beginning, that they were honest mistakes. I mean, how do you know what people are going to do with the technology you provided. Today's paper, I think, is saying that Facebook was doing some manipulation and in some ways, making some information available to other people. It gets us back into human nature and pretend and see to take advantage and many people give into that. So, I don’t think there’s any stopping it. I think that each one of us has to be alert to both the advantages, and the disadvantages of the changes that are taking place and the stuff that is made
available. I’m beginning to read in the New York Times encouragement articles encouraging people to cut back on some of the technology. Don’t eat your breakfast with the gadget in hand [laughter] you know? And I’d say probably, “eat your breakfast” because you probably don’t even eat you breakfast. Anyway…

[44:03]

DC: In your previous interviews, you have mentioned how you enjoyed teaching and mention the importance of critical thinking skills. Could you say it with us what your teaching approach was, and what kind of assignments you selected for your students back then?

MFB: I didn't go back to look at what I did, I went back to try to get an example and I still have an office across the street, most of the stuff is over there. But let me say that with Shakespeare for instance and that was the course I kept when I became dean. I wanted to continue to teach so I settled on Shakespeare. In fact, I couldn't give it up. But what I had always done and continued to do was at the beginning of every class, if I could get in -not always easy- and put some stuff on the blackboard. I put questions. So for the next assignment, here are some things to look for, is what I called it; “things to look for”, and look for ‘this’ and ‘this’. So, to give you one very simple example; if you take Macbeth’s. Now if you read Macbeth, as a straight storyline and it’s fascinating just as a storyline, but I would put down as a question, things to look for, notice that Banquo in Act II, gives his sword and his dagger to his son. Now they're going off to bed, it’s at night. Act I, they fought a big battle and they've won, alright? And now they're moving to Macbeth's castle, and they have learned that the king is going to be there that night. They have also had a vision of three witches and the three witches have alerted them to the fact that the king is coming and that Macbeth will be given a new title and that Banquo and Macbeth will become king. Banquo will not become king, but his descendants will. So here, it is this- you talk about the news breaking on the TV- here is this apparition, here is this promise of something wonderful to happen. Then we get to Act II, and the language in the play, it’s past midnight, they're going to bed, finally, and Banquo says to his son, “take my sword… and take this” and he hands him his dagger, and then says something about “restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature gives way to in repose”. Now it's a one-liner, and a few minutes later he meets Macbeth and says something to Macbeth about all that has happened and the promises made, and Macbeth says “I think not of them, yet when we have a free hour, let us share some words upon that business”. Now, we know that Macbeth is already thinking about this. The king is coming, he has been promised that he will be king. How is this going to happen? But if the king- “I think not of it”- well he is thinking of it. He's thinking of the king coming and he's been promised to be king. But as you read a line like “Banquo hands his sword and his dagger to his son” you can just read it and they’re going to bed, he doesn’t need it, he’s handing it over. But, I would have a question “what is the significance of that line, at that moment?” because you can so easily read it, and you’re getting it straight, you know what the action is. What's the meaning of the action? And its Banquo being
drawn this way as anybody might be to seeing a possibility and- “restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature gives ways to in repose” I don't want to do that, I don't want to think- he's thinking about it. So that the element in human nature is there but you can easily repast it. So one of my questions on my notes would be “look at that passage, the words mean more than they say”. And then contrast it, you see, with Macbeth.

I felt that the important thing was to get students to focus on the passages that really told you about character because I also understood that even back in the good old days, student did not read every line, alright? So let’s put a little emphasis on some lines. There's lines that are important, so I think you need to take a look at them. And that's how I handled it, with notes in advance such as that. You need to look at what’s the meaning of this, what goes beyond the words themselves? What's happening here? And then I think, as you know, students get to know from one another what a teacher’s tests are like. I think everybody understands that. Any faculty member who doesn't understand that needs a course from the students. Anyway, they also understood that my exams in general, always had- at least the final exam- just had questions like this, but even the two hourly exams, I would give a quotation, and it would be fairly long, it would be a paragraph from a critic, from a Shakespearean authority. And then say, “Support, modify, or refute”. So you can take this whichever way you want, but you either have to say it is so, and you give reasons why that statement is correct. Or you modify it and you give reasons why you’re modifying it. Or you reject it and say this is the wrong interpretation. This is not what Shakespeare meant. I did it that way because I wanted students to think about it and to form their own opinions, and as the years went by, I found it wonderful. By the… well into the 70’s and 80’s, to be able to get films, and I learned how to get segments of films so I could show the same scene as portrayed in two different films. And there, the most disappointing ever I had was with King Lear when I thought Laurence Olivier, King Lear, was the most wonderful- I thought he was perfect, I still think he was perfect. And here it is, and here is Lear. And then, Ian Holm, H-O-L-M, you may have seen something- wonderful actor- did a very different Lear. Did it very spare, almost in- not in modern dress- but without decoration. It was bare. And I was stunned that the students loved Ian Holm's version as against- I still think Olivier was better [laughter]. But that's it. It's a difference in time, it’s a difference in an interpretation, it's a different way of looking at it.

