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 Margaret Buckley  
**Date of interview:** April 11, 2017  
**Location of interview:** Founders Hall, St. Joseph’s College, 232 Clinton Avenue, Brooklyn, New York

**List of acronyms:** MB = Sister Margaret Buckley, RB = Rebecca Ballman, AV = Alondra Villanueva, LK = Lauren Kehoe (moderator), MM = Mayumi Miyaoka (moderator),

**Recording Link:** https://youtu.be/iwg3e6jzor4

Keywords

Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph  
S. Alice Francis Young  
S. Margaret Buckley

Higher education institutions  
Pratt Family

St. Joseph’s College  
Dillon Center  
Founders Hall
MB: The house was the home of the Pratt family. The Pratt family founded the Pratt Institute. They also made a lot of money and oil—money, so this was their home. When their children grew up, there are three Pratt mansions across the street: Burns Halls, home of the Bishop of Brooklyn, and Caroline Ladd Pratt House, which is still owned by Pratt but they were the parents’ wedding gifts to their children when they got married.

Student: I didn’t know that.

LK: Very close [laughs]

MB: This we call the South Parlor, as it contrasts the North Parlor.

LK: Sorry, I just want to make sure you guys look up at some point. [Laughs]

MB: Well, when we had this room painted a few years ago, and then did some scrapping and they discovered that there was a mural on the wall, I think those were like muses. We were not sure what to do so we decided to leave it as it is. We could not afford to restore it but we figured someday some rich person may have enough money and be able to restore it, so we just kind of left it.

RB: So it was painted over?

MB: Yes, but notice that the wood is very beautiful.

Students: It is!

MB: I always say they had many servants, all that dusting. But it has fire places in many rooms which are very beautiful. Should we go out?

LK: Yeah, do you mind if we take a look? It’s such a gorgeous home.

MB: The people always comment on the wood.

LK: Solid wood too!

RB: I always thought the building next to Burns Hall was part of St. Joseph’s. When I came here to tour, I thought “what building is this? It’s so nice”, and then I realized it is not part of St. Joseph’s.

AV: I mean it is, it's just not part of -

RB: No, I mean like the one next to it-

LK: The Bishop’s house.

AV: Oh, the house-
MB: Yeah, not the Bishops house. The Burns Hall does belong to us.

AV: Yeah, mhmm

MB: Should we go this way? This is a nice staircase although that is an elevator and S. Mary Florence speculates that the elevator was put in as an afterthought because in a way it sort of destroys the space by introducing an obstacle— you don’t get the full view of a very nice staircase.

[Walking]

MB: This is the dining room, I think it was their dining room, and this is our dining room, and it was their dining room too, but of course they had like maybe 5 people or something in here. We have a few more. The ceiling is very beautiful and that is the original ceiling.

LK: They don’t make details like this anymore in houses, right?

Student: I know.

MB: Anything else you want me to point of here?

LK: In this room? No [laughs] the ceiling is very nice in here as well.

MB: S. Mary Florence who you are going to meet tomorrow.

LK: Yes, tomorrow afternoon.

MB: She really knows more than anyone.

LK: Sure, yeah, yeah

MB: So, you can ask her better questions. I think she said they used to be built in um, you know-

LK: Like pantry covers.

MB: Cover’s or like silver or china, I guess they took that down to make more room.

LK: Again, the original wood it’s incredible.

MB: When I first came here, there were 42 sisters, now there are seven.

LK: Wow, wow.

MB: It's hard not to get discouraged, but-

RB: How did everybody fit?
MB: Well, it is a big house.

MB: Also what is now the second and the third floor of Burns Halls, some sisters lived over there. As the numbers shrunk and they needed that space for Admissions, the sisters moved back over here. Originally, everyone lived over here, then they moved over there, and then came back here.

LK: And you still meet regularly and have dinner together?

MB: Yes, dinner is at quarter to six. Come, come!

LK: Oh, thank you, yes I would love to. I am still here at quarter to six from time to time.

[Laugh]

MB: Okay, let me show you-

LK: Yeah, we heard S. Mary Florence that said that the Convent used to do tours at some point. There has been annual-

MB: Yes, and you know what they would ask, we had a phone call from a member of the Pratt family-

LK: Oh, yeah.

MB: They had a little reunion, which they have periodically. They wanted to come on a day in June and asked if they could tour this.

LK: Oh, very nice.

[Walking]

MB: I saw you looking at this [Florentine etched glass door]. Isn’t this beautiful? It is etched glass, they are lovely. It is my charge - it is probably not as clean as it should be.

[Laughing]

LK: Everybody has their responsibilities.

[Walking]

RB: It looks much bigger on the inside, but on the outside it looks so small. 
MB: This looks like a kitchen, but we actually we call it the pantry because the actual kitchen-- big stove-- is downstairs because I guess in wealthy families you didn’t have the kitchen next to the living room.

LK: Like in Downton Abbey, upstairs and downstairs
[Opens the Dumbwaiter]

MB: This is called the dumbwaiter.

Student: Oh, my!

MB: This goes up and down.

RB: I’ve never seen this in person and I’ve always- this is so cool.

LK: I want to get one for the Library so we could move books up and down.

MB: And we still use them, because the food is prepared for us.

RB: So cool, oh my gosh!

AV: I know!

MB: We still obviously have a little stove, a microwave, and coffee. We have breakfasts and little snacks here. But the serious cooking takes place downstairs.

