

Interviewee: Jeptha Lanning
Interviewer: Gus Nolan

September 25, 2002
MHP

Jeptha Lanning

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, New York

Transcribed by Erin Kelly

For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

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Summary: The following interview occurs with Dr. Jeptha Lanning, former communications professor at Marist College. Dr. Jeptha speaks of his years as a professor as well as his administrative roles and participation with the Marist Abroad program within the interview. At the end of the interview, Dr. Jeptha Lanning speaks of his fellow colleagues who have played a significant role in the formation of the college as it is today as well as where he hopes the college will be in the future.

“Beginning of Interview” Gus Nolan: Good morning. This is an interview with Dr. Lanning. Dr. Lanning is a former professor of Communications at Marist College and he’s been retired a number of years and the date today is September 25th and we’re having this recording for the Archive project in the James Cannavino Library here at Marist College. Good morning Jeptha.

Dr. Jeptha Lanning: Good morning Gus.

GN: Jeptha, will you give me your full name please?

JL: Jeptha Joseph Holland Aloysius Lanning.

GN: Were you named after any member of your family?

JL: I was named after my father and my grandfather.

GN: Where and when were you born?

JL: September 29, 1931 in Brooklyn, New York.

GN: And tell me something about your early education, grade school?

JL: Yes, I went to visitation school in Brooklyn for the first five years, or six years including kindergarten and then for the sixth, seventh, and eighth, St. Anselm’s in Bay Ridge and graduated from there and went on to St. Agnes High School in New York for a year. And then I went to Marist Prep, Marist Preparatory School in Esopus, New York to begin to study to be a Marist Brother.

GN: Do you have any siblings, any brothers or sisters?

JL: Yes, I do. I have two brothers. Richard, a retired naval captain and Gerard, a retirement services executive with Phoenix.

GN: Are they still with us? Are they alive today?

Interviewee: Jephtha Lanning
Interviewer: Gus Nolan

September 25, 2002
MHP

JL: Yes, they're still with us. Gerard lives in Manchester, Connecticut and Richard lives in Riverside, Connecticut.

GN: Okay, will you tell us please the names of your parents and the occupation of your father?

JL: Jephtha Holland Lanning was a pharmacist and he was the son of a pharmacist and my mother was a secretary to a vice-president at Corn Products, which I believe today in General Foods.

GN: Okay, thank you. Moving on in your early career, will you tell us about your high school career at Marist Prep and then coming onto Marist College as an undergraduate?

JL: Well, between '46 and '48, I put in my sophomore and junior year at Marist Prep after meeting you Gus and your brother Frank and I were classmates those years. And I really developed a love for the Brothers and a love for teaching seeing so many wonderful men teaching me, mentioning people like Linus William Hall and Steve Urban, a great influence in my life.

GN: Now, and after you finished your undergraduate degree here at Marist College, what was your next teaching assignment?

JL: Oh, just so we go back a bit. I wasn't here as a student from '50 to '53 and graduated with a degree in English and during those years, developed a very much of an interest in the theater, which was going to see me a good bit in my professional life. When I graduated from college, I went on to Mt. Saint Michael and I, with that first year teaching at Marist Prep and then going to Mt. Saint Michael at each time I taught the junior and senior Englishes and also religion to the juniors and seniors.

Interviewee: Jephtha Lanning
Interviewer: Gus Nolan

September 25, 2002
MHP

GN: Tell me about the work in the theater at Mt. Saint Michael. You mentioned that and how did that... What's the genesis of that?

JL: Well, they always had done some theater back in the '30's in what is now the small old gym, I think it might be used for computer work in St. Paul's Hall. And when I came, Brother Leo Vincent, he was the Director and he suggested that maybe I would like to do something with theater and I was able to. They cast juniors and seniors and we put a play on, the first time a three act play was put on there in 1955. It was *Command Decision*. It was a war play and during the next five years, we did a play here and I had got to be also working with Professor Ed Cashin who was here at Marist for a number of years and works now and he just retired from Augusta College and assisted him in the running of the Speech Club, the Foreman it was called. And I would work with the boys with the dramatic interp and all interp, things of that sort.

GN: Now, while you were at Mount Saint Michael, did you begin your graduate study there?

