

BROTHER JOSEPH BELANGER

**Marist College
Poughkeepsie, NY
Transcribed by Jamie Edwards
For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections**

Transcript – Brother Joseph Belanger

Interviewee: Brother Joseph Belanger

Interviewer: Gus Nolan

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Marist College—Social Aspects

Summary: This interview touches on a wide range of topics concerning the history and development of Marist College. In particular Brother Joseph discusses the Marist Abroad Program the Theater Program and the Foreign Film Program.

“BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW – PART I”

Gus Nolan: This is an interview conducted with Brother Joseph L. R. Bélanger. We are in the Archives and Special Collections Reading Room on the Marist College campus. The date is November 2nd, 2001, it's the morning, the interviewer is Gus Nolan. Brother Joseph, what's your full name?

Brother Joseph L. R. Bélanger: Joseph Lucien Roland Bélanger, and all the boys in the family were called Joseph and all the girls were called Marie. Then Lucien from my godfather and Roland from my parents.

GN: Where were you born and when?

JLRB: In Lawrence, Massachusetts on July 11th, 1925. I have two birth certificates. The parish says July 11th and city hall says July 10th. I believe the parish. [Laughter]

GN: Do you have any siblings, and what are their names and are they still with us?

JLRB: I have four brothers and four sisters. Two girls, two boys, two girls, three boys. So we have the edge in the family. One of them died last year – my older brother Phil, who hated doctors and medication and wanted to check out early. So, the others are alive and well.

GN: Like yourself?

JLRB: Yeah, right. C+, B-. [Laughter]

GN: You're taking medication at ten, remind me if I should forget. Tell me about your hometown.

JLRB: Lawrence is famous, actually, in the history of New England because of its textile mills. At one stage, it had the longest mills in the world along the Merrimack, you know, for washing cloth and so on. And then it went through a very, very bad phase after World War II, when the mills were all transferred down South closer to the cotton fields. And it became the most depressed city in the United States. Early fifties, I don't have an exact date, and the Board of

Commerce was completely dominated by the textile people. So when Ford wanted to build a plant there, the Board said “no”, the Chamber of Commerce said “no”. And so they built in Summerville, near Boston. It has since picked up a little, but it’s now about 95% Hispanic and there was immense racial tension in the city – immense.

GN: What are they manufacturing? What do they do?

JLRB: What do they do now? Lawrence does nothing now. They are being hit very, very hard by the collapse of Lucent. I have two nephews and two nieces that were just laid off this month by Lucent. When I was growing up it was still some textile. We used to make these spools and bobbins on which, you know, the basis for the textile weaving. But there wasn’t much else, lots of small shops. About it, you know. But the people would work outside. My brother Phil was working in Boston.

GN: Where did your father work?

JLRB: My father worked at a bobbin shop in Lawrence and then when that went under, when it stopped making spools and bobbins, then he got a job with Textron in printing. You know, just to finish off his career, his working life. So now it’s still a very depressed area and people have moved out to the surrounding areas: to New Hampshire, and Andover, and North Andover. It has not had the leadership, say of Lowell. Ten miles away Lowell, Massachusetts was also a textile town. But they had much better leadership. Tsongas, who at one stage was going to run for president, was from Lowell, and he set up a museum there and he set up forward looking projects. So Lowell, let’s say, is doing much, much better than Lawrence.

GN: Let’s come back and talk about your education there. Where did you go to school and how long were you in school?

JLRB: You know I was born and raised in Lawrence and dad was born in Canada, but he came to the states a few months after, and my mother was born in the states. The schooling, I started

in South Lawrence – Lawrence is divided by the Merrimack River into north and south – and so I was born in north, but we moved the following month to south. And I was raised there and went to Sacred Heart Elementary School ‘til the completion of the fourth grade. Then we moved to North Lawrence, and then I went to St. Ann’s grammar school run by the Marist Brothers. That’s when I first got to know the Brothers. And I did fifth, sixth, seventh there and while we were in the seventh, this Brother recruiter came around and gave a talk on being a Brother and then handed out little slips of paper – are you interested, “yes”, “no”, “maybe”. So I don’t know what I checked, but I did not check “no”. And then the next I knew the Brother was in the house and I was out to movies. And he came back a couple of weeks later, and I said, “well, let’s go.” Right then, the Brothers training was in Tyngsboro, Massachusetts, about sixteen miles from Lawrence. And they had at that time the eighth grade. They had phased out the seventh. So I went to Tyngsboro for the eighth grade, then they phased that out, then I stayed there for the first year of high school, and then they phased that out, and then we did second and third and then we came to Poughkeepsie here in ’42.

