

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

Sue Lawrence

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, NY

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For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

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Transcript: Dr. Sue Lawrence

Interviewee: Dr. Sue Lawrence

Interviewer: Gus Nolan

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- Lawrence, Sue
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Summary: Sue Lawrence discusses her early years, her early education, and her arrival to Marist College as a professor of the new Communications department. She discusses the courses in communications with Gus Nolan and the evolution of the communications department at the college and implications of new technologies for education in the future.

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

00:10 **GN:** Today is June 17th 2010. We're having the interview this morning with Sue Lawrence. She is a doctorate in communications. She's on our staff. The Marist communications department or division. We're in the Marist library. Good morning, Sue.

00:28 **SL:** Good morning, Gus.

00:29 **GN:** We're making this interview. To be part of the archives. Of the beginnings of Marist from people who been here for more than twenty years and then more than thirty years. Sue Lawrence fits into that category. I'm with Eliza (?) for this opportunity. So as you know from the outline I gave you, we're going to take up try to get a view of your experiences here over your time but even before that what about the early years. This first part, I'd like you had to give us a thumbnail sketch of your earlier years. Where were you born and brought up? And elementary school and so on.

01:10 **SL:** I was born in Independence, Missouri and lived there for a long time.

01:14 **GN:** How long is long? Twenty years?

01:17 **SL:** More than that actually. Twenty-six, maybe or something. And I went to a small Catholic school, St Mary's and what else...

01:32 **GN:** That's elementary school.

01:33 **SL:** Both.

01:34 **GN:** And then the high school also?

01:36 **SL:** Yeah, same school.

01:37 **GN:** How big a school was it in terms of the student body?

01:40 **SL:** I think my graduating class had like fifty or sixty, you know. It was pretty small.

01:46 **GN:** And then move on to high school, same thing? About the same thing. Junior high school years, particular interests. Did you outside of study which you probably did very enthusiastically?

02:00 **SL:** I was a voracious reader I read all the time. But well I kind of wanted to be in pre-med, I thought. And. But you know I enjoyed... I enjoyed the education I got there. I was a reporter on the newspaper.

02:16 **GN:** Were you involved science projects that you might think of medicine?

02:19 **SL:** We had a very small science department. It was a very little ... Small facilities. But enough to pique my interest. But then I realized it was not for me.

02:37 **GN:** What about other interests? How about hobbies? When did the piano start?

02:41 **SL:** Oh. My parents started me in about third grade, I think and I continued till ninth or tenth grade. But I continued to play after that.

02:50 **GN:** How do you play still?

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

[02:51](#) **SL:** Yes, I have a piano and play. Well not very well but I play it.

[02:56](#) **GN:** Well. I would not be able to tell whether you played or not very well. I could tell if you sang very well but I don't know about playing the piano.

[03:07](#) **SL:** Arrowhead hunting has been one of my lifetime hobbies.

[03:11](#) **GN:** Is that so?

[03:12](#) **SL:** Yeah.

[03:13](#) **GN:** And the Missouri area has...

[03:16](#) **SL:** Well Missouri has much nicer ones than here but I hunt and stuff. The materials in the Midwest are more dramatic like pink and red and white here. It's just kind of gray or black or bluish.

[03:35](#) **GN:** Okay. What about other things as sports? Did you run swim or anything like that?

[03:38](#) **SL:** I was never a sports person but I jog for every day for like twelve years, three miles a day. When I was here, when I came here.

[03:49](#) **GN:** Do you still run?

[03:51](#) **SL:** No, my knees gave out. But I do yoga. I try to do yoga every day. But I can't ever run again. Well the knees went... I did not stretch and things like that...that you're supposed to do.

[04:03](#) **GN:** Well you should write a book on this now. How to prevent one's knees from going?.

[04:10](#) **SL:** I used to run across the Mid-Hudson Bridge every day.

[04:11](#) **GN:** Is that so?

[04:12](#) **SL:** Yeah.

[04:13](#) **GN:** How about the walkway? Have you used that?

[04:15](#) **SL:** I haven't been there yet.

[04:17](#) **GN:** Oh, you've been deprived of a great privilege.

[04:19](#) **SL:** Absolutely, yeah.

[04:21](#) **GN:** Did you have a chance to work, while at school or college?

[04:25](#) **SL:** Yeah, I got a job with the post office in Independence. Took that exam and got a job.

[04:33](#) **GN:** How old were you then? In your twenties?

[04:35](#) **SL:** No, sixteen and I was in high school for the summer. I ran the letters through that metering thing for the most part.

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

[04:47](#) **GN:** They had a metering thing when you were in high school?

[04:50](#) **SL: (laughter)** A machine.

[04:53](#) **GN:** Yeah, I see. What about teaching? Did you ever do a part-time teaching through high school or college?

[05:04](#) **SL:** In college and graduate school, I taught a course. And I was trying to remember it. It was must have been radio broadcasting because I remember there was a lab with it. I have no recollection of the lecture parts except that I was terrified. Every day when I had to go with the class.

[05:21](#) **GN:** And how big a group would you be instructed?

[05:23](#) **SL:** Thirty. We must have broken it down for the lab. I remember we actually did projects like little radio projects.

[05:33](#) **GN:** What is the link between then the graduate school and your teaching career? Did you like it? It would seem as though you're terrified by it but yet you were convinced that you could do it.

[05:43](#) **SL:** Yeah, no. I loved being in school. I loved studying. I loved learning about film especially when I got it which I didn't really get into until graduate school. I realized that was kind of major interest for me so I really enjoyed that. I hadn't really thought much about becoming an academic and teaching. It wasn't really a thing... It was more interested in the material like I guess then.

[06:08](#) **GN:** You know, what're you gonna do with it...

[06:10](#) **SL:** Yeah. I had no idea.

[06:14](#) **GN:** So you went to graduate school and you went right on and got a Master's and PhD?

[06:18](#) **SL:** In the same thing in Missouri. Speech and Dramatic Arts.

[06:23](#) **GN:** And then, was there any time between ... the ending of the graduate program and coming to Marist, did you have a job? Did you teach in the Midwest any place?