Let me give you one example of that, very funny. It was, I think, the late 60’s early 70’s and I had taught Measure For Measure, many times, and there is a scene in Measure For Measure in which the judge, a very righteous, rigid, rigorous man has suddenly, for the first time in his life, fallen in love. And he has fallen in love with this young woman who has come to plead for her brother’s life. And she had just entered the convent, so she comes in some kind of convent dress. And he is smitten. He is smitten by her beauty, he is smitten by her virtue, so, she comes in and in affect, he is making a proposal. He wants to take her virtue. And the question in all of the critics up until that time for that play was that Shakespeare is raising the question, which is a
greater virtue? A man's life? Or a woman's virtue? And up until a given year, late 60's early 70's, I would pose a question and I never- there was never any objection. I mean clearly, the woman's virtue was the greater of the two. Well that year, 69, 70, whatever, I pose a question and from the group comes “I don’t understand the question.” And I say “what do you mean? Which is of greater value? Man’s life, or woman’s virtue?” “Well, there's no question there. A man’s life is of greater virtue, is of greater value than a woman’s virtue.” Well, I never raised the question that way again. I said there's a whole difference in approach, and today, you're looking at me, you can’t imagine why anybody ever thought that a woman’s virtue was of greater value and I’m not sure, I look back and say “well, was it? I mean.” and of course Shakespeare then, pulls a fast one and spares her life, spares her virtue, and spares his life. So Shakespeare skirted the whole issue by the end of the play. But it was a revelation to me that there had been a significant change in the way people even looked at that question. I’d look at you and say “you don’t understand why I thought it was a question either” [laughter]. And that's the world that were really living in.

[55:30]

SM: Thank you, Sister. You mentioned in previous interviews that the major changes in academia didn't come until the late 60’s and things were pretty stable back then, so, would you say thing were as stable as well in St. Joseph's College? Or was any major changes between the 50’s and the 60’s?

MFB: There simply weren’t major changes in higher education in America. It was all across the country. Everything stayed the same, the curriculum was practically the same, everywhere. It was the liberal arts up to 72 credits of required courses everywhere, and then there was, in effect, a student revolution in the 60’s and it came from the students, but it came from California, and it took four years to come across the country, believe it or not. Started in California where many things get started, and it came out of the 60’s in which we had finished WWII, immediately gone into the Korean War. You see, that was then followed by all kinds of difficulties in the far East and young men were still being drafted, and the resistance to being drafted to serve in a war which they did not believe caused a real rebellion in California, in the California public school system in that whole UCLA. California had established a system before New York had, and so the young people, and some who were somewhat older. They were in their late 20’s, and were stirring things up. It took four years to get from there to here and I would say, it didn’t hit here until ‘66, ‘67. But it was a rejection of the authority that had held curriculum in place as it was, and it was a demand for a change in requirements, a demand for a reduction in the number of requirements, but you see, underneath all of that, was a rejection of the wars we were fighting and continuing to fight. You know, when I hear now that we have been, and I can’t get it straight, in Iran, Iraq for 17 years, I can’t believe it because we’ve forgotten about it because we don’t have a draft, you don’t know people being drafted into this, so there's no basic resistance to it. But back then with the draft, and people being sent off to fight in this war that we no longer
believed in, and it just led up to an upheaval that I'm not sure anybody has ever - it came from the grassroots and it came from the college students because they were the ones being drafted and it was a resistance to that war, it was resistance beyond that to all of the rules and regulations “this is not what we’re interested in” and it just broke the pattern. It did not hit the East coast fully until ’66, ’68- in there- but it had started back around ‘62 out in California and made its way. The East coast in many ways, has been more conservative, more traditional- you got Massachusetts, Connecticut, I mean, the early colonies were founded here and certain things were in place and so, even though New York, for one, is very open, there's a traditionalism here that had never existed in California. Does that answer the question?