JL: Yes, I did. I worked five years as a, not only as a teacher at the Mount, but also going to St. John's in Tomeka which had just opened and took my Degree in the Renaissance period, especially English drama from the years 1485 to 1642 and I wrote my dissertation with Master's Degree on the various interpretations of Shylock from the beginning up until 1960.

GN: And then going on for Ph.D., what was the genesis of that?

JL: Well, I was offered the opportunity of going to Catholic U. where I would serve as a Residence Hall director and at the same time pursue coursework in English and American Literature for my Ph.D. And I was there between 1960 and 1964 as a

Interviewee: Jephtha Lanning
Interviewer: Gus Nolan

September 25, 2002
MHP

Residence Hall director, I think in those days we called them proctors, and finished all my work except for the dissertation when I was “called to the colors” as it were, Marist was growing, it was 1964 and I found myself here on deck and working and unfortunately the Degree seemed at one point unattainable but gradually plugging and keeping at it I was able to finish the Ph.D. in 1972.

GN: Good. Let’s talk about coming to Marist then some of your first teaching assignments. What were the subjects you were teaching in your first years?

JL: My first years, I was teaching American Literature, a server course to the sophomores. I was teaching English Composition. I was teaching a drama course, it’s the English Drama of the Continental Drama, eventually American Drama. And I was also working with the Teacher Education program, going out and watching the, you know, people who were seniors who were teaching in the local schools working for their provisional certification.

GN: But not only local schools, did you not travel in some of those?

JL: Yes, as the program developed I actually traveled to New York City. Enough of our student Brothers were in that program and their assignments took place in such as Marist High in Chicago or to Roselle High School in New Jersey or Archbishop Molloy in Queens, Long Island and as a consequence see, I did move around quite a bit.

GN: And what about the theater here at Marist? Did you do anything in that?

JL: Yes I did. Coming in 1964 with my background, it was a natural fit and at that time we had a very good, very fine man, James W. Brit, who was the director of the program and I became as it were, a co-director with him as the years went on. And I think over the years here at Marist I did somewhere in the neighborhood of fourteen

Interviewee: Jephtha Lanning
Interviewer: Gus Nolan

September 25, 2002
MHP

plays, directed myself and Assistant Chairman in the production of many of his works.

We would work off each other. One would assist the other as the productions came on and in those years we were doing as many as four productions a year. And with the teaching work, I was kept quite busy. But we began in what is now the Marian Building, the old gym at that time and by 1965 when Champagnat it went up, I had the opportunity of doing the first play there, *Twelve Angry Men*, the first play was actually staged in that theater. I directed it.

GN: Now from our long list of plays that you suggested, is there any that really stands out or did you start with one of the best?

JL: Well, no I think, I think... Sure, a few stand out. I think doing the production of Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* is a high point for me. I think doing the production of *Marat/Sade* back in the spring of '68 was another high point. I think the crown and glory was the production of *Mourning Becomes Electra* by O'Neill. The cycle of three plays, nine acts with a wonderful cast and a wonderful review was off the paper and I think that was the high point. And I just acted in theater between '64 and '74, those ten years were my contributions to it.

GN: Okay, let's come back and talk about the department. Do you recall who was the Chair in those years?

JL: Yes, George Sommer was the Chair.

GN: Is that Dr. George Sommer?

JL: That's Dr. George Sommer, right. Dr. George Sommer and he had been my teacher as an undergrad in my senior year teaching American Lit. George came up from Manhattan College once a week and he taught me American Lit, so that was the

beginning of our association. And I worked closely with him when I came of course. Things were just beginning, the Teacher Education program was just beginning. We were expanding. The student body was expanding and there were so many opportunities to try and do things.

GN: Okay, when do you first start to take on administrative roles in the English department? Do you recall the years?

