

Thomas Lynch

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, NY

Transcribed by Kyra Walker

For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

Thomas Lynch

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Summary:

Tom Lynch provides insight to his background as a professor in environmental science. He reflects on the growth of the environmental science department at Marist, and the changes that that college and its students has undergone throughout the years.

Gus Nolan (00:02):

Today is Tuesday, the 26th of March. Now we have the opportunity to interview a retired professor, Tom Lynch from the environmental sciences. Good Afternoon Tom.

Tom Lynch (01:06):

Good Afternoon Gus, glad to be here.

GN (01:08):

Thank you. I wonder, we're going to start by kind of a general overview. Kind of a thumbnail overview of your life, your early years, where you grew up and kind of give us an idea of where you're coming from.

TL (01:25):

Okay.

GN (01:26):

So where would you say, born in the eastern United States? You can give me more detail.

TL (01:31):

I was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut--lived there, went to Catholic elementary school, Catholic high school. I went to the University of Bridgeport where I got bachelors and master's degrees in biology. I taught high school science in Monroe, Connecticut for two years. And then I decided to go back for my PhD degree in aquatic ecology with the fisheries and wildlife department at Michigan State University. So I spent five years living in Michigan getting my...working on my PhD. And then my first job was with a biology department out in the Southwest in a little town called Socorro, New Mexico.

GN (02:17):

Okay. Before we get into the professional, more things about the growing up. Special interests...you seem to be an outdoorsman, so were you involved in sports as well?

TL (02:29):

I didn't get involved in the organized sports growing up. At that time, every kid...every house on the block had three, four, or five kids. And so we played a lot of sandlot kind of stuff--baseball, football, basketball, et cetera. It was very easy to put together two teams because like I say, everybody had...every house had multiple kids, back in the middle of the baby boom there. And we used to spend a lot of time outdoors. I mean where I grew up, it was a suburban area of Bridgeport and at the time it was hundreds of acres of open space just down the street from us. And so we used to play Cowboys and Indians and soldiers and we used to hunt and we used to sneak over to a private lake, which was maybe 300.

GN (03:29):

Alright, I didn't want to go there [laughter].

TL (03:31):

Well, one side was developed, the other side was not developed. So we used to sneak around to the undeveloped side and fish and camp and stuff like that.

GN (03:41):

How about particular interests in your personal life. Talents...music or reading or a hobby and stamps collection or anything like that?

TL (03:54):

Yeah, I did stamp collecting for a while when I was, I don't know, probably middle school age because my grandfather had done it, so my father gave me some of my grandfather's stamp books. But I kind of lost interest in that. And so I spent a lot of time reading. Like I say, a lot of times outdoors we would come home from school and of course we always wore uniforms. So we very quickly change and you're out the door until dinner time. And same thing on weekends, eight or nine o'clock in the morning, we were gone, we'd show up for supper.

GN (04:33):

How big is the family of which you speak now?

TL (04:35):

I had three brothers and one sister. One brother is now deceased, the others are...the other siblings are still alive. Two of them live over in the Bridgeport, Connecticut area. One lives in North Carolina. So-

GN (04:55):

Okay. Changing pace a little bit, what's the genesis of your coming to Marist? How did that happen?

TL (05:00):

Well, when I was working out in...well, I went to a Marist Brothers high school.

GN (05:05):

Where?

TL (05:05):

In Trumbull, Connecticut. So St. Joseph's High School. And so I was familiar with the Marist Brothers. My older brother who's now deceased, he actually went into the Marist Brothers and spent one year in tins Bureau. So he spent one year there and then left. And so I was familiar with the Marist Brothers and I had heard of Marist College because of all the brothers. We had us as high school faculty. So then I...after I finished my PhD degree, I...my first teaching job was at a school of science and engineering in New Mexico, in the biology department. So I spent 12 years out there, eventually becoming department chair. And then I saw an ad in the...this weekly journal called Science. You're looking for somebody to teach environmental science at Marist College. And so I said my wife--who's from Yonkers--I said, should I apply for it? Because when we initially moved out to this town, it was only town of 6,500. She said, I'll give you two years and we're out of here. Because we were...being, she's from Yonkers, I'm from-

GN (06:23):

Your family is up here anyway.

TL (06:24):

Yeah, family was all here and just the whole...the greenery and stuff like that...the Southwest is just brown and very different and a little wine vegetation. And the town was really small, 6,500. So, when she took his first look at it, she saw I'd give you two years and we're out of here. Well, two years turned into 12. And then...and so we have a lot of really good friends and stuff there. And so when I saw this ad for Marist, and I had been developing an environmental science program at the Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology. And so I said, well, should I apply for it? She said yeah, what have you got to lose? So I applied for it. I came, I interviewed.

