

Brother Richard Rancourt
Interviewer: Richard Foy

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MHP

Brother Richard Rancourt

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, New York

Transcribed by Mary Ellen Lent

For Marist College Archives and Special Collections

Transcript – Brother Richard Rancourt

Interviewee: Brother Richard Rancourt

Interviewer: Richard Foy

Date: 21 February 2002

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Comments: Brother Richard discusses his journey becoming a Marist Brother and his commitment to his teaching career and the Marist Brothers.

Summary: Brother Richard recalls his early childhood, his family and his early education. Brother Richard discusses his many experiences in becoming a Marist Brother. His talent as a pianist and his many different teaching roles .His commitment to the Marist Brothers and their teachings.

Richard Foy: Okay, this is an interview conducted with Brother Richard Rancourt.

We are in the Archives room of the Cannavino Library. The date is the 21st of February, 2002. The interviewer is Richard Foy. Good morning Brother Richard.

Richard Rancourt: Good morning.

R.F. We would like to get some of your early biographical information. What is your full name?

R.R. Richard Joseph Rancourt.

R.F. Okay, where you named after any other family members?

R.R. Not to my knowledge. I'm the first Richard.

R.F. When where you born and where?

R.R. I was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, October 30, 1930.

R.F. Okay, do you have any brothers or sisters?

R.R. I have a brother, Victor.

R.F. Okay, he's no longer alive, right he died.

R.R. He passed away many years ago.

R.F. Okay, where did you grow up?

R.R. I grow up in Lawrence, Massachusetts and lived there most of my life until I went away to become a Brother.

R.F. Where did you go to grammar school?

R.R. Well, I went to St. Rita's School. St. Rita's and St. Mary's were affiliated but one was in another part of Lawrence and I had cousins who went to St. Rita's, which was also

associated with St. Mary's Parish. So as a student I went to St. Rita's School for six years, first grade to the sixth grade and then we were transferred over to St. Mary's which was in another part of town where we had the seventh and eighth grade. And St. Mary's also had an elementary school but that was for another section of the city. Then from there I, I graduated from St. Mary's in '44 and went to Central Catholic High School.

R.F. Was that your first association with the Brothers?

R.R. That was my first association with the Marist Brothers. At St. Mary's I had the Xaverian Brothers but I also lived on West Street in Lawrence, Massachusetts and at the end of West Street we had a school there called St. Ann's School, which was run by the Marist Brothers. I remember the Marist Brothers used to walk down West Street and pass by my house and they wore these cassocks and white rabbas. I thought they were different from the Xaverian Brothers and so I knew the Marist Brothers at least by appearance. I didn't go to St. Ann's because that was for French speaking students and my aunt and my mother thought I would go with my Irish cousins to St. Rita's.

R.F. What about your parents, what were their occupations?

R.R. Oh, my father worked in the gas company in Lawrence and my mother worked at the windmill.

R.F. So they both were workers?

R.R. Yes, just ordinary, you know, they had ordinary jobs and did their thing.

R.F. How did your father, when did your father die, how old were you when he died?

R.R. Oh, my father died when I was about forty, oh let me see when I was forty-two years old; I was in St. Agnes High School then.

R.F. Oh, okay he was alive quite a bit.

R.R. Yes, my father and mother lived quite a long time.

R.F. Now apart from your regular education you also are quite good as a pianist or organist. [Laughter]

R.R. Yes, I am.

R.F. How did you get started that way?

R.R. Well, we had a piano in the house and my grandmother used to play the piano. So I think she tried to teach me once. I really probably wasn't very interested. But she would play a lot of songs that I enjoyed and I used to tinker with the piano and one time I was playing with it and my uncle came along and he said "Well, would you like to take lessons"? and I said "Well yes," so he would pay for them. So I began to take lessons and took lessons and everybody thought I was going to quit because I had taken dancing lessons once and I didn't like that. [Laughter] People called me a sissy. [Laughter] So I figured that piano would be better so I took piano lessons for three years from sixth, seventh grade, eighth grade and the ninth grade and that's all. I kept playing and playing and when I went away to be a Brother, the Brothers were very, very helpful. They were like self-taught musicians, Brother Paul Ambrose, Brother Adrian and Brother Edmund and they all used to take a great interest in the fact that I could play and so they thought I was going to be geared to be an organist and all that so they helped me along and so I learned quite a bit from them you know. I kept playing and practicing and it all comes together and I got interested in people who knew music and I used to visit them and we played some songs and they showed me different techniques.

R.F. Was Brother John Colbert any influence on you. He was a pianist from Lawrence also.

R.R. Yes, he was. I lived with a John Colbert. I didn't know him well because he was four years ahead of me in profession and I knew that he was an individual who played by ear more than being able to read music. I don't know if he ever took any lessons in a formal sense you know but he was highly praised as a very capable musician and I used to listen to him play now and then particularly when I came over to the chapel for Vespers on Sundays in the St. Ann's Hermitage and he would play the organ for Vespers and I thought someday that might be my profession. [Laughter] I would follow in his footsteps, which I did a couple years later.

R.F. Yes, what about Brother Damian?

R.R. Brother Damian Victor?

R.F. Damian Victor Callaghan.

R.R. Well, he was three years ahead of me but also I heard that he was quite an exceptional pianist and he used to play mostly with my music and I believe and he was a classical pianist.

R.F. Yes.

R.R. He had a pretty good repertoire there and a good hand spread I believe and he had a different position from John Colbert. John Colbert was a kind of entertainer and he was a natural player. Brother Damian Victor, the beat when you read music, he was very good in what he did. It was just a different style.

R.F. Yes, technically must more advanced.

R.R. Yes, yes.

R.F. Okay, how many years did you spend up in Lawrence in Central Catholic?

R.R. I just spent one year. I went there as a freshman in 1944 and I left for Esopus in August 1945.

R.F. Now, there was a Juniorate at Tyngsboro which is only ten miles away, how come you wound up in Esopus?