JL: Yes, I do. I do. After I received tenure in 1970, George asked me to be Assistant Chair for the spring of 1971 and he chose not to run for re-election again and I was elected in the spring of '71 and served until July of 1977. And it's at that time that a number of changes occurred in the department. I would say we went from a classical curriculum in English and we broadened it out to bring in so many other literary, or I think literary is not the word to use, so many other informative and communicative courses that we have in our curriculum today. And the program was wide open if you recall, The Vietnam War, luck is the relevance for a lot of these courses. What one might call the classical tradition, the youngster that we were taking wasn't really that much interested in sixteenth or seventeenth century literature, Chaucer, pipe-smoking senior of years back is not around and as a consequence we were often... We began to bring into the curriculum things such as journalism, public relations, public opinion. We began to bring in drama courses, introduction to radio, introduction to TV. What got so that in 1973, just about thirty years coming up now, in 1973 the registrar joined Dwyer and his assistant Nancy O'Brien Donohue, called them over to the office to look at the dossiers of the youngsters who were coming up to graduate. And after we were going through, our English major seniors convinced me that we really have to make a change because the

boys and girls going out were not really going out with an English Degree, as you or I have it, or the others of the Department and we really would have to legitimize the fate. And as you recall, and you with your help and the help of Bob Norman and Jerry Cox, the four of us sat down, fashioned a curriculum and were able to offer a [completed] major in the fall of 1973 in communications.

GN: Okay, I'm a little concerned that my memory is not clear on this and I was not privy to what you had to endure as it were. What kind of support did you get from the administration and from faculty as you began to move the boat as it were from just the mainstream English to the Communication major.

JL: Well, to be honest Gus, I don't think that I really ever discussed it with some of the people in the Department. I think there were a number of eyebrows being raised, you know, what is this? What is this going to be? How rigorous academic with credentials will it be? I remember talking with George once and said to him that "If Dickens were alive today, he'd probably be doing things with TV." And the college at that time was in a, I would say a precarious situation, but the enrollment was either steady or perhaps declining a bit. He even had youngsters from Dutchess Community College living in the dorms. And something really had to be done. I found myself in a situation where I felt we could do it by ourselves, you yourself at your own expense went out and got a Degree in communications from Fairfield University. Bob Norman, when he started teaching, went into the internship program and began to build it up. Jerry Cox was able to give me advice of his in the curriculum and especially the theater section of it. And with us and some of the part-time people, we were able to pull it off. We were able to pull it off. It

Interviewee: Jephtha Lanning
Interviewer: Gus Nolan

September 25, 2002
MHP

wasn't, I didn't think it would be Harvard or one of the big things but I'm amazed at the way it actually grew and developed.

GN: Yea. It is an amazing story. I know on the other hand, English was never really deflated and as much as took away courses, it's just students chose not to attend.

JL: Exactly but it was relevant to them. I think the connection between the world of work and the world of school was perhaps a gulf between that and communications helped abridge that gulf.

GN: Good. Let's just change the focus a little bit and come back to your personal life if we could. Let me ask you about your marriage to Joan. Do you recall the year that you married Joan?

JL: [Laughter] I sure do. It was in 1972. I met her in 1970 and began in 1971 seeing each other quite seriously and at that time, she was the Associate Executive Director of Coney Island Hospital in New York and I might add, making twice as much as I was making. In fact one time George Sommer had said to me, "I wonder what would have happened if Joan had kept her job and you had gone to New York." "I know George it's very easy," I said "We'd be living in a condominium on Riverside Drive as she'd me making in six figures and I'd be writing the great American novel." [Laughter]

GN: Very nice.

JL: But she left her job and came up here, did some pharmacy work for a year. She originally was a pharmacist, took her Degree in Pharmacy from St. John's University in 1957 and did go on to get her Master's in Hospital Administration from St. Louis University in 1965 and she came up here and for a year worked in ShopRite in the pharmacy there and Mack Drug. In 1973 in the spring, the position of Director of the

Mental Health Association opened up and they chose her and I was a little concerned, I said to her “Some of these organizations, you know, are in today and out tomorrow” and yet it went on and it was all affair I think in both directors and the executive director and it lasted twenty years.

GN: Now I’ve known you for fifteen years or more. Was there any connection between your father being a pharmacist and this young lady? [Laughter]

JL: We often joke about that. I mean here, in the family rather, yes, it really is something. The son of a pharmacist and the grandson of a pharmacist marries a pharmacist.

GN: You didn’t give me where. Do you recall where you were married?

JL: Yes, we were married in Queens Village in St. Joachim and Anne Church on June 3rd of 1972 and as I recall, I believe that you were in the wedding party and did the reading if I’m not mistaken.

GN: I do recall and I did do that, yes. Now back to the college and the purpose of this interview is to get your view and your recollection of some of the developments that took place and well now, we’re pausing over the early years so it’s the development that needs to take place. When did you leave Chairmanship and who replaced you?

