

James “Jim” Steinmeyer

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, NY

Transcribed by Kyra Walker

For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

James Steinmeyer

Transcript – James “Jim” Steinmeyer

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Summary:

Jim Steinmeyer speaks of his years at Marist. He talks of his career in theatre, naming his favorite plays, the students he’s directed, and the peers who influenced him.

Gus Nolan (00:02):

Today is Friday, July 17th. We're having an interview with Jim Steinmeyer. He is a graduate of Marist College. He is a participant in the theater productions that go on here, and he's here today for an interview. Good afternoon, Jim.

Jim Steinmeyer (00:27):

How are you Gus?

GN (00:28):

Good. Jim as you saw from the outline that I made available, we'd like to start with kind of a personal overview-- say something about where you grew up, schools you went to, fields of interests--kind of a general background. But no dates are necessary. If you want to put them in, that's perfectly alright.

JS (00:50):

I grew up in a little strip of New York City called Glendale sandwiched between two cemeteries in Queens, and was educated at St. Pancras elementary school grades K through eight. And I think had the typical post-war experience of a New Yorker--played stick ball and punch ball and went to the local park, and was lucky enough to get into...was accepted at Christ the King high school and was part of the first graduating class of Christ the King. And it was there that I was introduced to the Marist Brothers and Marist. Now my family--particularly my mom--was very religious woman and I was steeped in the Roman Catholic tradition through elementary school, and then having gone to a parochial high school. And there I started out like I think a lot of New York City boys in the sixties did, in love with-

GN (02:07):

You lost your faith there? [Laughter]

JS (02:15):

[Laughter] That was a little later. I was a Yankee fan because the national league teams had deserted in New York and I...baseball was my thing. And then...I mean...however, I did make the varsity baseball team. However, in order to play...to actually start, the rest of the team had to be wiped out in nuclear war for me to ever begin. And luckily a brother by the name of Michael Gerard--Mike Kramer--one day took me aside and sat me down and said, 'what are you wasting your time playing baseball? You have other talents.' And that's when I became interested in theater. And I was in two shows at Christ the King my junior and senior year. I was in *Stalag 17*, and I played the Traitor Price. And then I was in *You Can't Take It with You*. And played *Tony the Fiancé*. And that was my first introduction into theater, and I loved it. And then as a result of...I loved Christ the King. I loved the education I received. I loved high school. And I...in addition to having been raised with a real strong faith, I entered the Marist Brothers and people like Phil Robert, who was a recruiter at the time and Mike Kramer and Freddie Lambert and just tremendous influences.

GN (03:57):

Was there not a brother named Aiden Francis at that time? I guess he had moved off.

JS (04:01):

He had moved. For instance, Luke...I forget, Francis is...but it...you know, I chose to enter in September of '66.

GN (04:15):

And you went there to the Marist-

JS (04:18):

The Marist novitiate in Esopus. And there were 36 of us I think in our group, and that's when I met Gus Nolan and Bill Levine and another tremendous-

GN (04:33):

Scholars all [laughter]

JS (04:34):

Indeed. And Bensky. But despite the rigor of it, to this day it's a very critical part of my life. It really changed who I was then and who I am now. And as a matter of fact there was an experience when I was a novice--my second year--Gus Nolan had the idea that we should become involved in the local community. And a group of us applied to Vista, and I was one of them. And Gus arranged that whole thing. And six of us moved into Highland that summer and we worked with migrant laborers. And it truly...the sixties were a very turbulent period, and very aware. And I mean, I got to see things that I just would not have seen and became aware of poverty and the plight of migrant laborers. And that really...it affected me. It changed me. Now because I was at the novitiate, I didn't have the opportunity to participate in theater during those years. But-

GN (06:03):

Although every day was a kind of an acting day [Laughter]

JS (06:05):

It was a pageant play. [Laughter] But I did develop a real love for English--the word, the language and writing. And I decided my major as English. So I did two years--'did' sounds like a sentence. I spent two years in Esopus and then came over to the college and lived in Fontaine, the temporary building. And I had a study area in the old Marian building, which was a real experience. I forget...I think I was in the cram, we called it-

GN (07:03):

Did they have lights?

JS (07:04):

Well we had strung some Christmas lights through-

GN (07:08):

No heat. [Laughter]

JS (07:09):

No [laughter]. No heat to speak of. And that was my first year on campus, and I was introduced to just...well, phenomenal...the people who are truly teachers. Jephtha Lanning. Jerry Cox. Milton Teichman. Bob Lewis.