R.R. Well, it was easy enough because this Juniorate that was in Tyngsboro was suppose to be for the young people who could speak French and I didn't speak French fluently at the time. So like when Joseph Belanger went to Tyngsboro, he had come from St. Ann's which was a French school run by the Marist Brothers. I had gone to St. Mary's and then to St. Rita's and so there's another guy in my class, Bill Connors, from Central Catholic and we where both going to go to school to prepare to be Brothers at the Juniorate. And it was that year in my freshmen year in Central Catholic that Tyngsboro finally went to... We're going to take the English speaking children as well. So I had an option. I had an option to either go to Tyngsboro or to go to Esopus but since Brother Alexander Joseph, Joseph Alexander was like my mentor in Central Catholic when I was there and he was the one who recruited me and Bill Connors. Since Bill was going to go to Esopus I thought it best to go to Esopus. I wouldn't back out on my deal so off I went.

R.F. Good, how many years do you spend in Esopus?

R.R. About two years, two whole years, my Sophomore year in high school and my Junior year in high school.

R.F. Okay and then, now we begin your stay in Poughkeepsie. [Laughter]

R.R. My odyssey. [Laughter]

R.F. So you came over here, what year did you come here?

R.R. I came here in 1947 in September.

R.F. And that first year you finished your high school when you were a Postulant?

R.R. Yes, yes.

R.F. At the old Beck mansion?

R.R. I think that time too, I'm not sure if there was enough room for the Novitiate, I know one time there wasn't enough room and some people stayed behind and came later.

R.F. I'm not aware of that.

R.R. Yes, because you know the Postulant began officially in January, a six month thing.

R.F. Yes, that's right a six month thing.

R.R. So there was some kind of a, I mean if I go back in my memory I could maybe scratch some of it out. So I came here in September and stayed in the Novitiate for two years.

R.F. Who was your Master of Novices?

R.R. We began with Brother Henry Charles, was the famous Master of Novices.

R.F. He was mine.

R.R. He was the former Provincial, very tough discipline person you know very small but he knew what he wanted and he knew how to get it. So we were very, very obedient in those days. He used to give us his lectures and his sermons and teach us how to work during the week we had two or three working periods. He assigned me one time to help him. I remember that very well to be a carpenter and I was supposed to fix the front porch of the Novitiate with him. I think after two meetings with him he recognized that I was not a carpenter. So I was assigned to weed around the bee hives so I did that that.

That was one thing. [Laughter] Well, my talents lay somewhere else, not with carpentry work anyway.

R.F. Right. So you did your Novitiate. Do you recall the cemetery?

R.R. Oh, very well.

R.F. How did the Novices and Postulants relate to the cemetery, did you visit it?

R.R. Well, it was very close to the Novitiate there at the Beck estate. In fact I often, when I go and walk around there now it's almost like the same curve you take, you take the turn as you're close to that football field, you take a right then you take a left but the left would take you by the bee hives. You remember by St. Mary's and by the cannery, we used to have a cannery there, a building for that. And then we go all the way down to the cemetery which really wasn't too far. Well, it was a nice place to visit. We used to go there every evening to say the De Profundis in Latin.

R.F. Out of the depths.

R.R. Yes, I can't say that I know it by heart now but I could say it before, the De Profundis. I still have part of it and then we used to say the little prayer and then we'd go back. That was after the evening recreation you remember then after we said the prayers for the Brothers down in the cemetery then we'd go back to the Novitiate and study for an hour before we had more prayers and then off to bed we would go. But it was, we didn't make too many visits to the cemetery. It was there and it was a nice place to go and to be calm and relaxed and look at some of the names of people that you knew.

R.F. Where any Brothers buried during your two years here?

R.R. Yes, in fact Brother Adolph Armond who was one of our teachers, he died unexpectedly in January in 1949 and he was teaching me Spanish because I was a Novice

then. I took Spanish with him and he passed away and we went there and then Emile Nestor also he was buried. Some of the old Brothers who were living over in the Provincial house had passed away.

R.F. Were you involved in digging the graves?

R.R. No, that also wasn't one of my talents. [Laughter] I never did anything like that.

R.F. But some Novices did.

R.R. I think some Novices did, yes, but I just never did it. And when I used to go there because it was a very nice cemetery where they had the flowers on each grave and they had a little like a little cement wall around, you remember that thing?

R.F. Yes, white stone wall all the way around.

R.R. White stone, yes, very tastefully done. One of my fondness recollections is that later, later on when I was living in the Gate House, this goes back to about 1984 something like that. One day one of the workers at the college brought over to the gate house, I was there, a plaque, a slab that the Brothers had on their grave stone with their name and the grave when they died, you know how many years were they in their profession and so forth. And he gave that to me, the worker did. So I took it and I when... In the evening I went over to see Brother Nilus who was living up in the penthouse on top of Champagnat and I said to him, I said "I have a slab down over in the Gate House." Brother Nilus had an office there in the Gate House at that time, I said I'm going to put it in your office and I said I think the Brothers are coming back to haunt you. [Laughter] Because a story attached with that little cemetery and I still have the slab up in my apartment.

R.F. Alright that's a new fact for me because I was under the impression that Brother Nilus kept the slabs there when he covered the cemetery.

R.R. Maybe he did I don't know. I don't know how this thing showed up you know.

R.F. He may have kept one as a model. They have little concrete monuments with a cross. They turned those down over the flower beds and left it there and then gradually moved in the walls.

R.R. Well, I picked up one. I don't know if anybody wants it. It's like those slides that I have.

R.F. You can put it in the Archives. [Laughter]

R.R. [Laughter] would you like to have it?

John Ansley (Archivist): It would be interesting.

R.R. It's heavy, not heavy, heavy but if you would like to have it I would certainly give it to you.

R.F. It would be interesting to take a picture of it and put it onto the website for the college because we don't have that many pictures of the cemetery. We have one where it is surrounded by a wire fence.