GN (07:09):

About what year was this?

TL (07:09):

This was in '91.

GN (07:12):

'91. So Dennis has in place as well?

TL (07:16):

Yeah, Dennis was already here. Andy Malloy was a chair of the department, or chair--I guess it wasn't even a department yet--chair of the school of sciences, is what it was called. And so I interviewed, and then Andy offered me the position. And so then-

GN (07:38):

Did you come as a biologist?

TL (07:39):

I came as an...they were recruiting for a director of the environmental science program. So I came in as an associate professor because I was already tenured out at this other school and actually had just gotten promoted to full professor. And so I came in with all my degrees are in basically biology. But they hired me as the director of the environmental science program. And so-

GN (08:16):

Well let's just talk about Marist for a minute. In '91, certainly we've changed considerably since that day. What would you say about that? What will you attribute or where do you see the biggest change in Marist from '91 to-

TL (08:33):

Obviously just in size and the physical plant and stuff like that. I mean, I was reflecting on...anticipating you probably asking that type of question. And so I think, I can't remember how many faculty there were when I came. I know we all fit during plenaries into Donnelley 225 and within a couple of years I think I probably pretty much knew everybody in the room.

GN (09:00):

Not for lunch where they had biology labs. Bill Pear was in there.

TL (09:06):

So we used to do, yeah. So Bill Pear died several weeks after I got here, so I only knew him for a couple of weeks. Because we were in the same office suite together. So it was Bill and Andy and myself and Vicky Ingalls. And Betty Jaycox was our secretary at the time.

GN (09:26):

Was LaPietra on the scene yet?

TL (09:28):

Richard LaPietra was here. Matt Polusny was here. Larry Menapace was here.

GN (09:35):

Was Richard in chemistry?

TL (09:37):

Richard was in chemistry. Richard, Andy Matt Polusny, and Larry Menapace were all in the chemistry department.

GN (09:44):

Okay, and Bettencourt was in biology?

TL (09:46):

Bettencourt was in biology. Vicky Ingalls was in biology.

GN (09:54):

All right. I just...I'm trying to get historical things. Just comment this now in terms of Marist and its growth and development. What was you think the greatest input for that? Was it Dennis or was it the tradition or was it the student body or is the potential, where was going? How do you explain?

TL (10:15):

Oh, it's probably a combination of all of those things. I mean, Dennis certainly had his vision, although I often didn't agree with the direction that he was taking the college fashionably in terms of the changes that he was requiring of the faculty and stuff like that. And our priorities and those kinds of things. But I think the reputation of the college kind of gradually grew and then certainly as we became larger, we've got number of different programs. So even environmental science, I mean when I initially came, I was the only person in environmental science and within three or four years we had hired Rich Feldman.

GN (11:07):

Okay, I want to get into that. But before that I want you to talk about...has there been a drastic change in the student body in terms of anything? Is their spirit the same, their capabilities the same, their backgrounds the same?

TL (11:24):

I mean I've taught...obviously I've taught a lot of the majors. I don't think the majors have changed all that. The environmental science and policy majors, I don't think they've changed all that much. I think they're probably comparable, maybe slightly better quality. But in terms of the of the non-majors, because I taught a lot of those, because I used to teach introduction to environmental issues, probably taught that course 60 plus times over the 27 years I was here. But I think there are a lot of those...or a lot of the attitude of those...I mean, I think that writing has deteriorated. The ability to write as deteriorated. The ability to do work outside of class I think has degenerated.

GN (12:17):

Really?

TL (12:18):

That was just my impression, particularly among the non-majors. There was a lot more, again from my...we've had discussions about this with Vicky and Joe and whatever that the students now require a lot more spoon-feeding. They want extra help sessions, they want review sheets.

GN (12:41):

Well, part of that I guess is also what you talked about you when you grew up, the families were five and six, and now they're two and three, so parents are helicoptering over-

TL (12:52):

They can get much more helicoptering parents. Certainly, whatever that education--I forget what the name of it, where you can't talk to the parents without permission from the school. The Educational Rights and Privacy Act, I guess.

GN (13:11):

Well, you can't send the grades to them.

TL (13:12):

You can't send the grades to me. You can't post grades anymore. So we used to just post grades by social security number or student number, that kind of thing. You can't do that anymore. So a lot of that has changed. And I think the students have just gotten more of an attitude of...I'm not sure what the word I'm looking for. I used to lay it out with my students--particularly the non-majors--I said that the average grade in this class, at the end of the course, it's going to be probably a C or C plus. And I--vividly--I remember one young lady sitting right in front of me and she's like, what do you mean the average is going to be C plus. And I said, well we can't all be above average. A is above average, it's exceptional. This is a link we'll be going where everybody's above average.