GN (07:40):

Did you take anything else? Like chemistry or physics or math? Biology?

JS (07:44):

Yes. I took bio with Hugh Turley. I became very good friends--eventually--with Vinnie Toscano. His daughter and my daughters went to school together, and I'll never forget--I was in a history class with Vinnie and I was given an assignment to prove there was no French Revolution, which I found rather difficult and confounding.

GN (08:22):

That's the widespread of the education at the time. You're talking about the teachers and their influence and their dedication to teaching. Where is your college going? You're a major now in English, is that right?

JS (08:39):

That's correct. In the teacher preparation program.

GN (08:43):

Okay. Besides that, at the college did you have any other interests? Well you mentioned the theater, but were you involved in painting or what else could they be as...outside of school? Did you have a key, a particular hobby to pursue? Did you work in the library? Did you work in the farm? Did you work on cutting grass? Did you work on-

JS (09:15):

Actually...to back up for just a minute, I have to mention at the novitiate, Brother John Berchmans. Who...I used to enjoy when I was home helping my dad, but when I got to the novitiate and Brother John Berchmans, I truly began to learn carpentry and he is the only man--present company excluded--whom I believe I knew a saint. The man was just-

GN (09:50):

Well present comedy is excluded on that one okay.

JS (09:53):

But I learned carpentry, and that became a real interest. I'd work on sets in the shop and I really began to develop an interest in that, and cooking.

GN (10:06):

And cooking?

JS (10:06):

Yes.

GN (10:07):

I see. Okay. A tailor shop was mentioned recently. Were you also involved in tailoring?

JS (10:14):

No, I wasn't. I just recall the shell of the building and having to...having the old cassocks stored there.

GN (10:25):

Oh yes. Yeah, right. And that had to do with a fire, I believe that took place in that building and left a certain aroma in the cassocks. That's the habits the brothers wore. People hearing cassocks might think of something else now. Pronunciation is a little bit off. What would be one of your fondest memories at Marist College? I guess it might've been Marian in those days. Maybe it was Marist, I don't know when the change took place. Would you say...was there ever a play that you put on?

JS (11:03):

Oh, absolutely. *Between Two Thieves*. Jim Britt directed, it was the second show I was in and I was lucky enough to get a lead and it had only run on Broadway I think three nights when it closed. But Jim was passionate about it. The premise was that there was a Jewish family traveling the world retrying individuals for the death of Christ. And there would be witnesses such as Saint Peter and Pontius Pilate, Herod. And then it was billed as one act, an intermission--supposedly the family would gather and come up with a verdict and then return after intermission simply to state the verdict. Suddenly, however, before they could a member of the audience would jump up and began arguing a case. And these members of the audience were all metaphors, various biblical characters like Mary Magdalene. There was a prostitute in the audience who jumped up and there was a blind man who came down from the audience.

GN (12:14):

They were all part of the cast?

JS (12:16):

They were plants. But we also prepared for the possibility of activists who-

GN (12:23):

Would participate.

JS (12:24):

Exactly. And that...considering it was only my second collegiate production and the challenge of trying to anticipate that, that show has always been with me.

GN (12:39):

Okay, let's leave the college and go on to professional life, if we can call it that. Your teaching career. Where did you start teaching?

JS (12:47):

I actually began at the Poughkeepsie Middle School and I complete...because of my religious studies I had to attend September to January and...but graduated-technically had enough credits in January, so therefore I could go out teaching and there was a position open at the middle school, which is where I had done my student teaching and they asked me to take the job--a sixth grade class. Now I had never taught a self-contained class. So I was teaching science and math and reading groups and history. And it was possibly-

GN (13:34):

A challenge.

JS (13:34):

Yes. The most challenging assignment I ever had. I lost a student on a trip to New York. It was terrifying.