R.R. Yes, didn't I show you that? Maybe I have a picture, I have that big picture of that one.

R.F. Then we have, we have that one in, bring it also. Now there's a couple of pictures with the white but I'm sure that left the pictures before he decommissioned it. Well, okay let's move on now by this time its 1949 I believe and you now have become a full fledged Brother.

R.R. With the Vows.

R.F. With the Vows and you get moved over to the Scholasticate. Who was your Master of Scholastics?

R.R. Oh, I guess that's what I wanted to tell you to about my Master of Novices. I did have Brother Henry Charles for my first year and I think somewhere in either that year or in the second year probably at the end of the first year he was replaced by Brother Louis Omer. Then Brother Louis Omer became my Master of Novices for one year. He was very different from Brother Henry Charles. [Laughter] Henry Charles although he played but not quite right to talk about this but when we played baseball even on a really hot, hot day, we had to wear long sleeves on our shirts to keep our arms all covered up. And we had sneakers and we had long pants and all of that and so it was taboo to wear like a t-shirt around or any colorful shirt. In fact one time my mother sent me for Christmas a hat and the hat was red and orange and a big, big yellow ribbon up on top of it or pom-pom, whatever and Henry Charles said "You have to get that dyed. It's too fancy". [Laughter] So I had to get it dyed and then I could wear it. But coming back to playing baseball, whenever we went out we always had to dress properly but not a tie but we had to have those sleeves, the long sleeves. Well, along comes Brother Louis Omer. He was Provincial and so we played baseball one day and he was going to play baseball with us so we all got out there waiting on the field and along comes the Master of Novices and he's wearing a t-shirt. You know, his arms are bare and we're looking at him and we're shocked by all this and so he said, "Next time you come out you can wear t-shirts too". [Laughter] So we did and that was like breaking an old code.

R.F. [Laughter] That's right.

R.R. It was kind of a some kind of predilection for things to come you know, the wave of new religious life and I had that.

R.F. He was an amazing man when I was a Scholastic. He used to play baseball and if you walked him he would get furious and refused to go to first base. He was sixty by this time. He wanted to hit the ball.

R.R. Yes, I remember to in the Novitiate at the, when we had a little recreation after supper and in the winter months there was a little piano down in the recreation room and so since I play the piano, I would play songs. And some of the songs where honky-tonky songs that I would play in the Novitiate and Henry Charles didn't like it and he told the Prefect he said, "I don't like the way some people are playing all this modern music down there." [Laughter] He told me to play something a little bit more sacred so I said okay. [Laughter] You know, I doubt to get out from under his wings you know.

R.F. Well, it's indicative or systemic of what the attitude was when you went into training to become a Brother or a Priest or a Nun. You're suppose to get away from the world. You got a different name because you where now a new person and the things of the world were not suppose to encroach upon you. So you really shouldn't have wrist watches, you shouldn't have... listen to the radio, no papers because all these things were bad influences.

R.R. And there were a lot of other things that I found it hard to reconcile. You see we had, Christmas would come along and we'd have a nice crib, this was the Novitiate and we had the crib right next to where I was kneeling and in front of me was the altar and there was another bench in front of me then the altar and I was one of the small guys so right next to me was the crib. The baby Jesus was in the manger and the Blessed Mother

and St. Joseph. Well one morning, we didn't have mass and we could not go over to the Provincial House because the place was all snowed up we couldn't get the priest. And this was right about two days after Christmas so got a little *button-button* meant that we sleep maybe a half hour later instead of getting up at five o'clock we got up at five-thirty. That was a big accomplishment in those days, a big treat. It didn't happen very often but after we said our morning prayer, the Master of Novices said, "Now we'll..." In the afternoon he said that since we have missed mass we will go to our chapel over here in the Novitiate which was in that same building and he said "We'll do the Stations of the Cross." [Laughter] So I was kneeling down at three o'clock in the afternoon or four o'clock in the afternoon and I was looking at the baby Jesus and they were saying the Stations and talking about the one Station he falls for the first time [Laughter] and baby Jesus I said listen this is kind of reverse physiologically in balance for me you know [Laughter] if I keep this up. But anyway we went through it and I just couldn't understand at that time why we had to say the Stations of the Cross at Christmastime. It was incongruity there but we had a lot of those incongruities in the Novitiate. That was a time to train us and to test our will and to break it if possible. [Laughter] You know it was really infantry it was like a military life, you went there and they were going to put go through all kinds of tests, I believe and we told horror stories. I'd say horror stories you know, the old people who had gone to the Novitiate before us would say it's very, very hard, very disciplined but they went through it. You remember well I'm sure.

R.F. You developed a fraternity of misery so everybody else was being subject to about the same so you learned to endure it.

R.R. Yes, and I never... Linus Williams who was our Master of Juniors when I was in Esopus was very well, more kind of modern person and he was a different type of a Master. Brother Henry Charles was too but Henry Charles was in Canada in kind of the old school but I remember Linus William that was a Junior, he was talking us about his Novitiate and when he was saying about this about the Novitiate he says he spent the happiest days of his life. And I must confess when I went through the Novitiate I didn't find it to be the happiest days of my life.

R.F. Nor did I. [Laughter]

R.R. And it's like a train more and more Philosophy something. Now when I teach Philosophy I tell people when people talk about they're married or the day of their getting married is the happiest days of their lives, some women you know would get a little bit effervescent about these things and about a lover and I'd say if that's the happiest then there's nothing else to look forward to. [Laughter] Enough said about the happiest days of my life [Laughter] I said what else is there to come you know, certainly the Novitiate although it was nice and I enjoyed it very much, it probably wasn't one, couple of my favorite years. The Scholastic, I enjoyed my Scholastic. And yet, I don't regret the Novitiate I liked it. I liked it, take it as it comes.