GN (14:12):

They call me C ++.

TL (14:12):

So I said, there's going to be A's, there's going to be F's. And I said, I've got no high expectations. I've got...I'm pretty well calibrated. I'm happy to give you an A if you earn it, but I'm not going to...so there

was just more of a... I think in particular more in the last probably 10 or 15 years more of an attitude that we're paying a lot of money for this education. You need to-

GN (14:40):

We deserve something from it.

TL (14:40):

You need to give us a good grade for the money that we're paying here.

GN (14:44):

Moreover, we write reports on you.

TL (14:48):

Yeah.

GN (14:50):

Changing the page to another issue, about environmental science--this was not a subject that I knew about in college. We never talked about this.

TL (15:00):

Well, and when I was an undergraduate, it was never offered either. So Marist...so one of the first things I had to do when I came, was Andy said, you need to do a program review. And so I had to delve into all the records, enrollments and all this kind of stuff. So I was able to trace the environmental science program back here to about 1974.

GN (15:27):

Really?

TL (15:28):

And then...so that would make it probably one of the oldest environmental science programs in four year colleges because I mean, I graduated as an undergraduate in '71 and there were no colleges offering environmental science programs at that point. And they really...the environmental science as a separate discipline, or really as an interdisciplinary approach really didn't...I would say start to pick up until the mid-1980s/late 1980s. And that's when I started putting this program together out in New Mexico. And so I had some familiarity with it. I had built or designed the curriculum and stuff, but it was undergoing review, et cetera. So when I came here in '91, they had just...Brian Hill was my predecessor and he had just revised the whole program into a three-track program. I actually was into a two-track program, science and policy. And prior to that timing, enrollments have been really, really low. And so when I started here, 45 freshmen came in with me, which is the highest I think we've ever hit. So the word had gotten out, Harry Woods was spending a lot of time promoting it. He would take me out on some of his tours on college nights and stuff like that. So from like '91 to about '95, we had some really, really strong freshmen classes in terms of numbers. But about same time lots of other schools were developing environmental science program. So when I did review in '91 there were about 400 colleges that offered environmental science programs. By about 1996 when we had to do another review, that number jumped up to over 800 and now it's probably closer to a thousand, so with the expansion of the

number of schools offering the programs now the students were interested had double the number of colleges to pick from. So our enrollment started a long slide starting. So we were...at one point, we were at like 105 or 110 majors over the last probably 18 years. We probably in the neighborhood of 50 or 60 and we've never been able to push it up. We've never gotten below that. But you know, so over the last 15-18 years, we've been at a steady mid-fifties in terms of enrollment, never the kind of enrollment we have from like '91 to '95.

GN (18:29):

But we've achieved that there's more opportunities now. I mean I always want to be interested. We had one of the college magazines had you on the cover to vote the lab-

TL (18:45):

There was another one had me sitting...standing in a screen with waders on.

GN (18:50):

Yeah, I mean that kind of on touch screens with different way of looking at the school. It was a real learning kind of thing you hear and what are you doing so. So I always kind of impressed with that. But I was wondering, what will you attribute to be the evidence that made this? What made them decide to take it seriously, to make this a major?

Tom Lynch (19:13):

Well, I think it all goes back to the 1970s. So you had the first earth day was I think 1970 and then you had...so that whole earth day movement started and then in the meantime Congress and president Nixon are passing the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Safe Water Drinking Act, Toxic Substances Control Act and Dangerous Species Act. So, all this federal legislation got passed in the early to mid-1970s. And so that created a lot of jobs and a lot of opportunities. And so that's why colleges I think started to see, okay, well this is an area that we need to be generating some people who have got the professional background.

GN (19:58):

The thing that affected me most to see it this way was that I guess one of the first moon shots are the landing on the moon. They made the analogy of the capsule was like the earth, they had to survive in it and everything was right there.

TL (20:15):

There's that famous photograph of the earth rising on the horizon of the moon, spaceship earth. That whole idea. A number of articles came out about that time.

GN (20:27):

All we have is here, we have to save it.

TL (20:31):

This little blue planet in the vast ocean, dark ocean of space.

GN (20:35):

I have it on my wall, I know it well. How about the faculty now here?. Were you about the same in terms of?