GN (13:42):

Was he found again? [Laughter]

JS (13:43):

Yes. And the mom blamed the child and not us luckily. I was lucky enough then to find a position in the Wappingers Central School District, a seventh grade English position. And I began teaching at Wappingers Junior High for a department head, a man by the name of Dennis Hannon, whom several people at Marist knew well and I must say he was just one of the finest educators I have ever worked for. But I did...I taught 12 years at the junior high. I taught seven, eight and nine. And what we termed the regulars classes, but also underachievers I taught a lot of sections of students who needed help. Then after 12 years, I asked for a transfer to the senior high and I moved up to Roy C. Ketchum High School in Wappingers where I taught 10, 11 and 12 honors classes. We had an electives program and I was able to teach Shakespeare. We had a history of drama class that I taught, theater, practicum class. And I taught the writing four section, which was the highest level. We had one semester, they were in placed in a writing program and I taught the upper level writers. And I...at the time I was also directing at Ketchum. So I...for 21 years, I was very, very happy in Wappingers but my wife was working for Xerox and she had a transfer. So off we went to Rochester, New York. She was with Xerox, but ended up switching to Kodak when she was up there--when we were up there. But I spent five years there and it was very interesting at that point in my life because I had become so committed to theater that teaching didn't scare me. I had been doing that for 21 years. But suddenly I began asking, 'where do I direct, how do I get my foot in the door?' And strangely enough, they were perhaps five of the most productive and creative years that I had. I directed for the SUNY Brockport theater department and I got a chance to do *The Crucible* there and *Glass Menagerie*, which I would never have gotten my hands on at a different level. And I directed for Nazareth College and local community theater groups, a professional group at the Jewish Community Center. And it was truly possibly the most creative time of my life in terms of theater.

GN (16:39):

Is it also one of the most demanding though? Don't you work off hours as it were?

JS (16:44):

I was teaching eight until three. Then I'd get in the car and drive to SUNY Brockport and have a production meeting. Then I direct from seven until 10, and then drive home, correct some papers, get

up early and correct papers and start the routine again. It was...but I felt like I was running to catch up with myself, or my interest. And then we returned in '97. My wife took a new job in Manhattan, and Wappingers was kind enough to call me back. They actually...they gave me my tenure back. They gave me sick days that I had left behind. They gave me my seniority and--both when I was in Rochester and when I returned--I was able to establish a theater program at both high schools, the one in Rochester and in Wappingers. So I-

GN (17:44):

When you returned to Wappingers, where did you teach?

JS (17:45):

I taught at Roy C. Ketchum High School again and I was able to institute theater one, theater two class and then a script writing class.

GN (17:59):

Are you a solo on this or do you have colleagues who are also involved?

JS (18:04):

On the academic side it's pretty much solo. The schools don't...won't support much more than that. But on the extracurricular side, I had a colleague whom I've worked with for 25 years, Rosemary Eval. And Rosemary has... I've been lucky enough to direct here at Marist, and when I pick up the phone Rosemary shows up with costumes and...so she's been...and then during that time, I was lucky enough to teach here at Marist for a semester. I taught Jerry Cox's-

GN (18:47):

Well let's come back a bit. How does that happen? How do you get back to Marist and then wind up in a classroom teaching? Because that's quite a step I believe.

JS (18:58):

There were two people responsible for that. One is a Marist alumnus, Sue Lesinski. I think Sue graduated in '91. Out of the blue, she called me at Ketchum and said my name was recommended by Jerry Cox. So, Jerry was the advisor to Marist College Council of Theater Arts, and they were looking for a director for *Brighton Beach Memoirs*. And Sue called me at his recommendation, and I really jumped at the opportunity. The thought of being able to come back here was-

GN (19:41):

That would be about 1990?

JS (19:42):

Exactly. And so, I directed here *Brighton Beach* in '90, *House of Blue Leaves* in '91 and *Fools* by Neil Simon in '92. And that's...I would love to have remained, but that's when my wife had the transfer. Which kind of ended that period of contact with Marist due to geography.

GN (20:08):

Then you go to Syracuse, or Rochester rather and then back?

JS (20:11):

Yes.

GN (20:12):

In those...well, it's a question that's from both parts of your theater career...I was asking--are there any of those students who participated in those plays who are still active in theater?

JS (20:28):

Yes. I have a student I taught at the high school level who is a...and has been...he is a graduate of Purchase, of the technical program and has been a Broadway technician for 20 years now. A young man who was an actor and making his living acting is now a playwright in New York. And then some students from Marist in allied fields. Mark Liepis is the producer of the Jimmy Fallon Show now. And I directed Mark. Maria Licari, who is with Good Morning America and I directed her at both the high school and the college level. I have a young man who was the assistant lighting designer on *Mamma Mia*, he is one of mine. A young lady who just a show for us here, a graduate of Purchase and now a Broadway designer. So there have-

GN (21:34):

A couple of students have gone on. I'm going to get back to that again in another way, as you saw from the outline. But let's move ahead to well-- what we might call the historical overview, looking at the place-then and now and the fundamental changes that have taken place on this campus that you have come to work on now. What were the conditions of the first theater? [Laughter] Were they limited?