[06:34](#) **SL:** No. This is my first and only real job.

[06:38](#) **GN:** Say that again loud and clear.

[06:39](#) **SL:** My first and only real job. I finished up my coursework. And then I started looking for a job. I was working on the dissertation but not very far into it when I got this job.

[06:56](#) **GN:** How do you hear about Marist? How did it come up?

[07:00](#) **SL:** I was in one of those placement services for... I think it was called speech communication Association in those days. I think it's called something else today. And I just applied to about ten schools, I think.

[07:15](#) **GN:**. We must have picked it up. You responded to our...

[07:18](#) **SL:** I responded to your advertisement.

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

[07:20](#) **GN:** Right, right, right. And then you flew into Dutchess County...

[07:25](#) **SL:** ... airport. I was picked up by Gus Nolan I believe.

[07:29](#) **GN:** I remember picking up this beautiful teacher that we're hoping we will be able to get. And lo and behold, we did. Let's talk about your first impressions here. When you came to Marist, we were rather small, not even well-known in the Hudson Valley.

[07:47](#) **SL:** It was very small, yeah. Well my physical impression though was because I remember it was springtime. And I had just come from the Midwest where in the springtime things happen faster. Things bud and stuff. It just looked like winter here so I was a little concerned about that climatically. But yeah the program was really small. You guys... I came in '79. You guys had turned into Comms in what year?

[08:20](#) **GN:** Not much before. Perhaps. I want to get to the curriculum later. I'm just trying to get to the coming here and the process of the interview. Do you remember the interview? Was there one?

[08:31](#) **SL:** I do. There was an interview where we sat around a table at the library with Jep and you and Bob Norman, Dick of course.

[08:43](#) **GN:** Of course, right. And at that time you knew you could make it here if these guys had made it here.

[08:47](#) **SL:** (laughter) I wouldn't say that. I know I had a favorable impression. I was a little concerned about the newness of the college. The newness of this program. And the fact that I had never heard of Marist College before to be honest. Those were kind of scary red flags for me and the lack of equipment was another concern because I was supposed to be teaching production.

[09:13](#) **GN:** You weren't impressed with our equipment in those days? (laughter)

[09:19](#) **SL:** No, there was a little radio room in Donnelly hall in the basement where things kept getting stolen.

[09:23](#) **GN:** Oh right, Lowell Thomas had not even been put up yet.

[09:27](#) **SL:** Oh no. God no. The T.V. Studio was in the basement of the library. In the library. And we had a couple of cameras and I think that all of that stuff was new. Before that someone had been adjuncting, Ed Mulvey. Adjuncting and teaching at a high school. TV production of a high school. Yeah right, I think this was a new thing that the equipment had been bought. A media center had been set up and it was relatively new.

[09:57](#) **GN:** We're just emerging to get our place in the sun. With the TV and communications program.

[10:04](#) **SL:** Which once you got them, they were pretty good. I mean they improved consistently.

[10:10](#) **GN:** It's been a forward movement up... right along. Did you try any other interviews?

[10:17](#) **SL:** I had an interview right before this in Michigan somewhere. The details are vague.

[10:23](#) **GN:** Yeah. It's a long time ago.

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

[10:25](#) **SL:** It was... I had to give a lecture on Frank Capra to three hundred fifty students and it wasn't really a good fit for me. I don't think. Plus at dinner, the guy I was talking to kind of got drunk and spilled the beans that they already had somebody they wanted to hire but they were forced to bring in a woman, which was fine. Which was fine because I got a free trip and.

[10:48](#) **GN:** You got the experience and so how bad it could be in another place.

[10:52](#) **SL:** It's a lecture to three hundred and fifty kids. (laughter) But then, it was early so I only had that other interview essentially.

[11:05](#) **GN:** Then we sent you an offer to come and join us shortly after that?

[11:08](#) **SL:** I think Dick called me. And I reluctantly declined because I was worried about the newness of the program. You know that the sort of retooling and just the lack of experience a little bit... maybe kind of scared me. But then I immediately regretted it. Because I remember I went to the bank in Nebraska and cashed the check and the cashier said, "Oh you got to go to Poughkeepsie." I said, "Yeah it was real nice." And she was asking me about that I thought. "Why did I turn the job down?" Luckily.

[11:46](#) **GN:** Well, Poughkeepsie was known for IBM. Marist was not on the agenda in those days. Okay, so you do get an offer to come back. And then you come. When did you come to live here?

[12:01](#) **SL:** July 15th. I lived in the dorm. Well for some reason Dick must have figured out a way that I could get paid if I came early in the summer to kind of set up the courses.

[12:12](#) **GN:** So you got a twelve-month contract right away starting in July.

[12:16](#) **SL:** Yeah. They paid me a lot. And that was good because it was helpful finding an apartment. You were helpful finding an apartment.

[12:24](#) **GN:** Oh yes. Near the train station. So you wouldn't have thought to walk. You would need a car.

[12:28](#) **SL:** That was a good apartment. On Davey's Place.

[12:29](#) **GN:** It was indeed.

[12:31](#) **SL:** A little studio.

[12:32](#) **GN:** I think it's a historical mark now.

[12:35](#) **SL:** No I think it is. I think it was one of those.

[12:37](#) **GN:** Okay. Let's get into your teaching here. Do you recall the first courses? What kind of course were you asked to teach?

[12:44](#) **SL:** Well I was doing radio production and Tv production for sure. I think I was mainly doing production when I first came.

[12:54](#) **GN:** That we didn't have much of a studio to do the production.

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

[12:58](#) **SL:** No but we managed.

[13:00](#) **GN:** We managed to get through that. How big were the classes?

[13:04](#) **SL:** Not over twenty. Very small.

[13:08](#) **GN:** And were you the sole person doing it? Or were you cohort with Bob Norman...?

[13:14](#) **SL:** What was Bob Norman doing? No I think I was the only production person,

[13:19](#) **GN:** He was probably doing speech, public speaking and I don't know if the internship had started yet.

[13:27](#) **SL:** I have no recollection when the internships started.

[13:31](#) **GN:** The place you're working was Donnelly for the most part or the library.