TL (20:45):

Yeah. So we've...over the 27 years I've been here, once we got past those first couple of years, we hired Rich Feldman and we hired Zofia Gagnon and they're still here--Zofia just retired, Rich is still here. My position has been replaced by a young guy who started about a year and a half ago. And they're going to replace Zofia's position. Initially, from what I understand, temporarily for a year cause they just did another five year review, that external reviewers come in that just within the last month or so. So they want to get the input from those reviewers, see what suggestions they made, what kind of changes might be needed in the program, et cetera. And then that'll determine what kind of specialty they're looking for to replace Zofia.

GN (21:41):

How much does the administration play in...does Tom Wermuth play a big part in encouraging or...the words I had in mind, there's notes here...did you have...was there resistance to the growth of the program?

TL (21:58):

Well, I mean I always wanted some additional people in areas. I thought it would enhance the program if we had somebody with a background in geology and hydrology. I thought that would really, as a fourth faculty position, I thought-

GN (22:13):

Did you know Vincent Toscano?

TL (22:13):

I never...I've heard the name, Joe used to talk about him all the time, but I never...he was gone before I came. But so, they said, well, you can build the program big enough, then we'll give you more faculty. So it was that argument.

GN (22:30):

So it was chicken and the egg?

TL (22:30):

Right. Chicken and the egg kind of thing.

GN (22:32):

You mentioned the two aspects of it, the policy and the lab. What is the policy? What do you do there?

TL (22:41):

Well, it deals with things, and that was new. As I said, that was just starting when I started in '91. And so that offered a track which had less science and more social science--environmental law, environmental planning, in environmental politics. Basically, people would...who would go into working for...on the legislative staff of people in Albany or we had...I added a number of people who served as interns to

United States senators and stuff like that as sort of their environmental--who advise them on environmental policy kind of kind of things. So that...and then a number of them went into like environmental planning with small to medium sized consulting firms specializing in planning, environmental assessment, these kinds of things. Environmental law. A number of my students went to law school for specializing environmental law.

GN (23:47):

Do you have much...do we take a course in environmental law?

TL (23:50):

Yeah, they do. Yeah. So policy people take a course in environmental law. And then they would take courses from people like Martin Shaffer. He used to teach environmental politics and policy class. Joanne Meyers used to teach an environmental planning class.

GN (24:11):

Yeah, she came out of the Albany...I did an interview with her one time when she was talking about...she had come from Albany State, I guess Tim Harris. And the contrast, it was just this quaint kind of a thing. Putting it practice, how do we get things done? You have to go to the legislature. You got to influence those people to vote for it. How does Marist compare now with a typical...I don't know what school I can take, Sienna just out of the blue, in terms of environmental sciences. Do you know how-?

TL (24:51):

I think we're as good as...I don't think we're as good as a Stanford or Cornell or a SUNY in environmental science. I mean, SUNY has got a whole master's and graduate program, school of environmental science in forestry E.S.N.F.

GN (25:08):

Which SUNY is this?

TL (25:10):

it's Syracuse, adjacent to the Syracuse campus. So they've got a school of environmental science in forestry. So I don't think we're that good. We can't...we don't have the diversity of offerings. We don't have the diversity of faculty. We don't have the graduate programs that they have.

GN (25:30):

Do we have any master's programs or are you going to go that route?

TL (25:33):

I'm sorry?

New Speaker (25:34):

Are there any master's programs in environment science?

TL (25:37):

No, not Marist.

GN (25:39):

Would you anticipate any?

TL (25:42):

We've talked about it from time to time, but again with two or three people-

GN (25:45):

Oh, yeah. You need numbers.

TL (25:45):

It's very hard to have a quality graduate program with just three faculty. But yeah, in terms of...you have your Siennas and your Ionas, those kinds of schools, I think we're comparable.

GN (26:08):

We have the river anyway.

TL (26:09):

We have the river and that's something we haven't probably taken as much advantage of it as we could. We've also got the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies over in Millbrook, so I know that we've been strengthening the relationship with them over the last couple of years. I've certainly--over the years--I put a lot of interns working for the scientists out there, both during academic years and during the summer. They've hired some of our undergraduates after they've graduated. In fact, one of my earliest students, did an internship out there, subsequently went to work out there for them full time for about two years. Okay. Then went to graduate school and is now a full professor at Yale teaching environmental science.

GN (27:06):

Of course 27 years ago, it makes him pretty old.

TL (27:09):

Yeah. So, he's got to be in his forties.

GN (27:12):

He's not a youngster.

TL (27:14):

So, he's got to be in his upper forties at this point.