JS (22:02):

Actually the facility--which still exists today--was fine. It was well designed, but other than the facility, all of those other things we needed.

GN (22:19):

Was there a green room?

JS (22:20):

There was a green room, but it had tools and the necessary lighting instruments. And it was limited, and our funds were very limited. I compare it to what we receive in funding now and I just remember stretching every scrap of muslin-

GN (22:41):

Contributing yourself I suppose, more than you should.

JS (22:44):

I think Jim Britt and Jephtha Lanning were reaching into pockets.

GN (22:51):

So the development is clear, although as you say, the place is fundamentally the same. It's still the same theater and that was well designed, but we have a new curtain. We have some new lights. We have a new sound system. All of this has enhanced, as it were, the place.

JS (23:11):

The thing is...again, having just done a professional production there, it is a very, very well-designed space and totally adequate for...it merely needs to be--as all things do-- just kept up to date. But it...I loved directing in the space. 330 seats-

GN (23:36):

How does that compare to some of the other places you've been?

JS (23:41):

Up at Nazareth college, they had an 1100 seat house. And I found it very difficult to direct in it. In an audience that large...it really does affect how you direct, how you design. I like theater. I'll say to students when you can see them sweat and spit, I think there's an intimacy about this theater that I truly love. And it's more than an adequate house, and it's intimate. I think it's audience-friendly, so I just think it's a perfect size for dramatic productions. Now musical productions and so on, I'm sure they'd like something larger.

GN (24:31):

Did you ever know Bill Davis?

JS (24:32):

Oh, yes. I just saw him a month ago. He considered being on the board of directors of the new company that we're forming, but unfortunately he lives in Manhattan and the travel he felt was too much for him, but he did come to our first organizational meeting, and spoke. We hope actually to perhaps do some readings of his new work.

GN (24:59):

Very good. Okay, that means we have time now to look at some other characters. I would like...there are three, you can take them in any order you want. You mentioned Jerry Cox as one, and then Jephtha, and of course Jim Britt. Pick one.

JS (25:19):

Jim Britt.

GN (25:22):

Okay, let's talk about Jim. What were the principal characteristics that you'd say about Jim?

JS (25:30):

Intensity. Jim was intense and serious about the work, but always did it in a humorous manner. I liked his style. I think Jim taught me about technique. Jim taught me acting technique. He taught me about theater, the mechanics of theater--of directing, of producing a play, of getting the most out of an actor.

GN (26:11):

Do you know anything about his historical background, where he got that from?

JS (26:15):

I know he did serve, and then Jim was at the time what we would have considered a nontraditional student. When I met him, I guess he was around 45 and was returning to school. So during the day he was with us in the classroom, and at night he was the boss. And so he had served in the Navy and I believe had done work either off-Broadway or on Broadway. So I think he was kind of the nuts and bolts guy in my background. Jephtha, I never met a more passionate student of theater and drama than Jephtha. And I think what I learned from him...Stanislavski used to say that you can sit home and read a play, but you go to the theater to see subtext. And Jephtha I think taught me about subtext. He taught me about character. And about analyzing a character that you were going to play, and the interaction of these characters. So and-

GN (27:28):

And he had a wide grasp of the whole historical scene.

JS (27:32):

It went from the Greeks to at the time the most modern of playwrights-Edward Albee at the time. I remember doing one with Jephtha. So it was a breadth of experience that he had. And if you were lucky enough as I was to have him direct and then have him in the classroom, I could marry the two experiences so that what I was learning in the classroom really could be applied to what I was doing on stage. I was in *Incident at Vichy* that he directed, which I liked. It's not Miller's best play, but it's his statement regarding the Holocaust. And I really did enjoy that play and working with Jephtha on that one. And I thought what a credit to him and this young man--there was a character on the stage simply listed as the old Jew, did not have a single word of dialogue. And when the show was reviewed, as they used to be by John Sloper, he got the best review and I thought Jephtha he had just nailed this character and his presence. And then I was in *Calculated Risk*, and Jephtha directed me in that. And talk about a different character. Suddenly I was a corporate individual, which was so far from my experience. As a young person certainly, but also my interest was teaching not corporate life. And you know, I think Jephtha got me there because of it. So he was really the subtext, the meat of the characters. Jerry...I really got to know later-

GN (29:27):

This is Jerry Cox?