JL: I moved the Chairmanship in July of 1977. Dick Platt, Professor Richard Platt, we had hired him in the proceeding year. He was a full-blown Communication major specialist. I’d like to think of myself as developed an interest in it but didn’t have the whole systematic coursework that Dick had. Now at that time I felt that we really needed a person who had that background to take another step along the way and Dick came into the program and I believe chaired it between 1977 and 19- I think it was ’85, he chaired

Interviewee: Jephtha Lanning
Interviewer: Gus Nolan

September 25, 2002
MHP

English and Communication and then gradually as we moved into division, he began to recruit things from the Fine Arts and Fashion.

GN: Okay, and then he would be replaced by Dr. Sadowski?

JL: That's right. In 19-, I believe it was in 1984... '84, I think it was '84 now brought Bob Sadowski, he came to the college and worked here for three years. It's under his direction that we developed and built the Lowell Thomas Center and he became the Divisional Chair. He left to take another position in Pennsylvania and at that time Dr. Marc vanderHayden asked me to head up the division. Prior to that, I had been doing the Marist Abroad Program since 1979. The founder of it, Brother Joseph Belanger, who I've known all of my life, he... I worked with him as an assistant and then became the Director of that program which I found fascinating. And that occupied a good bit of my time in the eighties. I had gradually moved away from the theater and I was concentrating now with the young men and young women going overseas and it was a wonderful opportunity for me to travel to some foreign universities, meet the foreign academics, always cordial and one place in my heart where so many people helped our people along all the way. But things change and when Marc asked me to take over the job, I said sure, I would take it. And I had the Chairmanship of the Division of Arts and Letters from 1987 to 1991.

GN: Okay, when you first came to Marist College it was a very young college and there was, you know, a few committees around, in fact you could number them perhaps on one hand. What part did you play in any of those committees that you recall? Were you on Academic Committee? Were you on the Faculty Committee? Were you on Rank and Tenure? Which of those would you like to say something about?

Interviewee: Jephtha Lanning
Interviewer: Gus Nolan

September 25, 2002
MHP

JL: Well, when I came I think the only committees we had were the Academic Affairs Committee and the Faculty Affairs Committee. Prior to Middle States, I don't even believe we had those. Middle States said... Really, I wasn't here, it was at the end of my term but you wouldn't have had the community structure so when I came, I was sort of in the door then Professor Dan Kirk asked me to be the Faculty Secretary so it was my job to take the minutes and have all our faculty meetings and to transcribe them and have a running commentary and that position I had for approximately four years.

GN: Did you serve on Rank and Tenure at any time?

JL: Yes, I did. I served on Rank and Tenure between 1980 and 1983. I was Chairman for the last year.

GN: Okay, one other area, it will be the academic structure in terms of the Core program and divisions, give me some feedback on Core program. What was your analysis of that and why did it happen?

JL: Well, I think there was concern, biggest concern that the students were heavily into their major with the extent that they were losing sight of what it means to be a liberally educated person.

GN: It was the sixty-sixty program.

JL: That was a sixty-sixty program. I was disappointed in the way it actually evolved and I can take that in a moment to go into that. As the Chair of the English and Communications back there in the seventies when this thing was in the early stories, middle seventies, I felt and we had meetings and what the English faculty and the Communications faculty worked up a program whereby we would save what philosophy to take, what psychology to take, what environmental science to take. Unfortunately, that

was not the way the program eventually went. I think perhaps maybe some things were unsubscribed that maybe other people thought should be subscribed and as a consequence, the program was set up with the youngsters taking a panoply of courses in their first two years mainly. And I always wondered when a youngster would come into my office for me to advise him or her and to sign maybe the registration form when they would say the famous words, "I've gotten Core out of the way."

GN: Yes, yea. I've finished my Core.

JL: I finished Core. I said to say it to the Core and we'll be finished.

GN: Yea.

JL: But that was a problem and I think probably still exists today.

GN: Yes. In later years, capping programs came in which were supposed to be all things housed in the major but following the requirements of the Core director which sometimes created a gap in how each one's view would then see it. Changing from the development of the College academically, let's talk about the physical plant. As you look around today, you certainly see a marked difference, do you not?