SM: Yes, Thank you. We learned as we went through the archives, we learned that the Dillon Center building is celebrating this year, it’s 50th anniversary. The nursery school itself predates the building and it celebrates its 85th anniversary of the school this year. The sculpture of the Holy Family in the Dillon Center is part of the beautiful work of the former St. Joseph Art Professor, Josephine Belloso. Do you remember the day when the sculpture was placed in the building?

MFB: No, I don’t remember the date but the building itself opened in the Fall of ‘68 and so the sculpture wasn’t there until that building was up. The Pratt’s had a rose garden there. That was followed by an archery range, if you can believe it. When I was a student, they had an archery range running the way that building runs. And then, the Dillon Center was built-- was completed, in just about ‘68, ‘69. Jo Belloso taught art and she designed that piece so when the building opened, the piece was there. So that was ‘68, ‘69. I don't think anyone had seen it until the building opened.

SM: Also, could you share with us a memory of Josephine Belloso?

MFB: She was a very talented person but did not give most of her time to her own creative work. That's one of the few pieces of her creative work. She had a very great gift for restoration, and I don’t know how many, and how many places she restored statues or artwork all along this Eastern coast, and that was her interest. It was what she most liked to do and she was just very good at it.

SM: Continue with that question about Professor Belloso; when I went into the archives, I found out about this beautiful plaque that the students of the art class back then and Professor Belloso made for the academy. Do you remember where it was placed back then, and where is it right now? Is there a way to see it? Because I went into the whole school looking for it and I couldn’t find it.

MFB: [reading] “Art students dedicate plaque for the--” Is this the article?
SM: Yes.

MFB: “...for the front wall”

SM: Yes, there is actually-- we tried to get a bigger picture but we couldn't. There is actually a small picture back there.

MFB: No, I mean, the significance is twofold. Oh, “the traditional college seal”. Oh, “permanently displayed in the front wall of the administration building” oooh [laughter]. I don’t know… I really don’t know. Now, this must have been, what, 1970?

SM: Yes, correct.

MFB: Because, Vicky Castagna’s name is here with ‘70? So it was roughly between ‘70 and ‘74? [Two Forty Five newsletter Summer 1974, p. 2]

SM: Yes, I think it was in 1972 if I remember, yeah.

MFB: Oh, no I don’t. I have no idea [laughter].

[1:05:06]
AC: We’ll look for it then.

SM: Yes [laughter]. It’s still a mystery.

MFB: Mayumi, do you have it hidden some place? [Laughter]

MM: No, I don’t think so.

SM: Still a mystery. Thank you, Sister.

MFB: You know, once something is put away…

[1:05:27]
AC: ...it becomes difficult to find.

SM: Yes, It's kind of strange because the plaque, I had seen a better picture-- a bigger picture of the plaque and it was beautiful, and actually it's kind of similar of most of the structure that the
building, the Tuohy Hall building. But it’s not there, so my question is, where would it be? I've been through it and...

MFB: If you can give me a copy of that, I’ll ask Sister Elizabeth Hill whether she has any recollection of what might have. I just know, I mean, I think we have had a few plaques in honor of trustees and, you know, they are to be here in this hallway, and the next thing, you know, you don’t know where they are [laughter]. That kind of thing happens. But if you give me a copy of that, I’ll ask her to check into it.

SM: Sure.

MFB: She might remember. Amongst us, we might remember, but. [Laughter]

SM: Thank you, Sister.

FN: Thank you. You were appointed Dean in 1969?

MFB: Yes.

FN: How did you feel to make such an important role? Like, you were a professor, and you now, change into a dean. How did that make you feel?