JS (29:28):

Jerry Cox, excuse me. I think what Jerry taught me about was the structure of drama, script writing and how a play is literally scripted. How it's put together and the essence of conflict, always looking. I remember Jerry always pounding at where's the conflict, what's the conflict. So I feel very lucky-

GN (29:59):

Did you have Jerry in class?

JS (30:00):

Yes, I did. I took a Shakespeare class with Jerry and also a communication arts class. And that one, I found--I love Shakespeare--but I found the communication arts class very interesting. The old Marshall McLuhan and-

GN (30:16):

Oh yes. Theory of communication. How do we communicate and et cetera, et cetera. Those are the characters, those are the principal directors. Along with that, there's a student body. And is there a good interaction? Would you say that there's a certain quality to a student who wants to participate in theater that is influenced by such people?

JS (30:51):

Oh, there's no two ways about it. There...regardless of whatever temperament you might display elsewhere, anyone who goes on stage there's a touch of the egotist there. But to characterize the groups I worked with, just fascinating and interesting people while I was here. And oddly enough, I think of sometimes the technical people like George Helpin. A big teddy bear of a guy who I think became a doctor, but he was a fabulous carpenter and he'd be in the shop all hours building and he was the most pleasant and genial individual. Or John Sheen, fabulous actor. I remember him in *Look Homeward, Angel*, and just in one scene he destroys the porch. And every night I had to rebuild it. But-

GN (31:59):

Well he was a carpenter too wasn't he?

JS (32:01):

Yes, he was. Yep, but a lot of the Marist Brothers were involved at the time. Ray Armstrong. Kevin...Kevin used to run lines with me. I can't recall his last name. But it...and also at that time Marist was in a transition and more female students were being admitted. And...so there was someone like Bonnie.

GN (32:33):

From Highland.

JS (32:33):

Bonnie McCloud. And a wonderful actor, a really good actor. And Diana DeGrandis--and she's still directing up in Rhinebeck, I believe. But these people...in terms of similarity--one: they were team players; two: very dedicated, and three: pretty intense. Passionate.

GN (33:07):

Good. This is a rather difficult question that I was wondering how you might approach it. On the outside, why do you do theater? But then specifically what do you see the students getting out of it?

JS (33:25):

Let me answer the first part.

GN (33:30):

You don't it for the money. [Laughter]

JS (33:32):

No, I always envied individuals that I knew who were part of the creative arts. Just for a minute--going back to the time I was in the novitiate, I would sit in the back of the TV room and there was a piano. Steve Brown would just sit at the piano and play. And I would just listen, and I envied people who could play a musical instrument like that. Or a Jimmy Smith who could paint. And I felt I had never found my art. And then I discovered theater, and I feel that I can tell a story on stage. So I do it because I love stories and because I can tell them visually and verbally on stage well. So that's-

GN (34:34):

It's a creative art too.

JS (34:34):

It is. It's a creative outlet for me. Regarding students, I really...now looking back at the years that I spent in secondary and in the collegiate ranks, I think it develops tremendous confidence in individuals. When you think about it, when a person steps on stage...a writer can publish an article but never has to listen to the criticism live. But in theater it's instantaneous, and you're putting out your work for public approval. And I think that takes a tremendous amount of courage, particularly in a young person. So I think it develops a sense of risk-taking, a sense of confidence. Then, just some of the techniques--public speaking, diction. Also I think it develops the ability to analyze people by analyzing character. And I think it develops a sense of empathy, and because you begin to get inside a character or characters in a piece and begin to empathize with the plight of individuals that...whom you may never really get to know at that level.

GN (36:03):

Go back a little bit to one subject that you mentioned. Have you ever taught or were involved in public speaking on either the high school or...you know. It is really one of the more difficult things--though it looks easy--to do. When a student has to do it, it's probably one of the most terrifying examples they have to go through. And if you in theater can give them that ability to stand up and to voice their opinion in an audible, concrete, sensible way--they can make a difference in society.