GN (27:16):

Yeah. Again turning the page, let's call this the crystal ball. What do you see on the horizon or the future for Marist? Let's say 10 years down the line, where do you see us? Are we going to be here?

TL (27:33):

Oh, I think we'll be here. I don't think there's any doubt about that. I mean, from what I...I haven't been following it very closely for the last two years or so, but I mean my understanding is...in fact, I just heard something the other day with the College of New Rochelle is closing as of this semester and Kent Rinehart was being interviewed because Marist has apparently offered to take those students on as transfer students.

GN (28:05):

It's not the first time we did that.

TL (28:07):

Cannibalizing...Mercy college was the other one, the other school that had offered to take on the students who were still....who are going to be cut off, so sure. But they mentioned that during this interview that we had 6,600 students here at Marist. So, I mean when I started it was probably 3000,

GN (28:29):

If that, yeah.

TL (28:30):

Something in that neighborhood, maybe a little bit less. And then, I mean certainly with the school of science and they've got the graduate program now with the physician's assistant program.

GN (28:47):

Medical school coming.

TL (28:49):

And the medical school coming, if they can pull that off financially. And then they've got the doctorate in physical therapy program, which just started back I think in September, June or whatever. So that'll increase graduate type enrollment. Undergraduate, I don't really see in terms of science. I don't see Marist growing much. I mean we're kind of facilities limited.

GN (29:16):

But there's also a drop in of candidates you can pull. I mean the population-

TL (29:21):

The population of high school students, but then there are these colleges that are falling by the wayside. And I've heard Tom Wermuth just in the last couple of years mentioned, this school, that school lost its accreditation; this looks folding, et cetera. So there's probably going to be some attrition among these smaller colleges that Marist may be able to cannibalize some of their student body.

GN (29:48):

[Laughter] I understand very well, and it's true. I mean, we're looking for those candidates and so the development matters. Look at the dollars we just put up. Sure. I mean it's quite a difference to the ones I knew.

TL (30:06):

And going back to your question though, I mean in terms of growth in the school of science, I don't see that because again, I just heard, I think Kathy Newkirk told me about two weeks ago that when the new building was built across the street, the idea was that within 10 years there was going to be a second science building constructed adjacent to it with a bridge. Well, she said all of a sudden that second science building is not anywhere in the 10-year plan. So right now the undergraduate offices, labs and stuff are maxed out. Unless they opened up more room in Donnelley.

GN (30:50):

What are they going to do with fashion design?

TL (30:53):

Well, fashion design is supposed to be moving over into-

GN (30:54):

It has, yeah.

TL (30:54):

So maybe that space, we'll get some of that space. Who knows?

GN (31:01):

But in this development age, how about off-campus learning? The online stuff, do you see that as part of it?

TL (31:13):

Oh, I know certain...I don't think that's ever been looked at very favorably by people in the sciences. I mean we've always kind of been dragged kicking and screaming in that direction. We do offer a couple of undergraduate courses for non-majors, like Introduction to Environmental Science, both during the academic year as well as during the summer. So that you could probably do because that doesn't require any laboratory work and it doesn't necessarily require any field work. So that you could probably do online. But you know, how are you going to teach physiology or how are you going to teach comparative anatomy? Or how are you going to teach chemistry online? I mean, you have to have that hands on experience to do that. And so yeah, we've never--as a science faculty--we've never sort of been too enthusiastic about the idea of going...offering a lot of online courses despite constantly being encouraged by Dennis. Oh you guys need to do this, you guys need to do this. We kind of guessed him to death.

GN (32:27):

[Laughter] Been there. I mean the enrollment at Marist--for what it is--has ultimately become much widespread. We have a map upstairs about the USA where people have from.

TL (32:43):

I think it's diversified there a lot, outside of the three state region.

GN (32:48):

Oh yeah. We used to be just Long Island. There was only one place...people going to the island, there was only one like Manhattan. Long Island was going to be it, you know. Now I mean, I think we got 90 students from California.

TL (33:04):

I know California, in the last few years, they've made a big push because I used to have some of those non-majors in class.

GN (33:11):

Well, we sent a football team out there every other year to let them know we're here. So that's it. On this crystal ball, if you had a chance or invited to go to board of trustees to represent environmental science because you're experienced, what would you say?