LK: And have you shared these cooking responsibilities?

MB: No, we have a cook.

LK: Oh, perfect.

MB: We have a part time cook that comes in around 4 O'clock, 3:30, and makes Monday through Friday meals-

RB: Fancy meals.

[Chuckles]

MB: We take turns, being what is called the “buyer”. That means you plan the menus or even go to the store and make sure the food you’re going to serve is here. But she does the actual preparation.

RB: That’s the coolest thing so far! [Laughs]

LK: And Sister Mary Florence was saying you can't find the rope anymore to replace it, so it's the original.

RB: I’ve always seen it in movies and video games but like I’ve never seen it.
[Walking]

MB: This is a small little parlor-

LK: We considered doing the interview here, the other room won out.

RB: So many staircases!

[Walking]

MB: Remember what the other room was called?

RB & AV: The South...

MB: Guess what this is called?

AV: The North.

MB: The North Parlor.

[Laughs]

LK: Now I know my directions, I am always disoriented when I’m in Clinton Avenue.

MB: This is the more formal room, you know. We do not actually use it a lot, but occasionally, sometimes we do, for a special occasion.

LK: Do you have a big Christmas tree that gets put up in here?

MB: No, on the second floor we have what is called the community room where people come together to watch television and etcetera, that is where we have the Christmas tree. Sister Pat has a small one where she puts there and it has lights on it so if you look from the outside-

AV: You could see it.

MB: Beautiful mural.

RB: Is that a fireplace?

LK: Might have been, not sure. Yeah, maybe they were both fireplaces at some point. I guess maybe they heated their home with oil being that they were the Pratt’s they probably had sophisticated heating apparatus.

MB: Now this is our chapel, we have a mass once a week. We have the Priest comes on Sunday and says mass for us here. Obviously the Pratts did not have a chapel, I forget if this was a music room or a library, maybe a library. It was modified somewhat to make it into a chapel.
LK: It’s gorgeous and again the ceiling is gorgeous, right?

RB: You think there was another picture here?

MB: I don’t think so, because they worked on that.

Student: Because I feel like this is the place where it would be.

MB: All kinds of gold in here-

LK: I think Sister Mary Florence was saying it is real gold plated or with gold leaf.

MB: Mhmm, yeah.

LK: But it's gorgeous with beautiful lighting.

RB: The windows are nice, too.

LK: Mhmm, stained glass. It is very special that you get to live here with everybody-

MB: It is, I consider myself very lucky. [Inaudible] the vow of poverty, gee. It’s like a mansion.

[Chuckles]

MB: You take what you get, and I just happen to get.

LK: I forget, are you from Brooklyn originally?

MB: No, I was born in Massachusetts.

LK: Oh, okay

MB: I still say a few words in Massachusetts accent.

LK: Yeah, that lived in New York for a long time.

MB: Oh yeah.

LK: Well, thank you so much, do you guys have any questions about the history of the house or the history of Sister Margaret, or the history of the College?

MB: More beautiful glass doors, right? What a beautiful glass door it is.

AV: It does not even look this huge from the outside.

RB: Yeah, I really didn't think it was this big.
MB: Then it has the second floor, this community room which is the central meeting room, and then bedrooms and the third floor which has more bedrooms and there is even the fourth floor which was occupied at some point— it has bedrooms too.

LK: 42 [sisters living together] or was it more than that?

MB: At one point they said the rooms were subdivided.

LK: Right, and did everyone that lived here, did they work at the College, were they affiliated somehow with the College?

MB: I think so, I think when it was 42, everyone worked at the College. Now not everyone does—we have Sister Betty Melane [spelling?], who is a nurse who is the medical person at Stella Maris which is assisted living facility in Rockaway.

RB: I’m from Rockaway, they used to have a school and I was going to go there and it closed.

MB: The school closed and is now an assisted living facility for sisters. So there are about 18 or so sisters. She takes them to the doctors, does their meds, they're complicated. There is also, I think a small charter school or something.

RB: I’m not sure. Next door there is a group home for boys called St. John’s.

MB: Yes, that has always been there, but this was actually part of the school. You know, after I was going to say 9/11, I don’t mean that, I mean Sandy, they had a lot of damage so I think the public school was closed for maybe a year. But I have a feeling they are back in there.

RB: I don’t know, I haven't heard about that.

MB: Sister Pat you have met, she is the kindergarten school teacher.

LK: In the Dillon Center next door. She is an alumni as well, she went to school here— Sister Pat she graduated.

MB: Yes, yes. And Sister Elizabeth you are going to meet her tomorrow, right?

LK: Yes, tomorrow morning.

MB: I think we are all alumni, we’re a little prejudice.

[Laughs]

LK: No, it is a testament to the beauty of St. Joseph’s, right?

LK: Well, thank you again for your time.
MB: You're welcome. It is an interesting ceiling up here.

LK: It is really gorgeous. Do you admire it every day?

MB: Well, no. [Laughs]

AV: She got used to it.

MB: Sister Alice Francis [Young], I don’t know if you heard- you probably met her at some point. We had a sister who died last year, she was 93 and she had been in pretty good shape for a long time. She was a Child Study teacher but for the last couple of years she was confined to a chair in a community room upstairs and she would say, “Such a beautiful room, look at those doors I am so lucky to be here”.

LK: [Laughs] She admired it every day.