[13:38](#) **SL:** The library basement mainly.

[13:44](#) **GN:** On the back burner of course is your dissertation that has to be finished or you are hoping to finish. And do you recall a Brother Richard Rancourt helping you in this?

[13:55](#) **SL:** I recalled it. I said this to him at one point, I need a typist. He said I'll do it and I was like what? Yeah. So he did it. He typed my dissertation. Which I could not have done because in those days you couldn't have any corrections. You had all those crazy insane rules. Because there was no computers or anything.

[14:16](#) **GN:** Yeah, I had to go from Poughkeepsie to Newark. To have one page done over.

[14:20](#) **SL:** No, it was horrible. Yeah. Requirements were ridiculous. Yeah. And you know I was flabbergasted that he volunteered. So yeah. I paid him of course (laughter).

[14:30](#) **GN:** Although he was grateful that you know. He keeps talking about it.

[14:38](#) **SL:** He does?

[14:39](#) **GN:** Well when he remembers. Well it must have been a nightmare to type.

[14:42](#) **GN:** Yeah. How long was it?

[14:43](#) **SL:** It was only like a hundred twenty pages but yeah. But the perfection.

[14:47](#) **GN:** You can't make any mistakes yeah. But see, he was like you so he's a good piano player but he was also a good typist. So that's ...secondary.

[14:55](#) **SL:** He said he was so that's why I wanted him to do it. And yeah, he did an excellent job. But that was not until '82. I didn't get that done until '82. Let's follow on now in the teaching. The program and the curriculum is rather simple when you saw it.

[15:00](#) **GN:** And then there's a gradual movement ahead. Where did you see the drive for this? Is this Jephthah, who did it? Or Dick? Or who are the instrumental people?

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

15:25 SL: Well it might have been in both of them obviously. And I can't even remember who was first? Was it Dick who was first? And Jeb? And then Dick?

15:34 GN: I think Jeb was first. And then Dick comes in and he becomes chair after him.

15:39 SL: What I loved about this job was you know the thing that had maybe turn it down the first place. It was... there was just so much open area that you could move into. I was creating courses right and left. I was having a wonderful time. I made up a whole bunch of classes which are still on the books like documentary film, experimental film, women in film. Yeah it was great. That was an opportunity that most people in my position would never have had. You know just being new and going, "Hey, let's have a course and yeah fill in the blank." And they needed these courses because there was very little...

16:17 GN: We had to fill out a little... we had to fill out the curriculum.

16:18 SL: There was very little to choose from. Yeah. I know I wrote. I know I did Writing for the media at some point. I was teaching a class and also comparative communications systems which might have already been on the books. It was like an international broadcasting and film class. Yeah.

16:38 GN: I don't remember that so much I mean. Were we comparing it with other countries and others?

16:41 SL: Yeah.

16:43 GN: How does the US compare with Russia or France?

16:47 SL: Right. But I can't remember the development of that. It just kind of gradually took place. I mean it was like one year I did six new classes but you know just over time.

16:58 GN: Now...it's an evolutionary thing that we saw it with nothing virtually. Or two courses and then you're moving up to where we are now and that's over a thirty-year period.

17:05 SL: When you guys started, there weren't concentrations. Were there?

17:09 GN: No.

17:10 SL: When did that happen? I can't even remember that.

17:14 GN: Yes. It happened as a result of the fact that a good number of our students who were English majors at the time were not taking English courses. They were taking communication courses. They were taking interpersonal communications or public speaking. Criticism of American public address. You know there were a lot of things that were basically in English but they were not the typical novel, drama, poetry, eighteenth-century, nineteenth-century.

17:44 SL: And you guys had a kind of rhetorical background, right?

17:47 GN: We did. And so the registrar came over and said you know, "You really have to do something to either put more English courses or... develop a new program called communications." And so then we went to the faculty with this proposal. Because we were in fact carrying the school.

18:06 SL: Who? You and Jeb?

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

[18:07](#) **GN:** Well, English department So Bob Norman would be in then.

[18:09](#) **SL:** And George.

[18:10](#) **GN:** And George and Bill and Dick Platt.

[18:17](#) **SL:** So Dick was hired in English department.

[18:20](#) **GN:** Yes but to do something communication. We were only one department at the time. And then, we broke out and became a communications department.

[18:30](#) **SL:** And that had happened before I got there.

[18:31](#) **GN:** No

[18:32](#) **SL:** No?

[18:33](#) **GN:** Well. The division had happened. But there was nothing in it.

[18:37](#) **SL:** That's right, you're right. There was nothing there.

[18:38](#) **GN:** It was an empty shell. We started putting books on the shelves and get along with that

[18:44](#) **SL:** That was kind of cool actually.

[18:45](#) **GN:** It was.

[18:47](#) **SL:** And it was pretty smart too, whoever had that idea.

[18:51](#) **GN:** Well it was a guy in the... I forget he passed away now. Ed Waters would be one person.

[18:57](#) **SL:** Really?

[19:00](#) **GN:** Well, he moved that we would take over the gym. They were putting up a new dormitory and putting up the Lowell... the McCann Centre and he thought it would be appropriate if we would move in and take over the gym as part of a developing of a lab. You know. But lo and behold. One of these years, a man called Lowell Thomas comes to give the graduation address and after his arrival here. We became very good friends to Lowell Thomas people. Because he died. And this was the last public address that he gave. So we went to the family and suggested that they put up a building in honor of Lowell Thomas and they said, that'd be a good idea. And we said, we'd like you to pay for it too. So they agreed to at least how the foundations and good bit of it. So. And then Dennis Murray was on the scene at the time too.

[19:58](#) **SL:** I came the same month Dennis came. He came in July of '79.

[20:01](#) **GN:** That's marked well in most of our calendars. (laughter) Yeah. And will you stay as long as he stays?

[20:09](#) **SL:** We're here together.

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

[20:14](#) **GN:** OK. Let's change the focus just a little bit. Looking back at the development now. That we've talked in terms of the campus and the library and the curriculum to take them on at a time. How about the campus. What strikes you now as the striking contrast between the 1979 arrival and the ...?