R.F. Well you came over to the Scholasticate in '49 and you were a freshman. You haven't taken any college courses?

R.R. No, because I had graduated in the Novitiate from high school.

R.F. No, I mean older students who came in like Cornelius Russell was in my group.

R.R. Yes, in my group we had Harry Jones and we had Denny Murphy and Raymond Siefert and a few others. These are the fellows who come to my mind right now.

R.F. These guys had taken some college courses.

R.R. Yes, well they were actually about four years ahead of me in academic life. They graduated from high school in '44. I graduated from grammar school in '44, you know. And then he went to the service too.

R.F. Yes, Harry Jones listed in the service for a couple of years.

R.R. When Harry Jones came to the Novitiate, he was an experienced individual and when he out to weed around the rhubarb patch he wore his best clothes because his other clothes hadn't come yet. And there was a sign for the rhubarb patch and there he was and I walked by him and he was with the shovel and doing the work he had to do. He had his watch on and he had everything and I said "The poor guy he'll never stay" and he did, he stayed. He stayed.

R.F. Yes, he did. He was a good friend of mine.

R.R. Yes, he was. He just adapted as the rest of us did and they used to go over to the Scholasticate for courses, those people who where taking college courses.

R.F. Yes, they would go over and take the courses.

R.R. Yes, yes.

R.F. Well, when you arrived at the Scholasticate, Brother Paul Ambrose was the Master of Scholastics.

R.R. Yes, he was.

R.F. And who were your other teachers?

R.R. Oh, for Chemistry we had Brother Adrian August and he was the organist you know and he was the musician or music teacher in the Novitiate. And then we had Brother Francis Xavier for Mathematics. Brother Paul Ernest taught us Logic and then

we had Dr. Schroeder and we had Georgie Burns the Historian. We began with Stephen Aime.

R.F. Victor Aime.

R.R. Victor Aime, yes, he taught us History for one year. I think in the next year he went to Novitiate in Tyngsboro.

R.F. He died, didn't he?

R.R. Oh, later in Tyngsboro, I remember having Georgie Burns come and teaching us you know. George, there's a house that's being named after him here.

R.F. Yes, the Burn Residence. Yes, he came my senior year so he came in '49 or '50 and he taught Economics.

R.R. So you were a senior when I was freshman?

R.F. Right, so how did you find life, you say you enjoyed the Scholastiate?

R.R. Well, I liked it. I liked it because well we had our studies and they were always very well organized and we had our time to study and we had a little more freedom. You know, you always went in groups you could go to the library when you wanted to go to the library. And you could do different things and I know Brother Paul Ambrose who was always interested in my getting better at music would allow me to go over to the chapel and I would go to the chapel maybe three, three days a week for a half hour or an hour to play the organ and practice and that's where they really helped me out with the books you know and gave me books. It was a different environment than the Novitiate here. They were trying to help you cultivate some of the talents that you have that would be worthwhile as a teacher and an educator, also stressing the spiritual life. We had a lot of interesting things that we did in the Novitiate rather than in the Scholastiate,

like we had the plays and we where able to maybe take a walk outside of the grounds. We didn't do that too often in the Novitiate. We had that big wall there but every now and then, you could go to Brother Paul and say "Might I go out with two other Brothers?" Remember we used to go out in three's and off we'd go walking and come back and we thought we where kind of treated with more maturity perhaps you know. Then also they used to take us to the IBM plant and to see that so there were a lot of things that they tried to adapt our interest in and Brother Paul was pretty modern in his own way and seeing into the future about the life of a Brother, I believe anyway. And his sermons, his talks when we talked you always had a good point to them and he was kind of practical minded you know and then he would take care of our, like send us to the doctor. He did a lot of things for us I believe, you know. So I enjoyed the Scholastiate pretty much. I was in charge of the typewriters. That was my *key*. We all had *keys* and my *key* was to fix the typewriters so I learned how to do that, not that I learned how to do it efficiently but I did it and in those days too no one taught us how to type you just had to go up there and start to type. And I was just lucky because I played the piano so I got pretty good at it in the beginning you know.

R.F. Yes, the typewriters... The typewriter room was upstairs over the central rec room, maybe twelve or ten typewriters.

R.R. Yes, well we all had a lot of little different things that Brother Paul would do. Like the day before Lent started, he would get us down into the big studying room area in front of the Marian Building and he would give us ice cream, you know, bring some ice cream around 7:30 at night and some soda, cookies and there were about sixty of us there then.

R.F. That was your Mardi Gras. [Laughter]

R.R. Yes, that was it. It was a nice little celebration where as we didn't do those things you know in the Novitiate. Brother Paul had a little more of a secular thrust I suppose.

R.F. But did you ever take a walk to Esopus?

R.R. Yes, I did. I did that ten mile walk on January 26th was it, St. Paul's Day and we used to, you could take the bus over there if you wanted to I believe.

R.F. Not in my day, in your day maybe.

R.R. Maybe not in mine either. We took a bus back I know. Yes, I made that trip. The three of us went all the way over, walked over the bridge and all the way up Route 9, 9A.

R.F. 9W.

R.R. 9W and it was a long walk. And when we got there and then we would go under the clock in the English village and we'd all meet there. Then the bus came or the truck came and brought the food over for us and we had a nice picnic. And also I found about the mission to go back when I talk about the picnic. We got our outings to the Novitiate every three months or so and I used to love to go over to Esopus or any other place. They had a lot of food there, like pancakes. [Laughter] It might sound pretty simple but when you can make your own pancake outside near the boathouse and you could go back for seconds and thirds and no one looked or looking at you, you know, it was quite a treat I thought. [Laughter] We had different foods, little special things like peaches and things that we didn't have in the Novitiate on a steady basis. Although we used to have our peanut butter and honey. That was always interesting. I still make that myself. I buy

some peanut butter and some honey and mix it and have it with toast. I remember the Novitiate all the time when we had that.