GN: Coming to Poughkeepsie now as a postulant?

JLRB: As a postulant.

GN: Coming to the Novitiate area?

JLRB: Yes.

GN: And what year was that?

JLRB: That was ’42. September ’42, or the end of August, I forget exactly when the transition was made. Must have been August, must have been the end of August in order to be settled in before school started. And we did two years there. One year postulant, and that finished high school. And then the following year, the novice year then is only religious studies: the life of the Brothers, and church history--

GN: So you became a Brother then on July 26, 1943?

JLRB: '43, then we took the habit and that's when the Brothers start counting, so we get a head start on our siblings for golden anniversaries. [Laughter] So we start young at eighteen and nineteen instead of twenty-five.

GN: Let's follow the process now. You finished the Novitiate in, I guess in '44. And then where did you... did you go to Marian College?

JLRB: Actually, most of the group went, twenty, took their vows. Then about fifteen of them came directly to Marian College and some of us worked. So, [Brother Felix Michael] Shurkus, and myself, and [Brother] Peter Morrissette, and I forget who else, was sent working for a year. And I was sent to the print shop to help Brother Tarcisius and that didn't keep me busy all week. So then I was helping in the laundry with [Brother] Bob Kiehle. So I did that for the year, but I wanted to keep busy so [Brother] Pius Victor, at that time was teaching Latin, and so I was given permission to take Virgil's Aeneid with Pius Victor. It was a very good year. Why did they name me working? Two theories have been floated: one of them was that I was too cocky and needed a coming down. [Laughter] I was a good student. And the second one, that I was too weak and frail to stand the rigors of college and work. So anyway, whatever.

GN: Where was the print shop at that time?

JLRB: The print shop? Well, you know where Marian is right now, the print shop was on the north side, and the northwest side, actually. It was hot lead printing, of course, linotyping at that time. It was a good year.

GN: Is that in the gym building now that is the Marian building, or was it at the bottom of St. Peter's?

JLRB: It was, no. The bottom of St. Peter's stopped... let's say, there was some then at that time. '44-'45 I remember working also with Tarci in the bottom of St. Peter's, the basement of

St. Peter's. I remember, because once Tarci got his hand caught in a v-belt and yelled for me to help him. And when I got there, I fainted and he helped me. But that was in the basement. I don't know. It was transferred... you're right. Marian was built in '47-'48, so the print shop with Tarci would have been the year entirely in the basement of St. Peter's.

GN: And where was the laundry?

JLRB: The laundry was right here just about, or just immediately west of Greystone right now. We had the, whatever they call it, the pullman in those days. So that was in the basement there. We did the laundry for the entire property, and then we did the laundry also for Esopus. The Juniorate in Esopus, that opened '42, '41... '42. So it was a fun year, really a good year, given the chance to relax and so on.

GN: Okay, let's start your college career now at Marian College and you were going to be here for how many years and what did you study?

JLRB: Marian, then as you know was chartered in '46 as a four-year college. So I came here in '45 and my desire was to major in Latin. I loved Latin, I had very good basic Latin all through high school and the Novitiate. But we were told in those days, for the needs of the schools, we were told what we would major in. So the first graduating class of Marist was told to major in chemistry, so those four majored in chemistry and went out to the schools and taught chemistry. And then, of course, they could switch later on for Masters or doctorates. And then my class was told to major in English. Which I wasn't sorry about, because I think literature is the greatest study in the world. And I loved it. It was a... it was a good major. Paul Ambrose was weak, you know because he was so busy trying to get the college going administratively and so on that as a teacher, he was very average. Then we came to graduation, and an event that determined my whole life happened. Brother Paul wanted us to be certified in as many subjects as possible. So we took, evidently, we had the certification in English from having completed all the course

work and done some teacher observation and practice, and then he said, “well, half of you here are fairly good in French.” That was myself, [Brother Gerard Corimer], [Brother John] Colbert, [Brother] Adolf Labonté. And he said, “why don’t you take the state test for certification in French at the same time.” So we did. We sat that test and I never saw the hard copy of the results, but Paul did mention that I had gotten the best grade a Brother ever got. So that’s why I wound up teaching at [Cardinal] Hayes [High School, located in Bronx, N.Y.], and that’s why I wound up teaching at Marist. Let’s not jump the gun. But we did that and in August, then ’48 we graduated.

GN: How many were--

JLRB: --The second graduating class. We were eleven I believe. Then we were assigned teaching August 25th. These for St. Louis, you know, that’s when all the Brothers of the United States were told where they were going the following year.