[20:43](#) **SL:** Hugeness. With that came a little bit of isolation. Like to me walking over to Fontaine seems like a huge hike. Yeah. So I don't go over there to hang out. I loved it when we were like with the English guys. Yeah. You know and...

[20:58](#) **GN:** In Donnelly.

[20:59](#) **SL:** Bill Olsen was upstairs. No, in Fontaine.

[21:00](#) **GN:** The Fontaine building, right.

[21:02](#) **SL:** Almost everybody was over there who wasn't in Donnelly. And yeah, I really got to know those people. Right. You know in a way it's good that we've got big but in a way on a personal level of its kind of a little bit of a loss. There are new people I meet all the time that I've just never seen before. Who've been here for years.

[21:22](#) **GN:** And they've been here for 10 years.

[21:24](#) **SL:** Well, not ten years. Usually a couple.

[21:26](#) **GN:** When they start retiring and you've never seen them before.

[21:29](#) **SL:** Going like, who is that guy.

[21:30](#) **GN:** But no we're really in trouble.

[21:32](#) **SL:** Well no the place is huge now. Physically.

[21:35](#) **GN:** Well. Geographically it's not much. It's just that there are more building.

[21:37](#) **SL:** Just more buildings.

[21:40](#) **GN:** And they're separated into these

[21:41](#) **SL:** We need more people.

[21:46](#) **GN:** Yeah of course. So, campus. The building we're in now is would be a striking example of this change.

[21:50](#) **SL:** Oh it's beautiful. It's gorgeous.

[21:53](#) **GN:** Yeah. I never thought I'd see the day when we'd have such a library.

[21:57](#) **SL:** Remember Fontaine, the library with the ... everybody always had the trash baskets catching the rainwater off the ceiling.

[22:08](#) **GN:** Oh yes. We had holds in the roof. That was a period of embarrassment sometimes. When

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

people were visiting us, pardon me as I move this can. So the campus would be one of the things.

22:23 **SL:** Oh, the campus is gorgeous. It is absolutely well maintained. OK. I thought it must really impress the parents too when they get here. It looks nice.

22:30 **GN:** It is a beautiful sight to see. Comment on when you saw the stadium going up. What'd you think about that? Do you think that was a good investment?

22:41 **SL:** You know I have no interest in sports so I didn't care. Yeah. It looks nice.

22:47 **GN:** It does. But it does bring students in who you know want to play for footballs.

22:53 **SL:** The thing they had before was just those wooden bleachers. That was not very attractive.

22:59 **GN:** That was a scary...

23:00 **SL:** I think there's just certain things that you have to do in order to attract the students and sports is one of them.

23:07 **GN:** Absolutely. And you just on a good Saturday afternoon, you just go there and it's like a hundred students dressed in uniforms who pay 30,000\$ a year or more to come here to be dressed in those uniforms. We offer them this opportunity. We won't deny it. They also go to school but the major attraction would be sports. And widespread. They come from California, foreign states like Connecticut and Massachusetts.

23:38 **SL:** We didn't used to get many of those in the old days. It was Long Island. I remember the Long Island accent.

23:44 **GN:** It was only one city. They're going to the city... It's called New York. I remember the time when we crossed over that there were more students not from New York than from New York here.

24:00 **SL:** There was a moment yeah.

24:01 **GN:** The swing of the tide. And now there's a lot more from outside New York, yeah.

24:06 **SL:** I've run into the ones from Texas. And all over the place now.

24:10 **GN:** OK. We're talking about to the development. Changing the focus here. The campus would be one kind of change in terms of it. How about the curriculum itself? Or the college curriculum. How does communications fit into the overall picture of it? Do we still have a core program for instance? Would you know?

24:35 **SL:** In the communications?

24:36 **GN:** No, in the college,

24:38 **SL:** No, we still at this time, have one..

24:40 **GN:** We do at this time.

24:41 **SL:** We're working on it.

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

[24:43](#) **GN:** It's being revised. On a constant...

[24:47](#) **SL:** And it needs to be revised. It's been the long time since it was revised.

[24:49](#) **GN:** Anything that stands still dies, you got to keep moving.

[24:54](#) **SL:** Exactly. Exactly.

[24:56](#) **GN:** Talk about the communications program. What's going on in communications? Do you still have the kind of the umbrella that there is advertising...that there is radio, TV? That there is interpersonal public relations or communications or some such. There are those...

[25:00](#) **SL:** We have those concentrations and added sports.

[25:25](#) **GN:** Sports in there?

[25:27](#) **SL:** Very popular. Sports comm is very popular.

[25:31](#) **GN:** What do they do? Is it writing for sports? Announcing sports?

[25:35](#) **SL:** Yeah. Everything about sports. And the media.

[25:39](#) **GN:** OK. How about advertising?

[25:41](#) **SL:** Advertising is going strong.

[25:44](#) **GN:** Is it? Still the same people? Well there's been some change.

[25:46](#) **SL:** Marcia Christ and Subir Sengupta.

[25:50](#) **GN:** One of the principals... Stridsberg?

[25:54](#) **SL:** I think. Well. Marcia and Stridsberg might have been here at the same time. I guess Subir replaced him.

[26:02](#) **GN:** All right. Yeah. OK. Carol Pauli. What does she do? Is she still here?

[26:09](#) **SL:** She's been on leave for two years. In New Orleans teaching somewhere and she's coming back supposedly. She has just been on a leave of absence.

[26:19](#) **GN:** Is there Law and Communication still? That was one of the...?

[26:24](#) **SL:** The things and Carol teaches law. Yeah.

[26:26](#) **GN:** Do we have a debate team yet?

[26:33](#) **SL:** Well I don't want to say definitively. We're reducing the debates a little bit after the last guy left. But I don't know. Things I hear.

[26:46](#) **GN:** It's not a big thing in the department itself.

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

[26:50](#) **SL:** Yeah, I'm not quite clear what's going on with the debate.

[26:54](#) **GN:** How is the division organized? There's a Dean?

[26:59](#) **SL:** You know there's the Dean. There's two departments. There's media arts which I think got started around '88. Early 90s. '93 or '94. And that includes radio, T.V, Film. And what we used to call multimedia which is now called game and interactive studies and then there's the Com department which takes everybody else.