R.F. That was the Sunday night supper with French bread. [Laughter]

R.R. Even for lunch we had it.

R.F. Did you ever go to Camp Sunset?

R.R. Yes, I did. I went to Camp Sunset and I remember how we had those cabins and then when we got up in the morning we had to go wash and we had to go down to where the basins were, where the faucets were, where the sinks were. It was down a big hill and I remember getting up early enough well, and then we had our prayer, whatever we did then but I remember getting up and I was running down the hill. I just forgot that the momentum would carry me faster than my legs would work. [Laughter] I rolled down most of the hill until I got to the basin. [Laughter] I also remember too, we had the play we had to have a little church there.

R.F. Yes, very nice chapel.

R.R. Yes and it had an organ but the organ had to be patched up where the pumps were and all of that, the bellows. So this little Chinese Brother, Peter Bosco, I was talking to him and he said, "Well, we can fix that up" he said because he was more mechanically inclined than I was. So we went to Brother Paul Ambrose's infirmary which was at the camp Sunset. Brother Paul Ambrose wasn't there so we took his tape, all the tape he had. We went back to the chapel and we fixed the organ so I was able to pump it and we were about to get music out of it and air and all that. When Brother Paul came at nighttime and looked for the tape, he couldn't find the tape. He wondered what had happened to it. And we told him I guess or maybe Brother Peter Bosco confessed but Brother Paul

Ambrose didn't get upset you know he just said, "Well..." he said, "You should have asked me. I would have gotten you some good tape." I remember those were very, very good summer days in Camp Sunset. We didn't have much. We had that pond. We used call it the pond and then we had singing at night and all used to sing and tell stories and we worked. We had a lot of freedom then. Of course there wasn't anyplace to go.

R.F. That's right. [Laughter]

R.R. [Laughter] It was a nice place to socialize and do different things and read and have the time to yourselves.

R.F. Some of the slides that you donated, I've been able to isolate about fifteen slides on Camp Sunset. I'll probably ask you to identify who the people are.

R.R. Oh, yes. Sure.

R.F. They were almost certainly taken around in '49 or '50 or '51.

R.R. Remember, we had that big hall where we used to eat.

R.F. Yes, that's another interesting connection. Sunset Lake is the origin or source for Black Creek, which is the creek which runs past Esopus on the end that's past New Paltz and all the way up in the hills. Of course the Marist property ran but they didn't know that connection. I just discovered that. It was very interesting, it was a nice camp. It was used mostly I think for the Juniors and the Student Brothers for vacation. It was never used as a public camp, all the Marist Brothers.

R.R. When Henry Charles was the Director General after those years of being a Master of Novices, I remember he had a little... He had a station wagon. He didn't drive it but he had someone driving, someone could drive it and he was like in charge of Camp Marist (Sunset). He fixed it up. He was the one who painted it and did all that kind of

stuff. I was very fond of Camp Marist (Sunset) and about ten years ago one Sunday afternoon I took a car and drove out there and I found it. It was nice going back to it again and looking over but the houses are gone. I didn't see the chapel and of course those cabins were all gone but you could see the terrain and then I haven't been back there since. I'd like to go back and see it, maybe ten miles from here, maybe fifteen.

R.F. It's by Plattekill, it's just hard to find.

R.R. It's just hard to find but the college sometimes used to have dances at Villa Baglieri?

R.F. That was the landmark. That's where you made your turn.

R.R. You made your turn, you know when I went there for the college dances I remember Villa Baglieri right down the way to Camp Sunset. And when we were at Camp Sunset as young Brothers, we would take a walk and see Villa Baglieri and you know you look at these places, these nice restaurants and you say well someday I'm going to go to those restaurants and have a meal, something descent. [Laughter] But we didn't do that too much then. I remember we would be taking college students to the dance and chaperone. That's where I went, I would chaperone. [Laughter]

R.F. How many years did you spend as a Scholastic?

R.R. I spent two years as a Scholastic.

R.F. It was supposed to be three, wasn't it?

R.R. It was supposed to be three, right. And one of the things was that in those days they would tell you what you were going to major in or you would pick and you know some years they were like Mathematics and Science or Languages. And in my year we could choose from Biology and English. I don't think there were any others. I didn't

want to major in English and so I majored in Biology and I didn't care for it too much. So when I got into my sophomore year we took courses from the Brother Aloysius. It was Brother Aloysius that came from St. Ann's Academy who taught Biology and he was Marcel Henry's brother I think it was, do you remember him? Anyway, they were good teachers and we took the courses and we did well, we even had experiences, we had a cat, we found an old cat so we gassed it and we went around like a bel-jar and where we cut it up we couldn't afford to buy one. I only add that. I don't know if we could afford to buy one. We didn't have too many frozen products in those days but it was an experience. [Laughter] And the guys there were Damien, Brother Hyndsman and Brother Bill Buckley, those fellows were also Biology majors and they were part of the group. And when I became a sophomore I thought I would like to go into Mathematics so I decided to. I said to Paul Ambrose, "If you need some teachers I'd be glad to go out" and so they took me at my word and he said "You'll be going out teaching after your sophomore year". He told me this when I was a sophomore. I was only twenty years old at the time and when I got the assignment it was to St. Helena's High School in the Bronx. I was supposed to teach the seventh grade. They didn't want to put in high school because they thought I looked too young, so we went over to Esopus to work. Do you remember how we used to go into Esopus to work to build the Juniorate? And that was one of the things we did in the Scholasticate, we went over for weeks and worked. Well, when I went over to Esopus, I remember working with the Brothers there for one week before we went to our assignments outside and then Tommy Austin was now a Provincial and he came over and he said, "I think I'm going to change you from St. Helena's because there's not a piano there or an organ there and you would have to go over to the

church, St. Helena's which was quite a distance from the school." So I didn't know where I was going to go; he said you might go to St. Ann's Academy. Well, I wound up going to St. Michael's. I guess I was the only guy who had three assignments in one week.