JL: Oh Gus, walking on the campus today with you and John, I couldn't help think that as a high school student in Marist Prep, I came over here and saw this property for the first time on January the 1st of 1947. It's come a long way from...

GN: The cows and the pigs and the... [Laughter]

JL: The cows and the pigs and the frame houses, it's... I like to think that if some of the Brothers of that time had come back today, they would just be thunderstruck, wonderstruck as I am as I've seen its developing over the years. This is really the first time I've been back today in a few years, last year, an afternoon just arriving through the

property but to stop... But the building we're sitting in is new since my time, the liberal arts building is new, the Marist rotunda building is new. It's just amazing to see the physical transformation of this property.

GN: Good, but there are some buildings that are kind of midway between, for instance the Donnelly building, which served as kind of a collect-all of all departments and things. Was there not a certain unity and spirit that seems to emerge out of that?

JL: Yes, I think at the time we were a smaller institution. I think when the major in Communications was voted through, I think it was voted through something like '65 to '66. I think since that time it's at least doubled if not tripled and yes, they were all working in Donnelly, there was great spirit because the English Department offices were right down from the History department offices downstairs by the business people. The science people were there. Often we would gather for lunch down in one of the labs and just sit at the common room table and exchange views with a number of people from the various disciplines there. It was a wonderful time but I just... With growth and specialization, there comes a gradual withdrawal and into one's own bailiwick and to one's own major and life. And that's probably one of the, one of the drawbacks of growth.

GN: Can you recall the English office as you describe it where in fact we had cubicles...?

JL: That's right.

GN: Hardly what you'd call private opportunities.

JL: No, no. No real privacy there. I mean, George was down at his perch at the end of the complex and Norman and then you had Bob Lewis and you had Teichman and myself and yourself and...

GN: Yea.

JL: Yea, it was, it was different. It was fun in a lot of ways and it was a great experience I think for all of us, for all of us. I don't think we... I think I know. I would try it.

GN: Right. Now, from where you see the college today, what would you say are its major assets and then what would be one of its major weaknesses?

JL: Well, apart from the physical plant and the way everything is laid out, I think, and in the years that I've left... I left, I retired there in '94 after teaching twenty-nine years and two semesters of working for Admissions, I think there still exists from what I can gather, a spirit about this place that other places don't have. We walked into this building and two women preceded us and they held the door for us each time. Where do you get those going other places? But I think there's a family spirit that grows out of the Marist spirit and the spirit of the Brothers who put their lives on the line in a Christian education of youth and that has animated the place. Whether it will continue in the future, who can say but I think at this time, it's alive and well and I think it's one of the things that people notice about it. I can hear people saying, "You've got good kids at Marist."

GN: One of the faculty members has commented in that way that Marist seems to draw a certain kind of individual who is not particularly arrogant or, you know, another word maybe aggressive, you know. They're somewhat laidback but never less...

JL: I can add to that if I interrupt you Gus, but I've noticed when I did some internship work before becoming Chair one semester, Bob Norman was ill and Dick Platt and I both took up the duties and going into New York to NBC or CBS or the Daily News or some of those media facilities and talking with the supervisors, they always say that our boys and girls could take direction. They were ready to work and take direction. They didn't know it all, they would learn and learn they did. I think that's a highpoint in the favor of the people here.

GN: Good. I was going to ask you something similar to that so please comment on your recollection of the student body as a professor here in your hay day of teaching and did you see them as bright and creative? Were they dedicated? Or were they... Did they work as hard as in the early years as they did in the later years?

JL: I think maybe in the early years maybe they worked harder. I think maybe they weren't as gifted at that time as we advanced, I think we grew a more gifted student, a higher up in boards, higher recommendations. And I think maybe sometimes maybe the youngsters from that caliber can coast a bit and I would notice in certain other classes coasting. I would... Particularly if they really weren't interested in the course and were taking it just because they had to get it to get it out of the way. I would notice that sometimes in the public speaking course that they would wish they were someplace else until they began to work at it and develop a certain facility with it and see themselves on tape and feel good about themselves. And then they began to work harder.

GN: Yea.

JL: And the same thing in the drama course. I didn't do... I taught it a little differently. We would take just about ten plays a semester, twelve. One play...

GN: Weekly, yea.