JS (36:46):

There's one student I'm thinking of in particular whom I met at Marist who had never auditioned for a show before and auditioned for *Brighton Beach*. And I'm still in touch with...she graduated in '92. She won the role and has since done a great deal of theater, has done modeling. But now...I mean went on the road with an agency and spoke to hundreds of people, and you know to this day she'll tell me that she would never have done it without the experience of having been on stage. So I agree entirely. I have never taught a public speaking class. However, for years I was the commencement speaker coach at Ketchum. I was always handed the valedictorian, salutatorian-

GN (37:45):

Get them to be heard.

JS (37:46):

Yes, exactly. But I think...I mean I remember students who seemed mouse-like and put them on stage and they just, they bloomed. They blossomed. And later you could just see the confidence building, and the public speaking ability.

GN (38:10):

Aren't they also concerned for one another? They want one another to succeed, you know?

JS (38:16):

One of the things, one of the reasons I think I have succeeded as a director is because I played sports and that...the concept of teamwork was drilled into me there. And I truly believe theater is a totally collaborative art. You have designers, lighting and scenic. And you have producers and you have props people, and you have actors and directors. And for it to truly work, it has to be collaborative. So I think that's...I've had casts that, at the end of a run, just hates separating because they've developed such a comradeship.

GN (39:06):

Oh, that's one of the most terrifying--taking down the set. Crying...this is not going to be anymore.

JS (39:14):

It is such a temporary thing.

GN (39:16):

Yeah, right. Another level I think we should look at is...while even the discipline needed to memorize the lines, that there's a maturing a mandatory...you don't do this unless you really want to commit to it.

JS (39:38):

I had a...I don't know who it was who said it to me, but it probably was Jephtha. His final note was 'memorize your lines and don't trip over the furniture.' And you know, there are some plays that are just so word heavy and every single word is the author's, and you have a responsibility to it. And I think you're right. I will telecast. I've never worked with a good dumb actor. They are some of the brightest, best read, most disciplined people I know. When I work professionally, very often it's in a short rehearsal period. So you ask them to come in with the script memorized, and they do. It's a tremendous discipline. And I think that's another great lesson for young people. And then others depend upon that discipline.

GN (40:42):

Yes. And along that line, you also get some ideas. The world...what has been spoken of or what has been written. What ideas are emerged from *The Crucible* or *The Glass Menagerie*. Are you going to go alright to any of those plays? Or Shakespeare, he has an idea or two has he not? [Laughter]

JS (41:13):

My dream...I would still like to do a production of *Othello*. I have one in my head and I'd like that opportunity.

GN (41:23):

Do you have Iago ready to go [Laughter]

JS (41:25):

The greatest--second greatest villain, I think in Shakespeare. Richard the Third is maybe my favorite villain.

GN (41:34):

I'm projecting now--not from the past, but to the future. What do you see for yourself? Do you want to stay with this in the roles that you're in? Do you want...you're more active in terms of directing and so on. Are you ever inclined to move on to another level? I don't think it's very attractive, but the production part of getting the money and the...that aspect of it...off the stage as it were, but without it there is no stage.

JS (42:14):

It's...you're right, it's not very attractive. It has never been for me. I've been lucky enough to have someone who address that side of the business. But I can see myself having to spend more time on that side of the footlights. Particularly now that we're trying to establish a professional summer stock company here at Marist. There will be some need for me to spend more time on that side, so I can see that. But I really want to keep my hand in the directing because it is my creative outlet. I like remaining in touch with students as well. And I've been lucky enough here at Marist in the last year since I've reconnected. I directed two shows last year for the student organization and I'd like to remain in touch with them. And finally, if I could pick up a class or two in directing or, stagecraft or acting or whatever, I'd be thrilled to do that and just keep my hand in the classroom for a little longer.

GN (43:36):

But you wouldn't push it more the other way and write for the theater?

JS (43:44):

I've tried my hand at scene work and I've enjoyed it. It frightens me. I...we joked, but I-

GN (44:01):

Do what you do.

JS (44:01):

Yeah. But I mean...I have an idea for a piece very much about what we've spoken of today. And I don't know what's preventing me from putting it all down and trying it. I've been around theater long enough and if it were to succeed in the slightest, fine. If it weren't, I don't know that anything would be lost. So I-

GN (44:31):

But it is a tremendous investment of time and energy.

JS (44:36):

Actually, I meant to bring a scene for you to read today. I will get it to you.