TL (33:35):

Well, I guess part of this goes back to one of my last efforts as a full time faculty member. I'm trying to get, I mean for quite a number of years, I served on the campus sustainability committee and with Steve Sansola and stuff like that. And we picked a lot of low hanging fruit in terms of getting environmental and getting Marist to be greener in terms of its practices and policies and stuff like that. But we always avoided making the tougher calls. And so one of the last things I did in the last year and a half I was here, was a group of six of us came and wrote up a white paper dealing with climate change and how from an ethical and economic and from a scientific standpoint--so we've made three arguments...ethics, tying it into our mission statement. How as an institution we should be responding to the global threat of climate change. We made an economic, and so what we were trying to do is get Marist to consider divesting its investments from fossil fuel companies. And then we made the scientific arguments. So it was a fairly considerable length white paper. We presented it to the faculty. Faculty approved it by a two to one vote. 66% to 33% or whatever to forward it to the trustees. So we made...we had like 12, 10 or 12 recommendations as to how--as an institution--Marist could be greener, more ethically responsible in terms of responding to climate change in terms of changing their practice.

GN (35:37):

So you believe in climate change? It's a reality?

TL (35:39):

Oh, absolutely. Yeah, totally convinced. In fact, just before I met you, I was sitting in the library here reading an article in Scientific America about the melting of...some of the Antarctic glaciers, how it's accelerating. Anyway. So, they took over a year to respond to this white paper because of... and they basically said, well, in terms of our role is if I do share your responsibility to the institution, this is going to cost too much. We can't implement these changes. Thank you very much for the recommendations. And so, we've got a few green roofs on a couple of buildings, but we're still buying all our fuel from natural gas or our electricity is all coming from fossil fuel fire-powered plants. And so those were the kinds of things we wanted to see Marist kind of shift. And so I think, I ultimately...I think climate change--well, a couple of different things--climate change I think is probably the biggest immediate threat to our future generations. I worry, I mean, I've got five grandchildren at this point. The oldest one is eight. And so conceivably, they're going to live to 2100. And so I said to my wife the night of the...when the first one was being born, she said, you don't seem too enthusiastic that we're going to have our first grandchild by tomorrow morning because my daughter was having a C-section and I said, I feel sorry for

the kid. I said, I'm thrilled. I'm going to have my first grandson, but I feel sorry for the kid. I said because of just half the stuff that I tell my class in predictions like environmental issues, just half of those predictions come true. They're in for a really, really bumpy road in terms of climate change and air pollution, water pollution and acidification of the oceans and population growth, food shortages, water scarcity. I mean the list just goes on and on. Loss of biodiversity and rising sea levels and flood. I mean it's just horrendous. And so I still...I mean I'm still very pessimistic in terms of the life that my grandchildren are going to have to cope with because of all this stuff that's happening and it's all coming together.

GN (38:17):

What's the condition of the Hudson?

TL (38:20):

The Hudson is actually in pretty decent shape. I mean there's some problems with it in terms of chemical contamination. There's a lot of invasive species, but I mean the system is just going to have to adjust to those but...so it's a lot better than it was 30 years ago.

GN (38:42):

When you came here, it was-?

TL (38:44):

Well, in fact, I had a conversation with...I used to spend a lot of time down at that lab attached to the Cornell Boathouse. And so I got to know some of the crew coaches and stuff like that. And one of them said that, he said that he had been crew coach for 20-something years. And he said, when I first started doing crew, he said every crew member before they got out of the river had to be vaccinated for hepatitis. And he said, we would see toilet papers and condoms and fecal matter and everything else out in the water. So he said they all had to be vaccinated for hepatitis.

GN (39:19):

Was there a sewer leakage or something?

TL (39:21):

It used to just be dumped, raw sewage. So all that started changing in the 1970s but it took a long time for sewage treatment plants to be built, upgraded, this kind of stuff. So he said--the other thing has changed--he said once the oars went in the water, he said we couldn't even--he said, they're only that far down--but he said we couldn't see them and therefore we didn't know whether they were holding at the right angle or not. He said 'the water is now clarified,' and he said, now when the oars go down, we can tell that the crew team whether they're holding the oars in the right position. So he said he had seen a significant change and he said back then, the coxswain if they won the race didn't want to be thrown in the river--which was tradition--because it was so filthy. So yeah, the Hudson is significantly improved. I mean, there are still some threats to it, but-

GN (40:18):

I think the thing that amazes me is the rise of the ocean and what...so many cities along the...Miami will be typical.

TL (40:26):

Miami is flooding once a month. Miami Beach is flooding every month on full moon. And so their solution is they're simply building the roads higher. So they're raising all the roads two or three feet, but now all the businesses which were along the road are down below the road so they haven't...so they've solved the transportation problem temporarily. But...and they're still building like crazy down in Florida. I mean there are just all kinds of high rise apartments and condos and stuff going up all over the place in South Florida. I mean, I was just down there for two months. I saw a lot of it, they're just building like this isn't a problem.