[Laughter]

R.F. That's Mount St. Michael's

R.R. Mount St. Michael's yes, I'm the only fellow who had three assignments in one week you know, they didn't know where to put me. [Laughter] From there, Mount St. Michael's, I wasn't so keen on going to the Mount actually and my reason was that Mount St. Michael had a football team that used to come to Lawrence, Massachusetts and play Central Catholic and beat Central Catholic all the time. [Laughter] So I said I'll get even with those Mount kids. [Laughter] So I went to the Mount, Brother John Lawrence was the Director and he had been my principal at Central Catholic. I knew him well and I felt comfortable enough and I was assigned to teach the sixth grade in 1951. We had a nice time; it was a pleasant experience because I did a lot of things. In the afternoon we'd go to recreation. I would organize the baseball game for the kids. We would stay out a half hour instead of fifteen minutes and then I would get up and play with them and I still was not very good at baseball but I was pretty sensational with the sixth graders. [Laughter] So it was very nice and I enjoyed that and I only taught sixth grade for one year and then after I went to teach high school. I keep in touch or rather there are some students around that sort of keep in touch with me that I had in the sixth grade. One of the things that was funny in the sixth grade was one parent and the name was Wall, Mrs. Wall. She said to me one day when she was coming for her son at three thirty in the afternoon she said, "Oh, my son enjoys your class" and she says you know, she says

“Isn’t it wonderful?” she says to “As a teacher growing up with the students.” [Laughter] I guess that’s right, I’m just twenty, and I said “Thank you, thank you very much.” We had a lot of fun, it was interesting and it was the same class in fact that Brother Edward Lawrence had in fourth grade. Brother Ed Lawrence taught the fourth grade two years before I had gotten to the Mount and then I had the same class the same kids that he had, same students. So we did share a lot of stories, you know.

R.F. Brother Edward Lawrence is Ed Cashin. He was the Academic Vice President here for five years. How did you complete your college education?

R.R. Well, when I got to the Mount we used to have extension courses there at Mount St. Michael. So I took extension courses at the Mount and we went down to St. Ann’s Academy for one lesson, like on a Wednesday and Brother Terrance Jones who was teaching at the Mount was very good in Mathematics and he would teach us Calculus down in St. Ann’s Academy. We would have a car, sometimes we had a car from the house and sometimes we would take the football coach’s car, which was staying at the barn but the director didn’t know that but Terry Jones had the key. [Laughter] And in those days you could do a lot of things, [Laughter] so we would take the car. There were four of us, Billy Kane was one of them and Brian Lonergan was another fellow. He would take extension courses but not the same ones and we took courses like in History. George Robert taught us History. Cyril Robert taught us Education courses. Bill Murphy taught us Psychology, Educational Psychology and Terry Jones taught us Mathematics. So we’d go down, all the way down to St. Ann’s which is about twenty miles from Mount St. Michael and sometimes we’d go down by subway and most of the time we would want to go down by car if we could. And then we would come back and stop at

the Wedge Inn on White Plains, not White Plains Road but Bronx Road or something. We'd get a wedge and we'd get some soda and that would be our supper. We did a lot of things like that. And then we also had courses on a Saturday morning, not at the Mount so the fellows who were at St. Ann's Academy, these fellow who were taking the courses would have to travel up to the Mount and take the courses. So I finished the degree in two years. Instead of graduating from Marist in '52, I graduated in '53.

R.F. What did you do for post-graduate?

R.R. Oh, I guess I should tell you. I got my degree in Mathematics from Marist but then when I went to post-graduate work I switched to Philosophy. It began actually, I was very ambitious so I thought and I was allowed to take courses in the summer before we... I never worked for the project. You see the project was building Marist College, this with everything else. And Linus just thought my fingers were too tender [Laughter] and as a piano player I shouldn't be there mixing cement or anything like that. [Laughter] He said something to that effect. So it allowed me to take courses and I began and I took a course in Introduction to Geometry, a graduate course and I took Number Theory and I also took courses in Philosophy with Plato and Aristotle.

R.F. At Fordham?

R.R. At Fordham. I went to Fordham. I only just took two courses, one in Math and one in Philosophy and eventually I did a dissertation on Leibniz on the Introduction to it. I had put it down in the Mathematical Nature of the Monads but when Betty Sammon, who was one of my readers saw that the title, she said "You better switch it to an Introduction to the Study of the Mathematic Nature of the Monad" because she was one too, a stickler for historical facts. So I got my degree in that and Philosophy and we put

down majors in Philosophy and Mathematics, stuff like that. Father Sommerville was my mentor and he had taught me Leibniz and I still like Leibniz actually and Monads and little things running around. People ask me what it is and I tell them it's a simple substance and I let it go at that. [Laughter] So I got my major. Also, when I was at the Mount taking these courses in '53, I taught at Marist College extension school because there was a guy at the Mount, Brother Vincent Dominic, do you remember him?

R.F. Yes.

R.R. And he came around to us as assistant principal and he and I got along very well and he was assigned to teach a course in Marist College extension school, teaching the Brothers that hadn't finished. So I hear he was an outstanding teacher in Mathematics in his day so I said to him "Do you mind if I sat in on your course" and he said, "No, no", so I wanted to see his technique so every Friday night we would have the course and he would go in and he would teach it and I would listen and there were about five other Brothers there. Then one evening, one week he said to me he said, "I won't be able to take the course. Do you think you can handle it for tonight?" and I said, "Sure I can teach it, I have a degree." It was Introduction; it was college Algebra. He said "Alright, could you replace me?" I said "Sure" so I replaced him and the next week I went back and he came and he taught and the next week later he taught and then he said "Could you take the course this time? I can't make it." I said, "Sure." Before I know it, I was teaching the course if you know Brother Vincent Dominic you could understand. [Laughter] So I taught the course and then I began to teach in the extension school at the Mount. And then I went on for Ph.D., you know in Philosophy and I got all those

subjects. And I also taught at the extension school in Tyngsboro, I taught the Novitiate for one year from '55 to '56.