MFB: Well, it was a very significant time in the College’s history, and Sister Vincent Thérèse had been president, and Sister John Baptist had been the Dean. And Sister John Baptist was, by that time, in her late 70’s, I think. And she announced that Middle States would be coming in probably the early 70’s, and it was time for other people. She was stepping down, and I think, to some extent it almost forced Sister Vincent Thérèse’s decision. Vincent had been president for 13 years, and she had put up both, the library and the Dillon Center, and she had raised money to pay for both of those. When she became president in 1956, she followed Monsignor Dillon, who would never asked for money. So the College had operated on tuition. You can’t operate on tuition. And the alumnae had never been asked for money at all. Nobody had been asked for money. The Sisters of St. Joseph had put money into the College, and finally the decision was, they couldn't do that anymore. So therefore a change, Vincent came in but was faced with having to ask alumnae to give money when they had never been asked. It was a very difficult role, and she did it. And she raised the money for those two buildings. Not in total. Some of it still had to be paid off, but enough to put them up. So, it was a major achievement for her. And at the end of that, she felt-- and she died really, about three or four years later. So I think health had begun to play a part in it.
It was also a time, 1969, when the City University announced that it was going to have open admission. The City University had always been restricted, and there had been a fairly high high school average. So they announced that they were going open admission. Catholic colleges in this area were closing. The Catholic high schools had begun to close and the Catholic college there, Notre Dame on Staten Island, closed. It was a tough time in this country financially. So there were financial difficulties on all sides, and the Sisters of St. Joseph, who had founded the College, and supported it through the years. Once it was clear that Sister Vincent and Sister John Baptist were going to step aside, the current general of the Sisters of St. Joseph really proposed that Sister George Aquin O'Connor would become the president, and then I become the dean, and the Board of Trustees ratified that. It was the congregation that really made the decision. So you had two people coming into office. Now, we were relatively young, we had energy, we understood the place. I had been teaching here, I guess, for 19 years. We were in the middle—if I can put it that way—there were older, there were younger, but I think we understood—and it was small. I mean, we had 400 students, 500 students, no more than that. All here in Brooklyn. There was no other campus. So, we knew the place. There was a total of 50, maybe, full time faculty, and of the 50, I think 30 were probably Sisters. So, we knew the place, we understood the situation, and it was a matter of, you’re either going to have to do something—if we don’t do anything, we’re gonna go out of business from sheer lack of students and lack of money. Well, that gives you courage. If you know there’s no future, you know, you're not the one bringing about the demise so pull yourself together and see what you can do, and that’s really what happened.

So we knew and the faculty who were with us understood that this was a pivotal moment. That we were either going to make it, or weren't gonna make it. And when things are that bad, you either give up, or you feel okay, “here we go”, and that's what we did. So, it was a matter—Now, the decisions were major, major decisions. I mean, even to take on the building in Brentwood, and we took on that building, and then to move out to Patchogue. That was really a move. I really thought this is not going to work and I was forced to go out there—Brentwood is 50 miles away. Patchogue is 63 miles away [laughter]. I mean, how are you going to get the faculty out there? I mean, that's what I was thinking and I don’t drive. It was WWII, you didn’t drive. I’ve driven out to Patchogue and this is ridiculous but as we pulled into that property, it was September, there were many more trees there than there are now, and they were gorgeous. They were all turning autumn colors-- is this how you make a decision? This is not how you should make a decision [laughter]. But there it was. It was gorgeous and I just thought, “what do you do?”. I mean I can’t fight this [laughter]. I was the one saying “we can’t do this, it's too far” [laughter]. So we did it. It took a while, but we did it.

They were major decisions and we would not be here today if we hadn’t made them then. And if we had stayed in Brentwood, it would not have worked. Those were the convent grounds, you know, the building was not great for a college. It was alright for a Sisters college, it was not good
for ordinary people, and we were fortunate. We had been joined by Sister Virginia Thérèse, we had Vincent Thérèse as president. Virginia Thérèse had taught chemistry here for years, knew the place, had been plucked out and sent as principal to the Mary Louis Academy and was such a success there that she was plucked out and taken to Brentwood elected to the general counsel of the congregation. By 1968 three sisters from this house were in general congregational business. Sister Joan de Lourdes Leonard, Professor of History, had been elected general superior. Sister Virginia Thérèse, who had been plucked out of here two years before went to Mary Louis and was then elected a general counsellor of the Congregation. And then Sister John Raymond McGann, who was still living here, was elected so three out of five members of the general government of the Congregation were from this house. Now, what it was doing to this house was a separate topic [laughter], but they moved into congregational government, and so, when they looked for-- and they knew us all, so they made the decision that George Aquin would become the president and I would become the dean and that’s what they did. George lived it out. She was four years older than I was, but she continued as president for 28 years. I stayed on for, as dean, and then academic vice president for another six years after that. And we had Virginia Thérèse then, who had been elected to government. Went out of office in government, we got her to come back and she headed up the Suffolk campus. She knew Suffolk. She headed that up. Rosalie Totino (?), not a sister, joined us and became really-- she started with admissions, eventually was into development. It was a wonderful team, and Tom Travis- I don't know whether you know Tom is still- now he didn’t come till ’78. But Tom Travis was the one who really took hold of the adult program and made it work. But those years from ’69 to ’79, you were either going to make it. or not make it, and we made it. So…