GN: And where did you go?

JLRB: And so, it was the end of the retreat. And I was sitting upstairs in a Scholasticate main hall, you know, the lounge. And Vinnie Dominic comes up to me, and says, “oh, you’re Brother Joseph, huh? I’m Brother Vincent Dominic. I’ll be seeing a lot of you.” He was the director of Hayes and so he spilled the beans before the official announcement came out. So we went, because Hayes, at that time, was about the only diocese and school that required certification of all of its teachers. Mostly Catholic schools don’t require that, you’re covered by the principal. But Hayes insisted on that, so--

GN: --What did you teach at Hayes?

JLRB: --So at Hayes, I went there specifically for French, but actually I was certified in English. So we taught Religion, English, and French.

GN: How many years did you work there?

JLRB: My seven years of plenty, I call them. Great, great years, extraordinary years, besides the fact that Hayes never lost to Mt. St. Michael in football on Thanksgiving Day in all those seven years. Krywicki was a great coach.

GN: That was '48, was it?

JLRB: '48 to '55. So, another huge turning point in my life was in the fall of '54. I get a phone call from the provincial, from [Brother] John Lawrence, and he says, "Brother Joseph, are you willing to go to Canada? We're opening a bilingual school up there in Montreal and they're looking for a totally bilingual principal. And so I thought of you." I says, "well, you say and I go." I really have no option. I said, "yes." I have relatives up there and I like Montreal. And so he says, "okay." And then, in the course of the year, the subsequent months, he made arrangements for me to leave Hayes and to be replaced and go to Canada. By April of '55, it was confirmed that the school would not open. So since I had already been replaced for the following year at Hayes, and since I had finished my master's in English... the Brothers would go to New York City to have access to the universities and once they finished their master's they would be shipped out to the hinterland. You know, like Wheeling, West Virginia. And so I wound up in Wheeling then in fall of '55.

GN: How long was your stay there?

JLRB: Wheeling was cut in two. I stayed there '55-'56 – very great year, I loved the valley boys, very blunt, very open and unsophisticated, let's say, compared to New York City kids. Then, in the fall of '56, I was sent to Esopus, because they wanted... that was the training house of high school people. And so I was assigned there. English and French, again you know, and religion. And so I had a very difficult fall semester in Esopus with Brother Joe Damian. You know, the iron man who thought that all of us can easily work twenty-four hours a day seven days a week with no problem. [Laughter] I was on the verge of collapse by December.

[Brother] Leonard [Voegtle] was there at the same time, good people, and Boopsie [Brother Robert James]. And in the spring, I see all this work being taught by putting on a play. I say, “oh my God. I will positively collapse in the spring.” I say, “well, we’ll see. Don’t cross the bridges before you get to them.” And so, lo and behold and in December, John Lawrence says, “Joe, I’m sorry about this, but you’re going back to Wheeling.” I say, “oh, that’s too bad.” I tried to contain my glee. [Laughter] And he said, “we’re replacing you with Brother Jimmy Austin,” who was coming back from Europe. So I say, “okay.” So then I went back to Wheeling for the spring of ’57, and the fall of ’57. And then I was scheduled to go into the second Novitiate. To go to Europe for six months of religious studies again. You know, about ten years after, you get a sabbatical and you think and pray and relax. It’s great, I recommend it to everybody. So then when I was scheduled to go to France, I say, “well, what the heck. Here I am teaching French and certified, but I don’t think I know that much French. I think I’m going to ask to stay there for an extra year.” And Brother Paul Ambrose was in charge of the studies at that time, and so I asked him, “do you mind if I stay an extra year in France?” And lo and behold, he said, “yes, go ahead.” Wow, I was surprised! I expected “no, come back to the trenches”. So when he said yes, then I started looking around for a university that would give me a piece of paper, not only knowledge. So at that time, Middlebury College in Vermont was about the only university in the States that offered a Masters in Europe. So I applied to Middlebury, got in there and then went to Europe. On February 4th, 1958, we sailed on the United States ship.

GN: Where did you study in France?

JLRB: And in France, we studied in a small French village [Drôme] in the southern part of France, St. Paul-Trois-Châteaux. And, maybe the population of the village is about a thousand.

The Brothers had a house there, well we were Brothers from all over the world. We were twenty-eight Brothers from about fifteen different countries. Everything was in French.

GN: Was this the second Novitiate?

JLRB: That was the second Novitiate. It was very good. After that, I wound up in Paris in August '58 in order to start my year with Middlebury. So Middlebury placed us, and we had different courses at the Sorbonne line and at the house of studies Reed Hall for Middlebury. So in the course of that year, in January after the chapter – there was a general chapter in the fall in Rome, Brother Paul Ambrose was elected there and he was elected Superior General. So he came back--

GN: --Assistant General.