GN (41:07):

Well, turn the page again to something else, what do you think...what are your happiest moments here? What are some of the best achievements that you...you had that student who went to Yale for one. What do you-?

TL (41:26):

Well, I guess the thing that comes immediately to mind is that when I retired from full-time before I went into the two-year step down, I...the school threw a little get together at lunch. They said to me, 'do you want a going away party? I said I don't know if I do, I'm not really into it. But they did it anyway. And so what--and I'll all always be grateful to him for this--Rich Feldman went out and he contacted all of our previous graduates back to the time that I started and he asked them to-

GN (42:04):

Send a note?

TL (42:05):

Send in a note or whatever. So, I mean, I got...so there was like maybe a 100, 110 students that had graduated at that point. And I got...I don't know something in the neighborhood of 35 or 36 responses from my former students telling me what a great influence I had been in their life, and a role model. So I mean that was, I mean I had to...and he compiled them all together into a book and handed it to me at this reception. And I couldn't read it all in one setting. I mean, it was just too emotional. I had to take in pieces. And so yeah, obviously I've made a difference in the lives of some students and-

GN (42:57):

And in the institution. I mean, I just know from being here. So that leads me to this next question, which kind of will be answered different ways by different people. What...is Marist worth the investment for the student? And by that I mean, if you look at it--there's a financial, there's a time to study and so on. There's a social one in terms of leaving home and breaking in to new things. And the commitment to, you know...you put all this in and is it worth it? Could you...I know my cousin, while he wouldn't...because my niece's husband is a well-to-do--he's doing well on Wall Street. He has a boy graduating from high school and he said he could just as well buy him a franchise, and financially he would be as better off than going to college. So-

TL (43:59):

That may very well be true in terms of finance. In terms of finances that may very well may be true. I mean, because, first of all, I don't think college is for everybody. In fact, I think there's a lot of students here who probably shouldn't be here. That they're here-

GN (44:19):

We need carpenters and plumbers.

TL (44:22):

And that's exactly right, and that's my point. You know, that we need those kinds of people. You can make a very good living as one of those tradespeople owning your own business, et cetera. So, do you need to go to college? I don't think you do. And in many cases, they're probably making more than faculty members are making here in terms of their livelihoods and stuff like that. So, I don't think you should come to college because your parents expect you to come to college. I think--and I've always said this--is I think that most high school students come to college two years too soon than they should. There should be a two year hiatus where they go into the military or they go into, Peace Corps or just go sling burgers at McDonald's and get your head on straight and figure out what your priorities are, and then make up your mind that this is what you want to do. Because again, a lot of them are just kind of going through the motions and-

GN (45:34):

They're maturing here, but while they're playing at it they're wasting some time.

TL (45:38):

Right. Yeah. And this, and if you're doing it for that reason, okay. That's a very expensive way to make a decision, just kind of bite your time and try to take the four years to figure out what you want to do. I had two nephews, they both went to state schools. One went to University of Connecticut and one went over here to SUNY New Paltz. They both got good educations. They're both well employed.

GN (46:15):

Happy?

TL (46:16):

Yeah. One's working, one's went and got his MBA and now his CPA. He's working for a big firm down...one of the major five accounting firms and seems...living down in the city and things seems really happy. The other majored over here in New Paltz in history and he's got himself a nice job teaching history at a high school down in Queens and seems very happy. And so...but I think it all depends on the kind of school you go to, I think. When I went to University of Bridgeport and at that time there were about 4,000 undergraduates. Roughly the size of mirrors. When I went for my PhD at Michigan State, there were 45,000 students. The freshmen class was 10,000 students. And I mean, you could tell, I mean, these kids were shell-shocked for months. I mean, they just had this glazed look in your eye and you can pick them off the sidewalk. There's a freshmen, there's, I mean, just by this glaze look in their eye...so I mean, they were living in 17-story dormitories and stuff like that. And you know, their classes were in the hundreds students, if not-

GN (47:31):

I like to throw out a, I just,

TL (47:33):

Well, and I took...one of the courses they wanted me to take, they said, well, you need to have some programming. So they made me take a Fortran programming course. There were 1200 students in the class meeting at the same time; everybody met the same time, the same day, but we met in 12 different locations. And the instructor was on a TV screen. so 1200 students sitting, watching 12 different screens with a graduate student who was given five minutes at the end of the class to answer any questions you might have. So as an undergraduate, would I have thrived in that kind of environment? No way. So I mean, I was a biology major at the University of Bridgeport. I was in a class of like 30-35 most of the time. And we traveled together the whole four years. So we were in the same chemistry class, same biology classes, et cetera. So yeah, it was a small group that basically traveled together through the four years. And so I think smaller is better.