[27:30](#) **GN:** Public relations and organization communication. Interpersonal.

[27:34](#) **SL:** Sports. Journalism.

[27:36](#) **GN:** Oh journalism is in there. Okay. And who's doing journalism for us? Is there a team or one person?

[27:44](#) **SL:** There's some new people. And they've also just instituted a broadcast journalism concentration. I'm not sure if it's a concentration by itself or...?.

[27:57](#) **GN:** For either radio or TV or both?

[28:00](#) **SL:** Which of course we should have done thirty years ago. But yeah. Whatever. We didn't. We couldn't do everything. (laughter)

[28:10](#) **GN:** No we were starting from the ground up. It took a while to get out of the ground. Let's begin along with this changing of things. Comment on the students. When you were first arrived here, what was the nature of the Marist students? And then what's the nature of the Marist students today? Let's talk about the early years.

[28:29](#) **SL:** Well the early years, I just remember. Everybody saying that most of the students' parents had not gone to college life. These were like first generation kids mostly from Long Island. And that sticks in my mind because of their accents which struck me as different. Yeah. They were not overly smart. Some of them were enthusiastic. But they had sort of deficiencies in writing skills and things like that which I think all of that stuff has improved incredibly. But you know they probably didn't come from a culture where those things were important culturally. It was a different time entirely. So I remember the students as being just really nice which they still are but they seem to really nice. For me it was a little difficult because I wasn't that much older than some of them. That was kind of an adjustment for me. And now...

[29:29](#) **GN:** And now, what would you say about students today? They're still nice.

[29:35](#) **SL:** They are still nice... but

[29:37](#) **GN:** The Marist kids bring another kind with them. I mean they seem to draw of the same caliber. From my experience but I'm not in the classroom but just being on campus and they still hold the door open and being polite.

[29:51](#) **SL:** They're really polite, yeah totally You never have any discipline problems. So you know it's pretty amazing. From what I hear from other schools. They are smarter. They worked hard in high school to get good grades and stuff. They're very grade-conscious.

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

[30:08](#) **GN:** Well Marist is harder to get into now than it was before.

[30:12](#) **SL:** Much, much, much harder. The SAT numbers really went up.

[30:19](#) **GN:** Say it again?

[30:20](#) **SL:** The SAT numbers? I don't remember what they were when I first came but they were pretty middling.

[30:25](#) **GN:** A thousand was good. But now twelve hundred would be pretty much required.

[30:30](#) **SL:** Yeah. So it's a really different caliber. And their parents have gone to college.

[30:34](#) **GN:** I see

[30:35](#) **SL:** I mean it's a different culture. You hardly ever meet anybody whose parents haven't gone to college here.

[30:42](#) **GN:** So this is another great in that.

[30:45](#) **SL:** And financially I think there's been an upgrade.

[30:48](#) **GN:** Oh yeah. And the price of the place is gone up as well.

[30:51](#) **SL:** I think the students have much more money than they did in the old days.

[30:55](#) **GN:** Yeah. And what about their production in school and in classes. Can you comment their projects? Like in their papers, are they more imaginative, creative or productive?

[31:08](#) **SL:** Well let's put it aside for a minute. One thing I did notice was in the early days. Just basic things like writing skills were really poor. I would spend a lot of time with grammar and correcting sentence structure and I don't really see that as a huge problem now. Maybe one out of twenty can't write now. Most of them are very good communicators and they're great talkers. That's one thing about Marist students. They've always been good talkers, I think. They can talk a good story. Creative-wise, I was thinking about this. It seems like in the in the '86, '87 around there. Were the times that I remember the students being just insanely crazy. They would just try anything and had great ideas. I don't see that. I don't think that the high schools are teaching creativity or the tactics for that in our They're teaching for these tests. So the students are not called upon. In fact in my TV Theory class, I finally said, "Why are you guys having trouble with these papers?" You know they were having trouble writing the papers. And so we had a discussion about it. Several of them told me that what they learned to write in high school was copying what the teacher had said. And then handing it in as a paper back. I'm going "Oh my gosh." You know this is killing them. Because I'm expecting them to come up with the original ideas and then follow through on them. And they were just struggling or struggling. They're not taught to be creative. I think it can be taught. Well you know. Not to be a genius or anything but I think you can teach tactics that make you think creatively.

[32:54](#) **GN:** In more recent years, some of the projects... do you direct projects so can they create themselves in terms of ...?

[32:03](#) **SL:** Well, I'm out so I don't teach production all anymore. I moved myself out of that like. Six or seven years ago.

[33:11](#) **GN:** What is it that you're teaching then?

[33:13](#) **SL:** Right now, I'm teaching mostly art of the film. Last semester I taught *Women in Film*. I teach documentary film, experimental film. I'm teaching all film classes.

[33:25](#) **GN:** Do you show films? That's part of the ... They see a film or they... It's a sign that they have to see it. So much time in class and classes analyzing things I did see... I suppose.

[33:35](#) **SL:** Yeah well, the film courses are taught in three slots. So we have time to watch a movie together and then a lot of time to discuss which I think is a good system. But anyway they're very good at that. They're very good at learning what you want them to learn. Not being creative so much though.

[34:00](#) **GN:** How big are your classes?.

[34:02](#) **SL:** Typically about twenty.

[34:05](#) **GN:** In the film?

[34:06](#) **SL:** Yeah. I mean I've gone higher than that but usually about twenty.

[34:11](#) **GN:** Another area, the computer. The use of the computer. How is that fitting into things?

[34:22](#) **SL:** (laughter) I don't know the students know a lot more about it than I do. We can do iLearn for the... I mean are you familiar with that? You can like have a component going on in class online where you can have discussions and things like that.

[34:38](#) **GN:** No I'm not familiar with that part of it. I mean I use email. That's all.

[34:42](#) **SL:** No, I know. That's where I would like to be myself. But yea, there are all these things. I'm not sure if it's a distraction or helpful sometimes. But I guess it depends on how you use it.

[34:56](#) **GN:** But it would be true to say though that all the students virtually are advanced in computer use.