JLRB: --Assistant General. He came back, passed through Paris in January and as usual, took us out to dinner and wine and dined us, which is, Paul was very gracious and political.

[Laughter] I remember the restaurant we went to in Paris. And he said, “you know why I said yes to your year of study here?” I said, “well, professionalism, you know, confidence and...”

He says, “no, no, no, no. I started a college in Poughkeepsie. I wanted you to go there next year.” Because Brothers in the trenches didn’t know anything that was happening in Poughkeepsie. That the College had just opened up in '57 to non-Brothers. So this was '59, then, in the summer of '59 when I finished with Middlebury I came here to start teaching.

GN: Okay, let’s start now. Now you’re coming to Marist College and it’s September of '59?

JLRB: Yeah, September '59. Full-time. I had taught a summer course in the history of the English novel in the summer of '56 and then I had taught advance French in the summer of '57. Maybe Paul was taking a look at me or something, I don’t know. But they were interesting.

GN: What were the courses now? When you come to Marist in '59, after this background in French, what are you teaching at Marist?

JLRB: At Marist, in those days, we're teaching about fifteen-eighteen credits a semester, not twelve. So I'm teaching English, and I'm teaching French. Those two subjects about equally.

GN: Who's on the staff with you?

JLRB: On the staff in those days: well Kieran Brennan, Brennan is there, and Brian Desilets and Jerry [Gerard] Weiss, and in '59 now, I think Ed O'Keefe come in '60 and [Louis] Zuccarello later around '63 I guess. Who else would have been there?

GN: John Schroeder was here.

JLRB: Schroeder, oh Schroeder, yeah, the first lay teacher at Marist, who had been my teacher in, you know, I went through Marist '45-'48 with three years with the summer courses. And Schroeder was still here at that time, oh yes.

GN: This sounds like the golden age of teaching then--

JLRB: It was a... well, let's say it was all family. You didn't need committees because every lunch or dinner you had meetings. You know, you had shop talk and so everybody understood everybody. Everybody trusted everybody, you know, you knew exactly where everybody was coming from. It was really a... well, it's of the very nature of small pioneering operations. You have tremendous pristine, spirit. That was a good year. Well, it was interesting then, it was in the course of that year then John Lawrence, again, comes up and says, "Joe, do you want to go study at CU [Catholic University]?" Because the brothers there had free tuition in exchange for dormitory supervision. So I said, "geez, John, I just had a dream year in Paris. I feel like a heel. Give somebody else a chance." And that's when Brian [Desilets] went to CU for his doctorate in physics. You know, because I said, "I've got enough. Give somebody else a break." And so Brian and then Richard Foy, of course, you know as President and not as faculty at that time.

GN: The change had taken place between Linus [Linus Richard Foy became President of Marist College in 1958] and--

JLRB: Yeah, Richie came in what, '58? I guess. And so--

GN: --Dan Kirk was here in those years?

JLRB: Dan Kirk was here, oh yeah, you bet. Dan was here, you know, the pillars. Dan, Jerry Weiss, these people.

GN: What other activities did you do then in that first and second year? Did you have anything to do, for instance, with the theater, or did you have anything to do--

JLRB: --Yeah, those were the... you know, when we look back on it, how did we ever survive with everything we had to do? You know, of course, we were young. We were not seventy-six years old. We were young, and vigorous and then we didn't have the tensions of committee and bureaucracy. We could do what we wanted, you know, just with the say so across the table.

That's extremely important. So in those years, then when I came in, Brennan was as happy as a lark, because then he could dump the theater on me. You know, he could get out of it. He had been directing the student Brother's theater. And so he dumped it on me that first year and we survived.

GN: When did you dump it on [Jeptha] Lanning?

JLRB: When do...?

GN: Or [Jim] Britt. Who do you dump on after you.

JLRB: After me? Well I leave in '65-'66 I think for a sabbatical year in New York City, to get a chunk of my doctorate out of the way. So that's when Jeptha Lanning takes it over. But the early years then, we put on... we had an interesting public relations event. We were only males, we had no females, you know, for role playing.

GN: In the theater.