GN (48:35):

I was totally impressed here at Marist you guys in the science had your labs...Bettencourt was in there from morning till night, weekends included, you know. And I say, that kind of contact, which leads to my-

TL (48:48):

Which you wouldn't get at a much bigger school.

GN (48:50):

Right.

TL (48:52):

Or it would be a graduate student-

GN (48:54):

Working with you.

TL (48:58):

Yeah, and even they would limit their time because teaching was not their primary responsibility or interest. They were just doing it for their financial support, their assistantships.

GN (49:11):

Lastly, why did you stay here so long?

TL (49:15):

Well I mean I like to say I liked the people. I liked the campus. So I mean-

GN (49:27):

You weren't very well paid. You were paid but not-

TL (49:30):

Well, I was paid maybe comparably to what I was making out in New Mexico. It was higher, but the cost of living is higher here, so taxes are higher here than they were in New Mexico. So on face value it looks like I was making more money than I probably was making in terms of actual spending power, I probably wasn't making any more or any less than that out there. But all my family were back in this area. My wife and I were the only two that sort of wandered off, and I'd been gone for 17 years basically. And our parents were still...all of our parents were still alive, but getting older and so, okay this isn't going to last forever. So yeah, it was, it was a mix of family, location. I mean, I'm a fisherman, so I mean I had the Hudson River and all these fly fishing opportunities all around. The people, I mean Marist was very welcoming when I came. We used to sit and--like you said--we used to sit around at lunch time in Donnelley Hall. Everybody was on the same schedule. We all had that lunch hour free. You and Liz and Andy and Rosemary and Cecily and Mark VanderHeyden and Richard LaPietra and Joe-

GN (50:54):

People going up to the board to explain certain things.

TL (50:54):

Yeah. Lynne Doty, Judith Saunders. All the different people who used to wander in and out during-

GN (50:59):

But now I understand you can't have lunch in the lab anymore. They took...see you environmentalists-

TL (51:04):

Well then as soon as they...as soon as Mark VanderHeyden changed the schedule to the present schedule, now everybody was on a different lunch. There wasn't a common lunch hour anymore. So then that all just kind of faded away, people started eating at their desk or whatever. And so all that was kind of lost, which I think is a shame. The other problem I see with the school of science is--and I knew this was going to happen and Kathy Newkirk confirmed it for me just the other day--is they've split the school between two locations at this point. So they've got the biology department and they've got the athletic training people over in the new science building. They've got chemistry and environmental science over in Donnelley, and very rarely do those two groups ever get together. And so as time goes by, you're just going to see a-

GN (52:02):

A demise?

TL (52:02):

Well not...I mean just people drifting away. You know, you don't...new faculty are coming in, old faculty are leaving, the people who are in one building don't get to know the people in the other building the way we did when everybody sat around the table every day, five days a week having lunch together. So I think that's a negative as a result of the growth.

GN (52:27):

Is there a consistency though in the Marist spirit as such? I mean, people are welcoming by and large. I sense that among the students that there's a basic simplicity. They still hold a door for you, which is-

TL (52:44):

Right. And my wife, she used to work in student services over at Vassar college. And so I had opportunities to be on the Vassar campus on numerous occasions. And you could tell. I mean, it's just a different culture. It's a different student body. I mean, just from the way they dress-- tattoos, body piercings. Political activity, social consciousness. So in some respects Marists students are a little bit less-

GN (53:26):

Avant Garde? [Chuckles]

TL (53:26):

Well, they're a little bit less active, a little bit less outspoken, a little bit less politically involved on social issues and stuff then something like a Bard or Vassar. So you could tell...if you put a Marist student and a Vassar student, if you picked 10 and 10, say which one is which, I predict I could probably...eight out of 10, I could pick them, I can peg them as to which campus they had come from. So yeah, so...but I mean, like you say, I mean Marist students, I mean they've always been really nice kids. Very polite, very respectful.

GN (54:12):

Yeah. I think they draw each other too. I mean, there's a magnet. They want to bring like unto like.

TL (54:20):

And I think they tend to help each other studying, at least in the sciences. I mean forming study groups and working together and looking out for each other and stuff like that, so.

GN (54:35):

Good. I've said everything I wanted to say. Is there something you'd like to say in closing of this?

TL (54:41):

I think we've covered a lot of ground.

GN (54:43):

We did. And so with that, thank you very much Tom, it's been a real pleasure.

TL (54:47):

Yeah. Thank you.