[35:03](#) **SL:** Yeah. In fact for my essay finals I said, "If anybody wants to bring a P.C to type your final, go for it" because some of them tell me. They do that better. They're not used to writing anymore. This is what they do all day with the fingers.

[35:24](#) **GN:** Do you have any trouble with fingers in class? People using text messages and things, is it a distraction to you? To the use?

[35:35](#) **SL:** Yeah, you have to have a strict policy about it and keep on top of it. That's for sure. The phones ringing...

[35:40](#) **GN:** Do you ask them at the beginning of the class, "Please shut off your phones"?

[35:42](#) **SL:** Not at the beginning of every class. I have in fact... I haven't had a phone ring for a couple of years. I mean I think they do understand that but the minute the class is over, you watch them walk out and they're on their phone. Yeah. It's just unbelievable to me I don't know who they're talking to or what they're talking about. But the minute the class is over, they're just back on their phone.

[36:04](#) **GN:** Are you the same? When you go out, do you get on your phone right away?

[36:07](#) **SL:** I've got a cell phone which I use to call the police if necessary. (laughter)

[36:13](#) **GN:** Yes I am in trouble.

[36:16](#) **SL:** Yeah no, it's pretty insane. Their dependence on these things. And some of them use them for notes in class and you know, I've been ... I see on television shows about how they cheat with them. So yeah, during exams I have to say, "If I see anything electronic, I'm going to confiscate it." I don't know.

[36:41](#) **GN:** Then doing assignments, do you feel they are able... I mean... I suppose there are assignments that they do. Is it all their own work in other words? Is there...

[36:58](#) **SL:** See, the beauty of the electronic age is that everything I have them do goes to Turnitin.com. So if it's appeared anywhere on the web or if it's something they bought usually, or if anybody has ever handed in a paper, I know. So I mean ... that's not one hundred percent foolproof, I'm sure. They can probably find some obscure source but I just run everything through Turnitin.com. And that way, two years later I don't get the same paperback myself. I'm not sure I could remember exactly. Yeah it's really great and it shows them exactly like what they're doing wrong if they're trying to quote a source or something It's really helpful thing.

[37:41](#) **GN:** So there are some advantages to this new age technology even the teaching world.

[37:48](#) **SL:** Yeah. I was concerned about getting other professors' papers. You know if I teach a similar course to someone else. Yeah. So you know as long as almost everybody is doing it and it's pretty failsafe.

[38:01](#) **GN:** Very had. I was not aware of this particular methodology that seems to be in place now. Okay. Let's talk a little bit down the line. What do you see Marist doing and where will it be ten years from now? Do you have an idea about the directions we're going? Or what do you see the interest is in faculty? Are they bursting at the seams to go out there and do something different?

[38:36](#) **SL:** I don't know. That's a good question. You know, Com has like eight hundred majors. How long can that go on? I don't know. Especially the way the media industries changing. I'm a little worried about some of that stuff that's happening. It's not necessarily a good career choice.

[38:53](#) **GN:** Now it isn't.

[38:57](#) **SL:** At this point. You know maybe things will change but I would be a little trepidatious about the future.

[39:03](#) **GN:** It is interesting for the students at least. I mean they come because it's current. And it does have a certain excitement to it. To learn how this works. Of course film will always be there I suppose I mean it's always good to know how a film is made.

[39:34](#) **SL:** And television I suppose in some form of it, may be on the computer will still be always be around. But I just look at the industry like. Look at journalism and what's happening to newspapers. They are closing all over the country.

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

[39:50](#) **GN:** But somebody's still going to have to get the story.

[39:36](#) **SL:** There will be there will be something that emerges. Yeah. We just have to kind of make sure we're tracking it I guess.

[39:51](#) **GN:** The other part of this of course is the whole business of distance learning and so on. You know, where are we in our graduate program? Does communications have ...?

[40:02](#) **SL:** Communications has a graduate program. I don't work in it so I don't know the details about it too much but it's some kind of leadership program.

[40:09](#) **GN:** Does it take place on campus or is it...?

[40:11](#) **SL:** No, it's all online. And you can do it in a year and I think. A year. You could do a five-year program here and get the Master's.

[40:23](#) **GN:** OK. And then do they ever come on campus? Those people who are online?

[40:32](#) **SL:** Sorry, I don't know that much about it. I don't know if they force them to come for a meeting. I don't know how they can do that necessarily. I know some people have met their students, But I don't know. What if they are in Arizona or some place? I don't know about. I'm sorry I don't know these details.

[40:50](#) **GN:** Do you have any idea of the size or the numbers involved? I wish I could get somebody in here who knew something about the graduate program in communications. One thing at the time.

[40:59](#) **SL:** Missy Alexander. Used to be in charge of it. Subir's in charge of it now. He'd love to talk to you about that.

[41:10](#) **GN:** How long has he been with us now? He was here before I left. But not too long.

[41:15](#) **SL:** When did you leave?

[41:17](#) **GN:** I retired in '97. I think '98. But then I stayed here for another four years doing part-time work.

[41:25](#) **SL:** You know he's probably been here for ten years or so.

[41:28](#) **GN:** Oh, more than ten.

[41:29](#) **SL:** Twelve?

[41:31](#) **GN:** Yeah

[41:36](#) **GN:** The question you've raised about the future kind of raises the problem about how Marist will survive these years. That's part of the problem. What will be education? Of course, after they finish high school, they'll have to go someplace.

[41:55](#) **SL:** Yeah. Now, that's a huge. Yeah. You know it's not ever going to be that everybody's going to do this on the computer. No. I hope it's never going to happen. And Marist is very attractive. Yeah. What do we...? We took in extra students this year again. Yeah. I don't know. Seems to be working. whatever's going on seems to work.

[42:12](#) **GN:** Yeah. And you know it's not cheap and it's hard to get into.

[42:18](#) **SL:** Yeah.