AC: Another change that you mentioned the word pivotal and that is what happened when St. Joseph’s went coed in 1970. How do you think that impacted the College? If it did, let’s say the population, or the environment, and the clubs, which we know how many clubs…

MFB: Yes, yes.

AC: You know… we don’t have any target like for girls or boys, but we have altogether, which is perfect.

MFB: Yes, yes, yes… Well, in the very beginning, I mean, it was pathetic, I mean… I think, did we have 12 boys? I don’t think we even had 12 in the first group who came, and not all of them were a success. I think we got a few who couldn't manage elsewhere… I mean, what do you do? But over time... The real decision to go coed turned on the fact that St. Francis College told us they were going coed that June, and up until then, they had been efforts to link the two colleges, and the linking had never worked. We had some boys coming here for classes, we had some girls going there for classes, but even at the best, you know... you probably can walk it as fast as you can get a bus or something else to get you there, it is not far, but it’s far enough not to be easy.
So, it hadn’t worked and the brothers decided to go coed, well… if they did that, we knew… I mean, it was not an easy decision to make, but we said we are not gonna make it if we try to stay single sex, it’s not going to work. The early years were very difficult because we weren’t getting altogether the best, but anyway, it worked out over time, I think… Hunter College has had, Hunter College and Vassar. The number of boys in each of those, is significantly fewer than the number of girls. If they started out as girls’ colleges, it’s been harder for them to be really coed, it’s not 50-50.

AC: Thank you.

DC: In the previous interview, you have mentioned how different… how different and difficult higher education curriculum was in early 20th century, and there were not many choices for the students in terms of majors and the courses. Nowadays, we have a lot of courses, and courses offered online and on campus, providing a lot of options to meet individuals need. What is your opinion about these changes? Do you think it’s a good change or it affects the students in a negative way?

MFB: [Laugh] I think it’s both, I think it’s good because this is the world we’re living in, and increasingly we’re hearing you have to be aware of all the changes that are taking place, you have to understand that you might move in a different direction from the one you thought you were going to move in… you have to be open to seeing what’s happening in this world; that’s the good part of it. The bad part of it is that I think it becomes distracting, I think you start out… well… I will try something else, you try something else [Laugh], you try something else, and in the end, I’m not sure how much you really have, and the part that gets lost I think in all of this, is the part that you might [Laugh]… you might take with you through the rest of life. I mean, some of the English, some of the history, some of the stuff that helps you to understand why things are the… some of the psychology, I mean, we’re living in a very strange time, and I think students are becoming much too focused on the end product, much too focused on the job, at the end of this, and getting the courses that are gonna get them to the job. I understand that, and you can’t ignore it, but I think it… because there's so many options, I think it’s harder to… it’s harder to focus, so, I think it’s a very… it’s a very mixed bag, and I think each student has to try to sort it, sort it out and say “what am I really interested in?” and “what do I…” now, of course, you have to… so I’m saying it again, you have to be open to the possibilities, but there are just so many now, that I think… I think it’s very hard. I do, I think it’s… in its own way, it makes life much more difficult for students, and much harder to… to decide what you want to do.

DC: Thank you!

[1:21:21]
AC: Sorry, I just wanted to say, and besides that, we also have the way that, we... a college degree now, just like the four year is not enough, and then, we’re focused not only on the four year one, but also on the Master’s...

MFB: I know...

AC: And what’s coming after that, what would be... our credentials, would they be enough?