GN (44:43):

Well let's talk about Marist specifically. What would you think are things that would enhance the Marist theater world or life?

JS (45:00):

Well there is within the English department a theater concentration, a theater program run by Matt Andrews, a professor in the department and Eileen--her last name just went out of my head. But I really think there has to be an infusion of more academic talent, probably in design. And there is a need for technical assistance. I think those two positions would round out a team who could then truly oversee the growth of the program and so on. I think eventually, as much as I love that theater, the college has just grown so much and the demands for space...and I mean that has been addressed in various ways in terms of academic space and research space. But...for example, the largest club on campus I'm told is campus ministry. The only place they can meet is the theater because they have over 300 members. So campus ministry needs it, and the music department has just exploded. They need for performance. The Marist theater program needs space and the theater club needs space. So eventually it's just not going to suffice. And a decision will have to be made either to cut back on programs or move to a performing arts center.

GN (46:55):

Right. So the thrust to move from the page to the stage is going to have to cause this or will necessitate a growth in those areas that which you speak?

JS (47:09):

I think so. I like the way...I'm glad you said that--from the page to the stage. Jerry Cox, one of his projects through the years that he was here was the original pieces written by students. And because there was a transition last year, it didn't happen. But it is...I mean, the dates around the books for this year...things like that I think are very, very important to the English department as well as the theater program when you have your students producing original work. And then in the case of theater--just as it might be in prose or whatever--providing an outlet for that in theater, seeing it produced. But again, all of those things begin putting demands upon space, but also upon personnel--who's supervising it, who's organizing it. But I think, I think that's a really important part, particularly when you have somebody like a Bill Davis out there who-

GN (48:19):

Yeah. Who's done it.

JS (48:20):

Who's done it. Yeah.

GN (48:22):

And big time. Right. There's a little sidebar now, not necessarily related to William. What do you think of children's theater?

JS (48:31):

That's interesting that you ask. I was never interested in children's theater. When I was here, it was just starting my last year and I...I was much too serious a student to bother with that--lower myself. When I

went to Rochester, I met a number of professionals who did children's theater and I really liked their work. And then I was asked to direct for a children's theater company and I ended up...while I was there directing three children's theater productions, all of them were professional and I loved it.

GN (49:18):

I'm confused. What do you mean by a children's theater company?

JS (49:22):

They were professional company of actors who did nothing but children's theater.

GN (49:28):

And what does that mean?

JS (49:30):

They would produce about three or four productions a year and they would trip them to schools and venues, and basically made their living that way.

GN (49:42):

The audience was going to be just children?

JS (49:44):

Yes. And I did one at Nazareth College in that 1100 seat house. I did a production of *Aladdin* and it was one of the most beautiful...I mean I had this great scenic designer and I enjoyed the production. I'd sit there and laugh every...the interaction between children and the actors and...but you need a skilled hand to handle that. And I saw it up there. So I'm a proponent now. My own...I have grandchildren and Andrew--my seven year old grandson--he has already seen *Beauty and the Beast*, *Mary Poppins* and *Lion King*. He loves theater. He sat through my production of *Man of La Mancha*. So starting them young I think is-

GN (50:42):

Well that's in the marrow of his bones. This is your grandson I mean, let's face it.

JS (50:47):

I'd like to think that.

GN (50:48):

You don't have a grandfather whose playing such a role here. What's your greatest satisfaction?

JS (51:01):

My family.

GN (51:02):

Yeah. The success that your own life has been able to bring and enjoy that...and that's even what you not being in the a good bit of the time, you know.

JS (51:20):

That's true. They've...my two daughters, I mean many times could have gotten very angry at that. Somehow they understood how much it meant to me and...but they always knew a great deal about it. They knew a lot of the students that I taught--some of them would babysit for them when they were younger. Later on, they became friends with them. So it was never totally separated from them. And they've been...and my wife has been great about it. The hours that I spend in a darkened theater.

GN (52:02):

You mentioned something about Marist in the summer. Do you envision something like the old Hyde Park Theater coming here and the Tent going up here as well?

JS (52:16):

Absolutely. Yeah. I just think...well, it's a mixture of things. I have never not felt that I was a Marist. I have never stopped feeling that. And I think that's part of the tradition, I don't think it's me. And I've always felt welcomed on this campus and I think that that feeling can be communicated to the entire community out there. Whether they-

**Audio is incomplete*