R.F. Oh, you were stationed up there?

R.R. Yes, I taught at the Mount one year of grammar school and then three years of high school and that was an interesting thing too because when I went to Mount and I wanted to, they said let him teach in high school. I want to teach a Math course but there was another Brother called Simeon Earnest who was teaching Spanish and he was changed to Central Catholic. So the Provincial said "Can you teach Spanish?" Well I said, "Why sure, I can teach Spanish. I had taken it in the Novitiate." [Laughter] I had taken four years of French all through my training and Spanish with Brother Adolf Armond. We did the two years of regent's work in six months. We were college kids then, you know we had a background in language. So that's when I was going to go to the high school to teach because [Tommy Austin] put me to the Novitiate because in the summertime I was there as a music teacher in the Novitiate up there in Tyngsboro and I was studying Spanish during the day with Brother Leo Hyacinth. But I went to the Mount and taught Spanish for about three years and Mathematics and then I went to Tyngsboro for a year and taught in the Novitiate there in Mathematics and Spanish also. And The Lives of the Early Brothers, remember all those subjects? And I was music teacher too up there.

R.F. When you, back tracking just a little bit, didn't you take courses with the organist of St. Patrick's?

R.R. Yes, Fred Short, Fred Short his name. He was the organist at St. Patrick's Cathedral and he knew the Brothers. Gus Nolan used to bring some St. Ann's kids down to the Cathedral.

R.F. Oh yes, the choir, Gerry Weiss and Gus Nolan.

R.R. So somehow I got introduced to Fred Short and I told him how I was interested in learning how to play the organ, so he said, "Well come on down and see me." So I said, "Okay." He said, "I'm playing at the church on Saturday and you could come down and then after I could give you an hour." He did this for nothing, I didn't have to pay anything. Except that I was teaching at Mount St. Michael in the Bronx and the church I found out was in Bayridge, Brooklyn. [Laughter] Our Lady of the Angels always comes back to me know that I think about it so dutifully at noon time like a clock and this was after cleaning up the gym on a Saturdays bingo, I would get on the subway and go all the way to Bayridge, practice, did my lesson, he gave me a little music lesson. He showed me this and he gave me some stuff to study. And then I would go all the way back to the Mount and got back to the Mount at about quarter past five just in time for the [Vespers] at half past five. [Laughter] So it was a sacrifice to go all the way down there but I did it. I did it for like six months and then for some reason I just felt like, I just petered out you know I didn't have to go down there anymore.

R.F. Did you learn anything from it?

R.R. Yes, yes I did. He was amazing, I mean you should see how his fingers could go over that keyboard you know and how his feet could go on, his left foot and his right foot that's the thing being able to use those pedals and being a lot out of it. I was doing pretty well with the pedals. I don't practice anymore but I learned a lot and I was able to use my

feet and get the right touch in combinations and I find it to be very inspirational, the whole thing. Obviously my eyes just pop out when someone plays the piano and I think I can learn something.

R.F. Well, that's in the Bayridge section. I could tell you where taking the lessons down at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

R.R. Well, I went all the way down to Bayridge, long ride. That was about two hours from the Mount.

R.F. Well we're getting fairly close to the end of my hour I think. How much time have we got?

John Ansley (Archivist): About ten minutes.

R.F. So far we have you off in Tyngsboro teaching some college extension courses. Of course by that time I believe the training of the Brothers had changed. They were no longer accepting freshman into the Juniorate. They were doing second, third and fourth year and then the Postulant was the first year of college. Who was the Master of Novices at that time?

R.R. Brother Pius Victor was the Master of Novices. Also interesting, when I was going to St. Michael's, I taught there. I took over advanced algebra class in mid-year and who was in my class but John Malich.

R.F. Who later became Provincial.

R.R. [Laughter] And then he said he was going to be a Brother. And when I went to the Novitiate to teach who was a Novice but Brother John Malich and I taught Tom Delaney, John Malich, all of that group. I taught them The Life of the Early Brothers.

R.F. Tom Delaney is a mentor now.

R.R. Is a mentor now, yes, so and that was from '55 to '56. Then I went back to the Mount for a couple years. Then I taught here on weekends in '56, '57 at Marist.

R.F. You came down from Tyngsboro?

R.R. No, no I was in Tyngsboro '55, '56 and then when I went back to the Mount '56 to '59, Brother Paul Ambrose gave me the assignment, Frank (Bro. Francis Xavier) was building the St. Ann's Academy (new Molloy High School) then. He used to go down there to work down there in '56.

R.F. Frank was still here I believe until '59.

R.R. We used to meet on the train. Was he living, maybe living down at... Not St. Ann's, at Molloy. When did they move to Molloy?

R.F. I got the impression that Frank moved to Molloy the year you came up here.

R.R. Full-time.

R.F. I was named president and Frank, I remember, meeting with the faculty and asking Frank to stay on because I learned he didn't want to and he said, "No it's time to bring in a new person, Richard Rancourt. This is why I kept making my move to try to get you up here. So you came here probably in '59?"

R.R. I came full-time, '56, '57. I taught on weekends in Ethics and then I got my degree in '59 in Philosophy.

R.F. That was probably it. Frank said now he's qualified and get him up here.

R.R. Yes, yes. Then I came up.

R. F. So you came up here in '59?

R.R. '59, yes.

R.F. And then so your first tour of duty here as a teacher, as a full-time teacher, began in '59 and when did it go to?

R.R. '69.

R.F. To '69? That was fast ball.

R.R. Yes, I was here ten years and then we were finishing the chapel.

R.F. Yes that was '67 and '68.

R.R. I was just living one year, '68, and then when I was there, I didn't come back to Marist. I went to Hayes for a year, Cardinal Hayes one year. I was Director for Hayes House and then I went to St. Agnes as the principal of the high school for four years.