JL: One a week, I had a full double period as it were and after three plays, I would give a test on those three plays with the students being free to choose one of two questions from the three authors studied. So they have to have read the three plays and know something about them and that test would be a whole period. And I would do that three times during the semester. I didn't give a term paper. I didn't give a research paper. I wanted to know what they had gotten from the reading and the [unit that] they did. And I think that was able to see people work harder than they may have first thought that this thing was going to be a breeze.

GN: Good, and you certainly were highly commented on your teaching while you were here and getting various accolades from various people and I just did not want this to pass that your innovative way of teaching did not go unnoticed. Changing the focus again, let's go to the administration. What would you say Dr. Foy's major contributions to Marist would be in the reign that he had taking over from Paul Ambrose and bringing it through some of the hard times. What do you see as his contribution?

JL: I think his contribution, first and foremost, is building of the faculty. Building of the faculty... I think that we might lose sight of that in the construction phase which occurred in Rich's administration with buildings going up such as the dormitory buildings, Sheahan Hall, Leo Hall, Champagnat Hall, the...

GN: Donnelly.

JL: Donnelly Hall and eventually a field house. They're all well in thought but I think he was able to bring together a faculty that made this place work. I think people loved and respected him, a very down to earth individual.

GN: Do you think the faculty found him as a threat?

JL: I don't think so. I think maybe as the years went on, maybe some felt that he was here too long, that he had outlasted, his contributions were done and perhaps he should move on. But I think that he was not a common guy but had a common touch. Students, faculty, could go to him. When you were with him, you were the most important person in the world at that particular time. I have a great respect for him. I've known him years. And today in the college as a Marist Brother and a few years older than me, he has many gifts, many, many gifts. And I think the big one that maybe he's lost sight of is that he built this place not only in a physical manner, he started it but kicked it up from perhaps being a junior college to a full-fledge college and now perhaps today we're on the way to being a university.

GN: Following Dr. Foy, we have Dennis Murray. Could you comment on his contributions to the college?

JL: I think Dennis took us outside. I think Dennis took us outside the institution. I think he made a number of major links with outside institutions especially the IBM Corporation. This building that we sit in this morning is the gift of one of the high-ranking officers of that time. He did begin to bring us out into the bigger world and connect us more sharply with that. Just from a minor point a view, he was interested that we maybe could pull up something in the theater with the Hyde Park Festival Theater back there in the eighties. Unfortunately, it didn't work but he was interested in it. I think he has his eye on developing the institution, to reach out and meet people, institutions outside and enrich them and they enrich us by our cooperation.

GN: Do you think he strives in any way to maintain the Marist spirit and in what ways would he do that?

JL: Yea, I think he does. He's quite conscious of the beginnings of the institution. I think he's made efforts to single out the early days of the institution, honoring the early faculty. I think right now we have on homecoming weekend, we have special commemorative situations, lunches and dinners for the heritage classes, the classes that really first developed here between 1947 and 1966. I think he's conscious of the role that the Brothers made. I think he wants to maintain that, build upon it. Yea, he... I think he goes out of his way not to neglect it.

GN: That takes a special touch to have humility, simplicity, and modesty on the one hand and seeking public relations and a greater image on the other.

JL: Yea.

GN: But I think he has done well.

JL: I think that's a nice way to put it Gus. I think yes... And maybe, maybe those virtues are with our students too. The... Life goes on and people pass things down to one another. There's a change but there's also a seed that is present there and develops and grows in another direction. I think he's done well. I think it's that move by the college.

GN: Good. Let's go down one step. You've met and know, worked very closely to a number of the Academic Deans. I think Dr. LaPietra would be one of those, Dr. Molloy, Dr. vanderHayden. Briefly comment on what you think their major contributions would be. Does one stand out more than the other or is it just each have his own specialty and marked the college with that?

JL: Well, let me think for a moment. Lou Zuccarello right off the top would have to be the Core program and what he did with that. Richard LaPietra, bringing some of the new majors along like political science, like communications, getting us into environmental studies. I was under Richard's aegis and I worked on the first committee back in the spring of '65 that got us, what today we call Upward Bound and it's one of our, one of our glories glories not only here but...

GN: National.