MFB: Yeah. And that was not true even 30 years ago, I mean, this is a recent development. The fact that everybody now goes on for Master’s degree is relatively recent, and... I don’t see it as necessary, and then that people... see, I’ve never seen the doctorate... I have a doctorate in English form Columbia University. I needed it because I was going to be a college teacher, and you can teach in college without a doctorate, but if possible you should have it, alright, so I was told to go get a doctorate from Columbia. I understand that, and I think it’s appropriate, but you don’t need it, if that’s academic, you don’t need it in the ordinary world. I look at the doctorate in business now, and we have some on the faculty and we’re happy that we do because if you’re teaching in college you should have the doctorate, if you can get, and if it’s in business, get it in business, but the ordinary person, certainly doesn’t need it in business. So, what I am concerned about is the move that I’m hearing right now to say move away from the academic, and move back into... I’m trying to think of the word for it, what used to be called vocational, and I understand that, and I think there is a place for that, and I think that a number of people will benefit from two years of a vocational program, an vocational, professional will be the better word for that, you know, so you are prepared for something. I understand all of that, but I think... I think it’s a mistake to feel that everybody needs to have a master’s degree, once you move into that, you already narrowing the field, it’s in college that you got the opportunity to study as much as you can study, to get a better understanding of this world that we’re living in, which is very difficult. And, I understand the importance of technology, but technology in and of itself does not help you to understand why people are killing one another over there, it doesn’t, it shows you how to kill them easier [Laughter], but it is... anyway...

AC: Unfortunately yeah [Laughter]... Going back to the questions, you graduated from St. Joseph’s College in 1946, as you mentioned earlier, but you continued to be an active member of the College since 1946 until your retirement in 2003. So we wanted to know how is life after retirement and how did it feel to leave the College? Did you miss it, after being part of such a legacy?

MFB: Well, I think... I consider myself very fortunate that I never really had to leave it, and after I retire as the academic vice president in ‘03, Sister Elizabeth Hill allowed me to continue on doing some support work until I said 2010 was the end, I mean I had then being 60 years and
it was time to give up any official, so eight years, I… now I still have an office across the street on the top floor of the 245 building, and I’m trying to clear it out…

AC: Lorenzo Hall?

Everyone: No, Tuohy Hall.

AC: Tuohy? Oh, ok.

MFB: Yeah, up on the third floor there, of the original building, I have an office in the back…

PC: It’s fancy.

MFB: And I’m going back, Mike Mcgrann is getting me over there again, and I’m clearing out, I gotta get out of there.

PC: Is it the door next to Sister Margaret?

MFB: Yes.

AC: [Laugher] Oh that’s why it’s always locked, I’ve been there [Laugher]...

MFB: Yes, it always locked [Laugher].

AC: And I saw you, what was it Monday? Walking with Mike towards there at night.

MFB: Yeah, right. So, Mike is encouraging me to go back over there [Laugher], Mike is encouraging me to write a history of the College, but that’s never gonna happen [Laugher], I could do an outline, and I started work on that, I got into the Trustee minutes and you… you know, get in 10 pages as you can outline a brief history, that’s something I can do. So I’ve had little things that I could continue to do and it has kept me involved that way, and just staying here, just seeing people is a help, so I have the feeling that I’ve never really left. And, I try very hard to mind my own business [Laugher] and not make comments. And, I may talk freely right here and tell you exactly what I think, but you know, you give people room. I’m very happy with the new president, I think he is the right man for this place, so that’s… so, you know, in effect, I feel… I have never really left, and hope with luck, that maybe I won’t leave until I… I’ve had very… difficult years here, very. And I’ve had the happiest years of my life here, so I consider that fortunate and beyond anything I could ever had expected. It’s been a very different life from what I expected to be a high school teacher, and you just go on and this is the way it is, and it’s been ever so much more than that, it’s been a wonderful experience so.
AC: That’s beautiful.

[1:28:04]

DC: So, as you’ve mentioned earlier that you always wanted to be a teacher, and you are literary aspirant, how do you fulfill that now when you are not teaching English anymore?

MFB: Well, I feel it’s though I’m still, I’m still able... I’m here, I see what’s going on, so I just... I still feel part of it, believe it or not. Nobody has to know me, but I can sort of get to know some people. I very much appreciate the role that the College played in my life, and the role it is playing in your lives, and I really want to be supportive of that. Every Sister in this house feels that way, anything that we can do.