R.F. And then you taught at Pace University.

R.R. And then I went to Pace University and I taught at Pace University for about four or five years. When I was the principal of St. Agnes, I was taking courses in Educational Administration at Pace and when I got the degree I asked if I could teach a course. So the guy said, "Yes, you can teach a course" so I taught part-time when I was principal and then I went there full-time. The dean had an opening and called me up. He said, "Would you like to teach here full-time?" and I said, "Yes." So I did that for four or five years and then I wound up back here.

R.F. In what year did you return?

R.R. Come back?

R.F. Yes, when did you wound up back here? In the eighties sometime?

R.R. Well, I came back here in late December 1980. I was talking to Paul Ambrose up in Lawrence and I was now, I had just finished my work at Pace and I had, I just took six months to do some private study and so I and he said, "What are you going to do"? I

said, "Well, I'm going to get job in some college" and he didn't say anything but then Joe Bell had visited Paul up in Lawrence and talked about the Refugee Assistance Program here at the college. They were looking for a director. The Refugee Assistance Program was a program for Vietnamese refugees, Laotians, Cambodians, any kind of refugees you can pick up and Joe Bell had a grant. You remember this?

R.F. I was out of the college by that time.

R.R. And then I applied for the job because I had been in Guam. I had worked in Guam for one, for a couple of summers and I had visited tent city where the Vietnamese were.

R.F. The refugees.

R.R. Then I had my language experiences too so I was, I got the job to be the director for the Refugee Assistance Program. It was funny enough because the guy who was the majordomo up in Social Services in Albany, the Administrator Joe Ruel was the best friend of my officemate down in Pace University. He was a Korean guy, Bein Nam but I got the job not from Bein Nam, I got the job by applying here and getting an interview. So I stayed on that job for three and a half years. That was a tough job. We had the Vietnamese, Laotian woman who died. We had the college kids who would tutor the refugees and I would teach the college kids how to tutor and during their free time they would come and they would get paid. They get paid maybe four dollars an hour and so I kept all the records and used to get the car and go pick up the refugees and bring them back. We had night courses and all day too, every day we had courses and three and a half years. When I finished that work, the lady who used to come down to loan it to me she said, "We're not going to fund this program anymore because there's no

refugees in the area” and so she said, “Would you like to go to Brooklyn because we have places there?” I said, “No, I think I’d like to go back teaching” [Laughter] It was tough you know, I liked it and I could have done other things but I said, “You know I’d rather go to teach.” Now I got a job teaching here in the Math Department.

R.F. Okay, lets back track to your first tour of duty which was in the sixties. Did you do, didn’t you do a semester or a year on sabbatical over in Paris?

R.R. What I did here was I taught here, came in ‘59 and I was you know, I taught a variety of subjects. I taught the, there were all young Brothers then it was never just, a little seasoning of lay students. I remember and I taught Ethics, Philosophical Psychology, Metaphysics. You know and then I used to go to Fordham to take courses and I did that and finally took my Ph.D. Comprehensive, then I had my sabbatical. Then I went down to the Mount to study during September of 1963. That was the November JFK died at the Mount and I took my Ph.D. Comprehensives three Saturdays, six different areas and I passed the Comprehensives Ph.D. Comps and then in January I went to Second Novitiate. Do you remember?

R.F. Yes, you when to Second Novitiate.

R.R. Yes, in ‘64.

R.F. Who did you go with? Oh Gus Nolan.

R.R. Gus, Gus Nolan and maybe Albert was there and John Malachy and all that and Mattie Snowden.

R.F. That was the spring of ‘64?

R.R. The spring of '64 and I came back to the college in '64 of September and stayed here until... Then I went to the Chapter in '68 and then after the Chapter I never came back here. So I always say ten years I was here, that I was associated with the college.

R.F. And Betty Sammon was your mentor down in...

R.R. Betty Sammon was my mentor for my... She was my mentor for my...

R.F. Master's.

R.R. Father [something] was the mentor for the Master's. She was the mentor for the Ph.D. dissertation and which I still have which is not complete yet. However I had gone for a degree in Education Administration and when I got that degree I came back to the college, no I was down at Pace, I was teaching at Pace and I said no sense finishing up this Ph.D. in Philosophy because the jobs where scarce and I got interested in Education and I got interested in being a principal. So I went back to Fordham and they gave me a scholarship at the School of Education. I said, "Okay" and I got the degree, no I wrote the School of Education and I was working as a student there too in graduate school but then I got my job at Pace you see so I told the guy at Fordham I can't keep the job. But here, at Pace, got the job and take the courses, I took four courses and I eventually got a Ph.D. in Math Education. Now I go back to finish my Ph.D. in Philosophy but I don't know what I'm going to do with it. [Laughter] I mean remember in those days it was tough when you think about jobs and what they needed, you know. So I did alright.

R.F. Well, I think we're going to cut it off here. There's still a lot we'd like to talk to you about, either myself or another interviewer in particular, I guess the second interview will probably concentrate more on your experience as a teacher, your experience with the Athletic Department and sort of the quasi- Chaplin. And I guess your impression of

students and what's been happening at Marist because you're been able to watch it now for almost thirty years so you've seen a tremendous amount of transition. So hopefully we'll get another session with you, if you don't mind.

R.R. Sure. No, no I don't mind.

R.F. And meanwhile I want to thank you for everything that you had to say. I think I was very informative. [Laughter]

R.R. It just brought back a lot of memories you know, [Laughter] very interesting. Names came up from my memory now that I had never think of too frequently.

R.F. Well, when we get to transcribe this we'll probably have to ask you for some names, you referred to some Brothers. I'm sure John wouldn't know them.

R.R. Oh, yes sure.

R.F. I probably knew them by nicknames but we won't get into that. [Laughter]

R.R. Right, right okay.

R.F. Okay, thanks very much Richard.

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