JL: By... On a national length, a national stage. Washington's very proud of what we've done here with that program. And then you had Andrew Molloy continue the work in environmental studies. I think Andrew really enjoys most of all being in the classroom. I think he had one of the shortest tenures of the deans that I served under. And then of course, Mark vanderHayden who I think developed a close relationship working with him with fellow deans, it was... It was our own community and he... He had his way to share with us so many things that maybe another dean wouldn't have. He's a [forester]. The political ramification of certain acts or certain programs coming in and developing, he was precious. [...] My relationship would be closer and with that I would say with Richard LaPietra and with Marc vanderHayden it was the closest.

GN: Okay, moving on. From your own perspective, if not being too false in modesty, what so you think your major contributions were here? Looking back now, your golden years and say it was a good ride but particularly in what area? Would it be in the communications? Would it be in the theater? Would it be in the Abroad program? Hey, there's a lot of them there.

JL: Yea, I think... I think my biggest contribution was not to be afraid to take a risk that would “make egg on our face”, the program in communication. I think that I felt it just couldn’t fail and so help me, it wasn’t going to fail. That has to be what I would call my contributions in my own mind. The Abroad program would come in perhaps after that, the opportunity to see boys and girls go overseas and develop into men and women, aware of not only their own national culture but also the implications of other cultures. I want to say a wonderful experience to be able to share that. I’ve had difficulties with Dennis on this. I know now that the program is multifaceted. I think the youngsters could go for a semester or maybe a few weeks and think that’s what as my predecessor would say, “If it’s not a year, it’s empty tourism.” I don’t think the President and I see eye to eye on that. It takes a while to develop and understand and be accepted by people from another culture and you don’t do that in one semester. One semester you eat, drink, sleep American and you hang around with those American kids and stay on top of the wave and never really get into the situation where you are by yourself or with another or with two. We would always send off students, two or three, maybe sometimes four to an institution. We didn’t send them the counting strength of twenty-five or thirty to one school with three and you going over to teach courses with them. That’s not it. That’s...

GN: Is that commonplace?

JL: Many of the big institutions do it. It’s not in vacuous, I mean the curriculum in here, the grades can be there. A number of the fine details can be meshed together. Does the experience finally justify it? Well, I don’t know.

GN: Of course, you...

JL: Here we’re probably rank third. It will probably rank third.

Interviewee: Jephtha Lanning
Interviewer: Gus Nolan

September 25, 2002
MHP

GN: It will rank third, okay. What would you say or answer this question, what do you wish to have happened that didn't happen in your time here?

JL: I wish... We started a major. I wish we had been given more resources than we had. I think the reliance on a number of part-time people, good as they were, it would have been better if we could have some full-time people coming on board back there in the late seventies. We weren't able to make many hires. When John Schroeder, who was Professor of English retired, I was told back there in 1973 that I had his seat but only his seat for the next four years.

GN: A Limited budget.

JL: Oh, very limited budget, right. But that to me would be a, you know, kind of a disappointment. I realize what the implications were. It was, it was tough times.

GN: Was there ever a time, Jephtha, in your time that you had an interest of going somewhere else to teach?

JL: No, no.

GN: With your abroad experiences and, you know, and traveling abroad and traveling to different part of this country...?

JL: Well, let me say this, I think I probably could have worked something out if I wanted to. Joan and I had vacation in 1980. Margaret Thatcher had just come in in England and had tripled the fees on all the overseas students. So from having sixteen youngsters spread around England and Ireland, we're now down to four. Dennis said, "What're you going to do?" So I said "Well, maybe we could replicate the experience to some extent if we sent them to eastern Canada." And that summer we traveled up through Nova Scotia and over to New Brunswick, checking out colleges and universities.

Interviewee: Jephtha Lanning
Interviewer: Gus Nolan

September 25, 2002
MHP

So it happened that I got to King's University in Halifax and met the... Henry Hyde met the registrar Academic Vice-President, had a very nice talk with him. He ended up taking us both to dinner and then the next day invited me to meet the president who was, I can't think of his name now, but he was about Linus Foy's, Rich Foy's age and he offered me a job. Would I come up and teach English, maybe do something in Communications and I could live here? And it would be very much like teaching in a British University. We could live on campus, we could have our meals high table but I thanked him very much and said no.