The new vice president for development, Rory Shaffer-Walsh, has gotten three of us involved in sending thank you notes to alumnae who made contributions, so she, Rory just came in the summer, she came over to see us, and now once a month, September, October, November, three times, she has brought the names and a little bit about alumnae who made contributions that month, and I think that the contributions must be at least at the hundred dollar level because there will be many more than we’re getting. But the first month, three of us wrote to... just thank you notes, we didn’t have to ask for money, we’re thanking, it’s one less thank you note going out. So, there were 30 or 40, the next month 30 or 40, November, there were 92, which we divided up and made phone calls, it’s a very short script, we make a phone call, if we don’t get the person, and you frequently don’t get them, and you just leave a message thanking them for their contribution, so it’s her idea that they’ve already gotten a letter thanking them, but this is one more thing, and she wants it from the sisters, so that’s what we’re doing. So, you have that sense of life going on.

AC: And you, sorry, and you just did a lesson with us on Macbeth [Laughter], so that’s was nice, about literature [Students laugh and agree], about the critical thinking skills earlier...

MFB: Oh…

Students: Yes!

AC: That we were a little bit lost on [Students laugh].

SM: Sister, I would like to say in behalf of my classmates that it’s amazing to me to meet you today, and to listen to all the stories that you have [Laughter]. We can see how passionate you were and you are about St. Joseph’s College, and it’s really special for us as a student to see that
kind of perspective and see how this was built and what is the principles and values that makes us special. As a final question, I would like to ask you, what do you think makes special St. Joseph’s and different from the other colleges around us, in the area?

MFB: It starts with the students, and the students who come to us, the students who here in Brooklyn want to be with one another, want to come to a place that’s small enough that your individuals and you’re known to one another, so it’s starts with the students. But, I think, what is… what has continued to be a wonderful part of St. Joseph’s College is that the faculty want to meet you, know you, support you, and I think that the interaction between faculty and students it’s different here from the way it is in places that are much bigger. I think the faculty really get to know you, and there may be only one moment in four years when you have a question that really matters, or when you want an opinion, because you need somebody who knows you and who can tell you whether you’re on the right track, and I think you can get that here, and you can’t get it anywhere else. I think that… that has been part of it, the faculty concern for students, I think is remarkable here, and in all the years, and all the faculty I have known, I used to say, there are five that I wish we had dropped in the East River [Everyone laughs], you know, apart from that, the faculty we have, I think, are the people who make, who really make the College… you can connect with them, if you can’t connect with this one, you can connect to that one, there is somebody here. And part of it is watching them, knowing that they’ve prepared, knowing that they care about what you’re doing, knowing that they’re understanding, but they’re concern, and that has been through, all through the years, and their concern is for you and for your education and that you, you come through this experience ready for whatever you’re going to face in life. So, it’s partly the subject manner and faculty always concentrate on their own subject manner, but it moves beyond that, it helps you, I think, to understand what matters in life, what’s really important, and what you can do with this life that you have. That I think is at the heart of the St. Joseph’s College education, I do.

Students: Thank you, Sister.

MFB: Well, I…

PC: As of now, we would like to thank you for opening this… your house and also for giving us your time, it's been a pleasure for all us to be here and knowing more about the history of the College with someone that has been part of it for since a long time, very thankful that you serve to us as a lens to go back in history and to be here at the present time, so one more time Sister Mary Florence, we thank you for your time and everything that you have done with the College that today, we as students get to benefit and see it, and we hope that we can continue to making big history as part of the College.
MFB: And I’m delighted that you’re part of the College, I’m delighted that you’re part of the future.

Students: Thank you!

MFB: Thank you very much. I think you’re wonderful young people, and that you would come and spend time on this, I think is wonderful.

Students: Thank you [Laughter].

MFB: And I thank you… thank you for coming, for making this possible.

MM: Thank you so much… Well, you did it! Congratulations, everyone… okay, great!

END [1:35:27]

Keywords
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S. Virginia Therese Callahan
S. Elizabeth Hill
S. John Raymond McGann
S. George Aquin O’Connor
S. Vincent Therese Tuohy

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