JLRB: In the theater. So then I said, "well, let's get an all male play: 'Waiting for Lefty' by Clifford Odets. The problem is, Clifford Odets had been brought up before the Un-American

Activities Committee. So when, this didn't bother Richard Foy, but when the American Legion in town heard about it – this is an Un-American Activities Committee as of thirties. Clifford Odets had been brought up in before them in '35 or so, and now we're talking '60, but they created a real stink about our putting on that play. So Linus said, "look, Joe, we're too young to fight them. Ten years from now, we would just tell them get lost, but at this stage, I think we have to change the play." So we did, and we put on "Waiting for Godot," which at George Sommer -George Sommer was here of course – and at George's suggestion an all male play. So we did well then, got involved with the National Catholic Education Association--

GN: We'll get back to this in a second. So "Waiting for Godot" was produced that fall?

JLRB: Yes, we put in, of course there was no Champagnat Hall, every thing was in the old Marian, the old gym. In those days, all the students took part. I mean, it was Jimmy McKenna, who later became psychiatrist and professor at Harvard, there was Jimmy Callahan, in math, who later became professor mathematics at Harvard and is now at Smith College. There were the Bruno brothers: one was in history the other one was in math, and so on. So you had every... the lay students were all part of the group. Now, the "Waiting for Godot" story is very interesting. When Kieran dumped on me, then I was putting on a play with the student Brothers. We put on "The Strong Are Lonely" about the Jesuit reductions by Fritz Hochwalder, Jesuit reductions in Latin America. That was very good. And then right after that, John Donnelly, student government president at that time, comes up to me and says, "you have to put on a play with the lay students. You put one on for the Brothers, now you have to do one with the lay students. There was lots of tension in the early sixties – from '57, to I'd say almost '65 – there was lots of tension because the student Brothers outnumbered the lay students and the gym was theirs. And if they condescended to let the lay students use it, it was not graciously done. So, there was lots of tension and there, also classroom tension. What the heck, the Brothers were ripping off all the

As and the lay students got all the Cs. So that caused some tension in the early years. And then that passed with the phasing out of the Brothers or the decline, let's say, and the increase of the lay students. After, I worked with the NCEEA, also, and that was my first publication: Teacher Ed. Got involved in Teacher Ed. with Jerry Weiss. We were working just incredibly hard at that time, of course to get the place going, and so in '65, I was on a verge of collapse and I was trying to think this morning or last night – it must be Richie Foy that dickered with the Arch Diocese to get me a scholarship. Because I didn't do it on my own and I'll have to ask Richard Foy about that. That would've been very perspicacious and very sensitive.

GN: The scholarship was for what now?

JLRB: For a year in study in New York City. And it was available to any Brother – any religious or lay person who had taught in the Arch Diocese in schools. So it wasn't much, but it was enough to free me, get to St. Agnes for the year, and knock off a German language test and all your prerequisites for the doctorate that are a real hassle. So it was a good year. It was a very, very good year.

GN: You return here then in the late sixties?

JLRB: Well, one thing for that year that I can add, that fits in to the sixties, is that I stayed in St. Agnes so I would study thirty-eight straight hours. I would study from eight in the morning to about noon, gulp a glass of milk and rush to a theater, a movie. So I saw about a movie a day on Thirty-fourth Street. Then I would get back to my studies by two and study till 5:30 or so and then dinner at six... So that's where I... I saw lots of movies...

GN: You were in walking distance of the public library?

JLRB: But in walking distance of everything. Yeah, Forty-second Street. It was just a very, very good year.

GN: Okay, return to the campus now.

JLRB: Now I get back here and so I don't have to worry about theater. One thing that started that's important for the history of Marist... I came here teaching French, and then I was totally convinced, always have been, that you cannot acquire native skills without emersion. So as soon as I got here, I told Kieran, who was in charge of the student Brothers, I said, "the Brothers have to go abroad. They have to study." So that was a radical departure to get that kind of permission. And so we let Brothers study in Canada. Larry Whartenby, John Reul, these people went to Canada for a year. And then we got student Brothers to go to Mexico in Spanish to get emersion and get total native skills. And the Brother's administration was very open, they were very liberal and open there so we had green lights. Then, we had the first lay student go abroad, Michael Perry in 1963 to Paris.

GN: That was the beginning of the--

JLRB: The beginning of the Marist Abroad Programs, the international programs for lay students. The Brothers had started in the sixties.

GN: And this would be '60- '61? What year is Perry going abroad?

JLRB: '63.

GN: '63?

JLRB: Yes, he's going '63-'64 to Cathay Institute in Paris. So he was the first one and then it moved after that to include all majors that went abroad.

GN: You were very specific about the demand in those early years. That you wanted to avoid tourism, I think, was the expression?