[42:19](#) **GN:** I have made recommendations for students to come in and so has Linus Foy, the former president and we can't get students in. No. Here is the point. They don't want to bring them to fail. In other words, from what they have shown on their applications and so on, it does not seem that they would be able to do the college work. You know. And so rather than having them come here and fail, what they're saying is we will accept them in their second year. If they take these courses you know, in other words, they have to have some calculus or they have to have some statistics and they have to have some history and some English. And as you talked about before, basic reading and writing, that they would be able to measure those things. Because you don't want to bring somebody in here as a friend and they have to stay in the dormitory because they're embarrassed.

[43:14](#) **SL:** It looks bad for the college. They need the retention rates to stay up.

[43:19](#) **GN:** But they themselves failing out, it's going to curtail their career, their personality. I won't get into all the things but I don't know about it but... Personally on your career here, the beginning was a little difficult, just because you got to get your feet on the ground and you weren't much older than some of the scene is.

[43:47](#) **SL:** And you know what I was... There weren't many women here when I came. I always count myself as the twelfth woman here.

[43:55](#) **GN:** Is that so?

[43:57](#) **SL:** You don't remember this.

[43:58](#) **GN:** I do remember the well I was aware of it.

[44:01](#) **SL:** Yeah, I was aware of it. Painfully aware of it.

[44:06](#) **GN:** Well you were treated with special care because you...

[44:08](#) **SL:** No, I was treated very nicely. You guys were very welcoming and I felt like I immediately was part of the family here. And that's one reason why I've stayed. More like a family than a job. But there were very few women here.

[44:20](#) **GN:** Yeah, that was the other question. Why did you stay so long? Since we were such a simple little place and one...?

[44:31](#) **SL:** But the excitement of growing like this and I could still make up classes pretty much kind of do what I want. And then I was chair for like nine years and that was the best learning experience of my life and I learned a lot from being the chair. You know.

[44:48](#) **GN:** How about the friendships? Were they key? Give me a few names you remember.

[44:55](#) **SL:** You know because I was younger when I got hired, I immediately gravitated towards the media center crew. Frank Roberto. Scott Badman and Christine, the secretary and. Also I made friends with mentor Deborah Gere. She's my best friend. I'm going to go see her next month. She lives in

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

Massachusetts. But you know. Yeah.

[45:26](#) **GN:** Good friendships. There was a place where people could meet and share experiences of what they were doing and the common area here. Tell me about you, your great success and getting the Teacher of the Year award.

[45:46](#) **SL:** That was a shock. That was one of the best things that ever happened to me in my life. It changed my whole view of the place. Yeah, I can't explain it but I just, I just feel different about the place. I don't know why. It's a very huge honor.

[46:02](#) **GN:** Well I said it in my note here that they finally began to see that you were here.

[46:07](#) **SL:** It was a huge honor. It was really nice. Yeah.

[46:10](#) **GN:** And what you do with the money? (laughter) You bought a farm.

[46:15](#) **SL:** (laughter) Spent it before I got it. It went to the mortgage. The money. (laughter)

[46:22](#) **GN:** The other points that the good years as it were, you know, the classes that you had. Did you still have contact with outstanding students? Or less than outstanding?

[46:45](#) **SL:** In fact, that's why I was thinking about the class of eighty-six because those are the people that I've kept more in touch with me like Bob LaFort who is the vice president of C.B.S. They've gotten real good jobs. So you know. But yeah I keep in touch with some students you know.

[47:02](#) **GN:** I had the same pleasure as it were. Must've been in April, I met with that... There was a guy, Brian O'Reilly not Bill O'Reilly. Brian O'Reilly

[47:14](#) **SL:** He's not related?

[47:16](#) **GN:** No. Not related. Although he was also not as successful he did become. He worked for Fortune Magazine who became an editor for Fortune Magazine. And I put him up once to do an anatomy of a story. How does the story get into Fortune in the process, you know? So he did one of the obscene profits of the pharmaceutical organizations. That was the title of the thing you know. And he was showing how has that whole thing developed, you know. Well, I met with him last month, whenever April was, and a whole other group. contacts in that age. They were '65, '66, '67 ... were the years that I had them as students and so that was a while ago. But it's through a letter that he sent out four times a year. That's been maintained over the years.

[48:13](#) **SL:** Well it's nice to see them successes on themselves. We have a lot of successful graduates too in comms especially.

[48:23](#) **GN:** Oh yeah. From a small college we've made ... do well. You know, they have done well in the...

[48:29](#) **SL:** And it has a great reputation.

[48:32](#) **GN:** It has. Yeah. It has managed to for a small college and particularly in the areas like communications. The Internship Program I don't know what...

[48:44](#) **SL:** I tell everybody. All the parents that I met that we have one of the best in the country. We

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

have one of the best internship programs in the country. Yeah. I really believe that. I always have. Yeah, we get students in the places that are unbelievable. They'll a Marist student over somebody from Harvard, you know. I'm just making that up but you know it shocks me. When I hear the places they get into and who the competition was.

[49:10](#) **GN:** Who is running the program now?

[49:11](#) **SL:** Gerry McNulty.

[49:11](#) **GN:** He's still running it?

[49:12](#) **SL:** Yeah he is doing a great job. But you know, Bob Norman deserves a lot of credit for that.

[49:17](#) **GN:** Right. He started it. I mean. And I was...

[49:20](#) **SL:** And it was shaky. I was involved in a little bit of the supervision in the early days. It was very slipshod.

[49:25](#) **GN:** We had some tragic little stories. Yeah.

[49:28](#) **SL:** But I also got the CIA gig. For the free lunches.

[49:33](#) **GN:** Very good.

[49:34](#) **SL:** To go inspect and get free lunch up there.

[49:38](#) **GN:** We had a student going to Kingston on an internship. A girl going up there. Turns out she was working at a diner instead of going to the studio. They hardly even knew her. You know. Because no one was really following up too close on it. And she wasn't interested, you know. Bob didn't have a chance to.

[49:59](#) **SL:** I got myself out of that you know, to leave it to him as quickly as I could because I saw that there was a major lack of supervision.

[50:06](#) **GN:** Yeah. Well you have to be on top of them.

[50:09](#) **SL:** Yeah but I think that that exists pretty well today.

[50:10](#) **GN:** Oh yeah, I mean there is a chance in the local scene where they can get hands on experience to do things you know.