GN: We're all grateful you did. [Laughter] Finally I want to get down to one or two other thoughts here. What do you anticipate for the future of the college? In ten years from now, Dennis this year said we have received the most freshman applications ever, more than 6,900 were accepted, the brightest and the most gifted student body. The freshman, I think he said that for the last several years but he has the data on stats to prove that these kids seem to be a little brighter. Do you think the location of the college, the spirit of the college, the name of the college, the interpersonal... Do you think that we'll go down the road of distance education in a big way or do you think Marist's strength is here?

JL: I think Marist's strength is here. I think it's here for the reasons that you just enumerated. We're seventy miles north of New York City. A wonderful opportunity for our young people to do internships and I'm a firm believer in internships. I think the last academic experience should be the first work experience where they begin to realize what it is in the world of work and how their coursework has prepared them or not prepared them for what they are now encountering. The proximity to the major metropolitan area,

the quality of the student coming in, brighter, sharper, that is going to attract similar people. The reputation that our sports teams bring. It was just wonderful to read this summer in Canada in the Canadian paper a write-up on the Marist rowing team...

GN: Regatta.

JL: At the Royal Canoe Regatta. People know Marist today. I would hope, I would hope and pray that the name would never change. I think its strength is in its name and what that signifies. The... No, it's to come back to what I believe at one time was the motto of the Marist Brothers' private promise of the United States are putting forward and this place is to be right on target doing like that.

GN: Finally, is there any question I didn't ask you that you would like to comment or ask yourself and, you know, propose here? What could be, you know, what the College has gained or what it has lost in the course of the last forty years? The personalities that are here, that have impressed and influenced you and influenced students as well, some of the memories of those past people?

JL: Oh Gus, where does one begin? Where does one begin? The people that I had the opportunity of working with, let me count them in my mind, Dan Kirk...

GN: I have to interrupt. You made this comment before about the last experience should be the first work experience. Ed O'Keefe was the last person interviewed here and he entered with Dan Kirk pushing the idea of an internship and not only an internship in a field that was never taking place before, but he wanted the students paid. [Laughter]

JL: Dan was so far ahead of his time. It's a pity we lost him when we did because he had such insights and he started the graduate program, Psychology. That was one of Dan's major contributions.

Interviewee: Jephtha Lanning
Interviewer: Gus Nolan

September 25, 2002
MHP

GN: And your community psychology, which I heard was never heard of before.

JL: That's right.

GN: And it was in a whole new ballgame.

JL: Right, right. So, you know, he's one. Let me mention John Schroeder, courtly, distinguished, everything you would imagine a college professor should be.

GN: Opposite to Bill Murphy. [Laughter]

JL: Opposite to Bill Murphy who in his own way, was and is a very bright guy, perhaps I would say his staying power isn't where it's at. A great idea man can flush it out but moves on. It's a pleasure to work with him. I enjoyed working with Joe Belanger in the overseas program, terrific. We had our difficult... We had disagreements on some points, maybe minor, but I think that together we had the vision of what it should be.

Working with Jerry Cox in the theater, oh god, he's...

GN: How about Howie Goldman? Go with someplace in another area... [Laughter]

JL: Howard, Howard... Howard was just... Howard said it like it was.

GN: Alright.

JL: That's Howard's contribution. He was not afraid to take a stand and say it how it was. He...

GN: It's like the elephants in the tent.

JL: That's right. Howard is the one who actually got us onto a rearranged schedule in as far as the semesters are concerned. Howard was concerned, I was the Chair of English and Communications at the time. At one of our meetings, Richard was the Dean, he said, "We have to do something with spring semester." He said, "We can't have a break and ten days with the holy days and the Easter vacation. It shifts every year and you can't,

Interviewee: Jephtha Lanning
Interviewer: Gus Nolan

September 25, 2002
MHP

we can't schedule the games and things of that sort." And it's then that we went onto the mid-winter break and that was it.

GN: When did we move that up? That we finished before Christmas? There was a time when we used to have finals after Christmas.

JL: Yea, well I used to call them my lame duck sessions because nothing really got done. When they came back on January the 3rd, I would start up the tests on the 21st or whatever it was. I think that started in 19-, I think it started in 1969. I think Richard... I think it was in Richard's first...

GN: So early on? Alright.

JL: I think it's... I think it's 1969 with the... We started early and we finished before Christmas.

GN: Good, well thank you very much Jephtha.

JL: It's been a pleasure.

“END OF INTERVIEW”