JLRB: Marist Abroad, let's say, programs were very... well, they've always been labeled me an elitist, whatever that means. It means I have standards I guess, I don't know what else. You know, because we had students... these were all individual placements. I mean, we weren't running a travel agency. So you went abroad for the full year and you went abroad if you had

the academic credentials to go or the intelligence and the desire to go. Because I think of some students that wound up with a 2.4, 2.5 wanting to go abroad. Jim McLoughlin, I said, “Jim, in economics?” I say, “I can’t place you in London School of Economics they will never take you, okay?” With that, I say, “I know you’re intelligent, I know you’re bright.” He had spent his life running campus, these people were very active in campus and so on. So I said, “do you want to go to Africa?” So Jim said, “yes.” So he spent a great year in economics at University of Nairobi. So it was very hard to place them since I had to go beg the various universities that were sick and tired of American tourists and I had to convince them that I was sending them students and not tourists. And we did very, very well.

GN: You spent a good bit of time each year, at least, some time each year in Europe following up on these different students.

JLRB: Yes, let’s say, in January at the intersession, I would go to Europe for two weeks and just hop around. A day here, a day there, a day there, living on Mars Bars. [Laughter] You know, on planes. But we had great kids. This was the cream of the crop. I mean, the last alumni meeting here, you know, the alumni weekend and Annette Pasternak comes up. “Remember me?” I said, “Annette, I can never forget you.” And... great girl, and Bill O’Reilly, and Ed Weiss, and so many others. They were all honors students and they went. And my principle was that once I say yes to you, I can trust you. Do what you want. Paul Brown went to Latin America. Paul Brown slummed the whole spring semester around Latin America, he was not sitting in classroom taking notes. I don’t care, because Paul Brown could do no wrong. He was an intelligent guy out for an education. That didn’t bother me at all. John Abbatiello, University of Rome, was on strike his entire year. But he had a great year, then joined OSS, and wound up in Iran, speaking Farsi.

GN: Let's come back to talk to some of, what you might call, controversial or at least problems. You mentioned a woman a moment ago. What was your take on the entrance of women on campus?

JLRB: We were very happy, as far as I recall. I don't recall a faculty member against it at that time.

GN: Previously, they voted against the nursing program because we didn't really have the facilities for women here.

JLRB: Right, the nursing was nixed primarily because of Tony [Anthony] Cernera, who had calculated – he was in charge of development and money – and he said we just do not have the money to field a quality nursing program. And that's why that was nixed, because you have very clear-cut and rigid state requirements for nursing. The other thing about women on campus... I was living in Champagnat initially, when Champagnat was opened. And then we went to Sheahan, I was director of Sheahan for three years, besides full-time teaching. We did anything, in those days that had to be done. Not only me, but everybody here. Then we wanted to open up the College to women, so I was asked to take two students with me and travel. So we went to Harpur College to see how they integrated men and women. We went to LeMoyne College, to spend a day there to see how they operated and so on. It was very interesting when we left LeMoyne, the two kids and I were just stunned by the quality of the buildings, beautiful buildings and spacious apartments for RAs. I said, "well, what about the rest?" They said their policies are terrible. "We'll take all their buildings and we'll take all the Marist policies." I say, "well, you can't have both." So the women came in, and then became resident students. One thing we learned on that trip – Harpur College had made a huge mistake in putting women on the first floor, and that's what we had intended doing in Sheahan and in Leo. And they said, "never". "Put the women on the upper floors." So that was a very sound piece of advice.

GN: Another point has raised some questions over the years was the transfer of Marist College from the Marist Brothers to the Marist College Educational Institution. What's your take on that? Do you think that was a good move?

JLRB: At the time, everybody agreed it was a good move. The thinking after Vatican II was to go where the spirit blows and not be tied down by real estate. So that if some year Marist College, the Marist Brothers no longer wanted to run Marist College, the Apostolic endeavor of Marist College would last and the Brothers were freed to go where there was another need. And so the thinking at that time was that it was a good move. Subsequently, we feel that we should of kept our finger in the pie. And even Richard Foy told me subsequently that if he had to do it all over again, he would keep a finger in the pie. And not hand it over--

GN: --Have a Marist Brother presence on the board--

JLRB: --Keep, let's say, some authority in decision making because after all, it is called Marian, Marist. You know how the name was changed?

GN: Yes.