[50:19](#) **SL:** It's invaluable. You know, it's a foot in the door.

[50:22](#) **GN:** Yeah. I see what it's like from the sixteenth floor of the ...

[50:27](#) **SL:** Students get hired right from those internships. Which is always great.

[50:33](#) **GN:** We're coming down to the end of the line of things I wanted to ask you. Anything we didn't talk about that kind of comes to mind. How about the relationship between the administration and faculty? There was a time when there was a lot of tension there.

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

[50:54](#) **SL:** I was on the F.E.C in those days with Bill Olson.

[50:58](#) **GN:** Committee work... You've been on. There were times we used to meet off-campus because we were all in a union remember?

[51:07](#) **SL:** We were an organization.

[51:14](#) **GN:** Marist something or rather.

[51:17](#) **SL:** And yeah, I heard that the money for that still in the bank account got donated to some college that was having some kind of fight. No, I thought those were nice because we all had picnics and things. It was kind of enjoyable.

[51:32](#) **GN:** In the Hudson River Boathouse up there. We used to go and have our meetings, as you know. That was interesting.

[51:39](#) **SL:** There was a lot of contention in the mid-80s. I don't even remember what it was all about. I do remember one thing that I am really proud of that I was involved in Marist was, I was chair of F.A. C with John Pagliarulo and Rose White when we rewrote the faculty handbook section on rank and tenure. We put in the peer review process which I know maybe some people don't like but I think it's incredibly helpful to the faculty member in most cases.

[52:22](#) **GN:** Describe it. What is it that they do?

[52:23](#) **SL:** At the three-year point of the committee is formed of your colleagues in your department and

[52:30](#) **GN:** They visit classes.

[52:32](#) **SL:** They visit two of your classes each, you know. Talked to you about scholarship and you know what progress you've made and. If it's done right, I think it's really helpful in developmental.

[52:42](#) **GN:** And that's done before tenure right? That's on the way to tenure.

[52:45](#) **SL:** It's the midpoint Yeah. And then at the end, another committee is formed or sometimes it's the same committee that then that becomes another piece of documentation that goes to the rank and tenure committee. Because before that the chair would poll the faculty privately. So you could have everybody going into the dean and saying, "I hate that guy." You know. I thought it was causing a lot of contention because then if I said, I hate that guy, I wouldn't say that to the person. So at least to me, you know this is more of a buck board. Yeah you know who's been in your peer review. You know they came to your classes. Nobody's talking about you behind our back.

[53:38](#) **GN:** And you know. Here you have written a paper. You did go to the conference. You are doing something for development. That's a track record.

[53:43](#) **SL:** And that's not enough is right. And you can say that's not enough yeah. We think for the rank and tenure committee or that's fine or whatever. So that's one thing I always liked.

[53:54](#) **GN:** What about there was some little struggle, I don't know how it is now in terms of 4-4, 4-3, 3-4?

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

[54:02](#) **SL:** That's over. We've got 4-3. Well but some people are doing 3-3s. Depends on your level of scholarship.

[54:11](#) **GN:** Right. And that is still wholly to do with a graduate program. You get one reduction. It used to be but then I've heard. I thought they took that away.

[54:21](#) **SL:** I think they might have taken that away and then that was the bone of contention. But at least spread out the 4-3 to more people. Yeah. So it seems a little fair. Again I don't know. I'd have to check on this.

[54:34](#) **GN:** Are you on a committee now? Senior citizen?

[54:35](#) **SL:** No, I'm on a committee sabbatical. I just got off the new FAC.

[54:40](#) **GN:** So you're on the sabbatical committee?

[54:42](#) **SL:** No I'm on a committee sabbatical. When you're on a committee, you get a year or two off depending on how long you've served. So that's nice. I didn't have to do anything last year.

[54:52](#) **GN:** So by and large, it's been a pretty good run. Yeah, it was some ups and downs. But more ups than downs but you're still here. Do you do anything in the summer academically?

[55:05](#) **SL:** I'm going to a conference in Vermont. I'm presenting a paper which I'm writing

[55:09](#) **GN:** At the present time?

[55:11](#) **SL:** Now, yes. It's in August.

[55:14](#) **GN:** What's going to be on.

[55:15](#) **SL:** Well I'm looking at... Do you ever watch the TV show, Bones or The Closer? I'll just talk about that...It's like she's a real strong woman who is on the police force. But when you compare her to her husband, the F.B.I. Agent. He takes care of the kitten when it's sick. He takes care of her relatives when they're in town. He's kind of doing all the womanly duties for her. I'm kind of looking at that sort of gender play there that's happening on these shows with really strong women. Right, I think they're making the men like really new-age softies. (laughter)

[55:52](#) **GN:** You used the expression there, "new-age." What's your take on new age? How do you describe that?

[55:58](#) **SL:**.. What is it? Oh it's just it's just kind of a psychobabble term for like Age of Aquarius.

[56:07](#) **GN:** Wow, very good. That's the thing... And there was another thing.

[56:15](#) **SL:** You know but I mean men nowadays are getting in touch with their feminine side. Right. And if they don't they're criticized. And the women are getting in touch with their masculine side

[56:19](#) **GN:**.. Right. We are complex beings and we're trying to find out more about ourselves as we go on. Well I mean, let me just say it's been a good run knowing you. I hope to continue on.

[56:41](#) **SL:** Well, you're one of the main reasons I stayed here. Remember sharing in that office for so

Lawrence, Sue, 17 June 2010

long. We were there forever.

[56:45](#) **GN:** Yes, I do. We managed. We could have the same kind of temperature and live with it without too much of a problem. I'm glad to hear you say that because I thought you might say I couldn't get rid of you soon enough.

[57:04](#) **SL:** No, in fact when new people would come in, I'd be offered an office and I'd say I don't know what's the point because they would put somebody new in your place and I thought we got along pretty good. And eventually they opened the janitor's closet and I got that. But that was different there was a new office space. It was literally the janitor's closet.

[57:26](#) **GN:** You did a review of my scholarship. Which was always time-consuming. I was away from campus for research. Okay, well thank you very much.

[57:40](#) **SL:** Thank you.