JLRB: We were – is this on the record, or? – we were in a basement of St. Peter's one Sunday late afternoon. We had just finished watching the Giants game, you know, we all sat there and watched the Giants play. And then, [Brother] John Malachy, who was the director of admissions at that time, before, he was admissions. He said, "you know, I'm having a very tough time getting men to come to *Mary Ann* College." It had been called Marian because of our Blessed Mother and because of St. Ann, the patronesses. So he says, "can we come up with another name?" So we sat there, in the basement of St. Peter's, and we threw names around like Mid-Hudson College, since the Jesuits called Fordham, Fordham because of where it is, and New Orleans. So we said, "what should we do?" So we threw some names around, and finally, somebody said - I don't know who it was maybe it was Kirk – said, "look, Marist is known

around the world and around the United States. Let's call it Marist so that anybody who hears the name will immediately associate it with St. Anne's Academy, and Mount St. Michael, you know and other schools from around the world." So that's how we came down with the name Marist in '60.

GN: Another significant point that has been a part of your interest here is the Marist College Foreign Film Program. Can you say a few words about that?

JLRB: Actually, that was started by Mario Ruggeri, the part-timer in Italian. We had started Italian and Evening Division. Schroeder had started an Evening Division. And Mario was hired, he was a full-time teacher at Highland High School, and then came here and taught Italian. His first year here in 1960, he said, "let's start a foreign film program." So at that time, of course, there was not VHS, it was only sixteen millimeter, so we had only eight films a year, four each semester. But we used to put out beautiful posters, I mean, they're masterpieces. And then we also had program notes and we had discussions in the alcove in Champagnat after... well, we had started, actually, in Donnelly. We started early on, and then when Champagnat came, we moved there. So Mario, then and the following year, asked me to help him because you need a contact on campus just to be sure that the projector's there and so on. We weren't organized where we are now, you just couldn't put in a request to Joey Wall [Director of the Media Center]. So that took off. The second year he asked me if I would join him, I said, "yes." And we worked very well together for about thirteen years, I guess. Mario ran a film program and taught Italian. And then, later in the sixties, he gave up Italian and started communication courses, he started film courses here. He was a very talented fellow. He then pulled out, I guess, of the film program and then it lapsed I guess in '76, '75 or so it must have lapsed. The 16-millimeter program as such. Then, there was none for a few years. Then, when I came back from sabbatical in '81-'82, in France, that was the VHS revolution. So then we started in the

spring of '83 we started a French film program of about six, seven films. And then the following fall of '83, then they started the twenty films a semester on VHS.

GN: We have to pay attention... the clock is running here, and I want to get some kind of sweeping questions in. First has to do with a historical view. We've had three presidents in terms of Brother Paul Ambrose, Linus Foy, and Dr. Murray. Could you briefly say something about the administration of each?

JLRB: Well, very little actually about Paul. Paul came in, in '43, I think, to the campus as Master of Scholastics. And he came specifically to transform the Marist Normal Training School into a four-year college. And so Paul's strengths were outstanding administratively and in paper work. He could deal with all the, you know, and get all the paper work done on time, clear, the way they wanted it. Just an incredible administrator in that sense. As I mentioned earlier, as a teacher then, of course, that was a sideline for him. So he did very well, we got the charter amended in '46 of September and things took off very well. He was also, at that time, Master of Scholastics. So he had the role of many leaders today. Religious, superior, and mentors. Just seeing that everybody was on track. So, in that sense, he had those strengths that were needed at that time. Then, when Richard Foy came in, actually Paul says, Richie was not the first choice. There were three or four other Brothers that had been asked to do it, but down the line, they turned it down and rightfully so because you need a doctorate and you had to move to another level and not just bare administrative skills. So that's when Linus then was asked, the youngest college president in the United States at that time.

GN: What was his key contribution do you think?

JLRB: His key contribution I believe was vision – humanistic vision. He knew what education was about. He knew how to deal with people. He could handle all the aspects except development – fundraising, he was just not a fundraiser. But for everything else, he was

absolutely genius, an outstanding leader in my opinion. And then, just the package – he’s very deeply, as a Brother, very deeply into human rights. And the benefits package that he set up for all employees at Marist College we would not get today. He just had a sense of human rights, a sense of justice and then open... I mean, he’s the one, for example, that got me into the theater when I was into the theater, after the first year, he said, “Joe, you’ve got to get a doctorate. You’re teaching eighteen credits. You can’t be doing this theater business. We have to hire somebody. Go hire somebody.” So then we made contacts with different people, and we wound up with Jim Britt [Jim Britt was hired in the summer of 1960 to direct the Marist College Theatre Guild]. Jim Britt was just a genius, exactly what we needed at that time for theater. Great, great person.

GN: Okay, we have to move on now. What about Dr. Murray?

JLRB: Now Dennis came in as a developer. You know why Dennis came in? Because for three years in a row, we were in the red. And when that happens, I’m told, banks cut off your credit. And then it was the end of twenty-one years, I think, for Richard Foy, and he was very, very marketable, he could any job he wanted around. So he decided to leave. And then Dennis came in then, specifically mandated to put us in the black and to keep us in the black and that’s it. So when Dennis came in – I’ll never forget this – in his opening talk, in the Champagnat Theater, he said, “when I wanted to get into education, I figured I had to come east. And I looked into dozens and dozens of liberal arts colleges, and this was the best unknown liberal arts college I looked at and I intend to make it known.” Those were, I don’t know if that’s recorded on video anywhere, but that is my recollection of his first talk to the faculty. And that was his mandate. So he came in, and his mandate is to make us known and to keep us in the black, and he has done that. In my opinion, he’s very weak academically, very, very weak academically, no

interest whatsoever in academics. But he's done what we've brought him in to do. I believe it's now time – he's in his twenty-second year – it's now time for another president--

GN: --Let's talk about that vision of the future. What did you think of Marist? Where is it going or where would you like to see it going?

JLRB: I would like to see Marist as a solid educational institution. Humanistic, not primarily vocational and technical because the society changes radically and quickly. You go to college in order to train your mind to make the best decisions in life. You do not train your mind primarily with technology, you train your mind primarily with the humanities, with the liberal arts. You learn to think. To learn to think means to analyze, to synthesize, and to hypothesize. Those are the three aspects of thinking. So that, it's extremely important then in every course, to teach students to analyze, to break down into parts. Teach them afterwards, to synthesize. Now, put it together, put it all together, draw major conclusions. Once you have those major conclusions, then it is critical to hypothesize, to dream, to get the mytho-poet part of your brain going to see what is not and what can be. So I think Marist, right now, has moved too much – under Dennis – to the vocational, technical part and not sufficiently to the humanistic and liberal arts part.

GN: As you look back now, what do you think is your greatest contribution here, or several of them?

JLRB: No, my greatest contribution has to be the classroom, teaching in the classroom. I mean, the students have... well, the greatest tribute I ever got was from Susan Van Parys, national merit, brilliant girl from Red Hook. In five years after graduation, we send out questionnaires, you know, what did you major in – French, Spanish, Russian – and if you had to start over again, would you still major in that. And she said, “yes.” And then, what did you get out of French? And Susan Van Parys answered in four words: “I learned to think”. That's it. My greatest contribution, I think, has been to challenge students in the classroom to think. To analyze, to

synthesize, and to hypothesize. Very, very important. And I believe that has to be the goal of every teacher, of every educational institution.

GN: Well, you've been recognized as one of the outstanding teachers in the awards that you've gotten, and I'm sure that as we look through your various accomplishments, we can't help admire the great work that you've done. In conclusion, is there something that I didn't ask you that you would like to add to this historical bit of history that we're making here? Something about what you would tell new faculty, what their quests should be?

JLRB: What I want, and what I wish we would do, is before we hire even non-faculty, staff... well, I'm a paper person, I believe in writing makes an exact man. If you can't express it, you don't have it. So I would want every faculty member, every staff member before being hired to be required to write their educational philosophy. This is what I believe education is all about. Because I think we're hiring more and more people just pragmatically, just... I guess not educationally. And in the final analysis, there is no reason for existing if we are not teaching these students to think. You know, and then, evidently be moral and hard working. But basically, the role of an educational institution like Marist College is to teach them to think, and what I would want then to see would be a debate on educational philosophy. You know, Gus, remember when Dennis came, and we re-wrote the mission statement? For two days I think it was, or maybe even longer, we wrote down, everybody, whole college faculty, the whole College community, staff and so on. We sat down for two days in different groups and we hammered out every statement of every idea in that mission statement. We haven't done that since. That should be done at least every ten years, you know? And then it's a tremendous binder. See, unfortunately, Marist with its growth, loses the sense of community it used to have. And we still do, but it's more fractured now. I mean, biology has its group, and theater has its group, and the psych people have their group and this is all you can do, I think, with the size of

Marist today. But I think we could do a lot more with faculty and staff. I really believe we have to take the time to do it. We've even cancelled out what Andy Molloy started. When he came in 1980, and the faculty retreat in January, which was an excellent binder. Excellent, you know, get to know people, and then bind in decisions and committee work becomes a lot easier when you know the person across the table and you trust them. So that has been stopped, as an economic move. I think we've lost the sense of community, and we can get more. I think... and we've lost a sense of liberal arts, there's no doubt, no doubt.

GN: Okay then. Thank you very much.

“END OF PART I OF INTERVIEW”
