

John O'Shea and Jim O'Shea

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, NY

Transcribed by Jillian Egan

For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

John O'Shea and Jim O'Shea

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Interviewee: John O'Shea and Jim O'Shea

Interviewer: Gus Nolan

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Subject Headings:

Summary: Brothers John and Jim O'Shea discuss their connection to Marist College. This includes: their family company's role in completing electrical work in Marist buildings, their thoughts on the construction of various campus buildings, their memories of several Marist Brothers, John's role as Board member, and their opinions on the future of Marist.

Gus Nolan (00:00:05):

Good morning, Jim and John. Today is Thursday. It's the eighteenth day in November. And we have an opportunity to talk to you. Now, let me check, I think it's Friday. [Laughter] This is an interview for the Marist College Archives, which is an attempt to gather as much material as we can in whatever form. And this is by oral interview about Marist, for the most part. It just amazes me--and you too, I suppose--coming on campus now, and the question is: how did this happen? In our lifetime, it went from a pretty primitive situation. So that's the backdrop of what we're here for. But I'd like to get something to know about you for the record, for people who say, "who are these fellows, and what were they talking about, and what was their background?" Maybe you could just give me a thumbnail overview of early life. Were you born in Poughkeepsie? In the area? Did you grow up here?

John O'Shea (00:01:24):

I can start that off. I was born in Poughkeepsie, and a matter of fact, we lived on Taylor Avenue during my early years, which is just a few blocks from here. My first recollection of what was then, I think, Marian College, was the fact that we used to go past it to get to Woodcliff Park. Which was a very good size amusement park here at the time. As kids, we enjoyed going there whenever we had an opportunity.

Gus Nolan (00:01:56):

Where did you go to school?

John O'Shea (00:01:59):

We both went to Saint Peter's school. The building is now torn down, but it was across from what is now Mount Carmel Church.

Jim O'Shea (00:02:08):

As our father did.

Gus Nolan (00:02:12):

Your father did? So, this family goes back.

Jim O'Shea (00:02:16):

We have a picture of our dad in, like, the sixth grade. In his class.

Gus Nolan (00:02:21):

That was Saint Peter's, I guess, at the time.

Jim O'Shea (00:02:28):

It was Saint Peter's Church. Yes.

Gus Nolan (00:02:30):

Then Mount Carmel eventually took that over. Can you talk about the times, sports, what your own interests were in sports, hobbies, school activities? Did any of you sing? Act? We didn't have too much drama in those days, did we?

Jim O'Shea (00:02:51):

Well, I'm Jim O'Shea, and as John said, we grew up on Taylor Avenue and one of my memories of living there--I think I was seven when we moved out to North Randolph Avenue--one of my memories would be in Pulaski Park early one summer morning, and there was a little dew on the grass, and John was giving another kid a piggy back ride and slipped on the grass and broke his leg. So, that's an early memory. [Laughter].

Gus Nolan (00:03:23):

You went to Saint Francis at that time?

Jim O'Shea (00:03:28):

Yeah. Incidentally, Saint Francis was built by--the force behind it was Monsignor Joseph Sheahan from Saint Peter's Church.

Gus Nolan (00:03:39):

After which now we have Sheahan Hall.

Jim O'Shea (00:03:41):

Yes, right. As I know the Marist brothers were brought here to teach at Saint Peter's school.

Gus Nolan (00:03:50):

Yes. And that was the beginning. And also to establish a trinity house because they had one in Canada, but they spoke French up there. So, the recruits they had in New York--Saint Anne's Academy in midtown, New York--going to Canada to become a Marist brother, but had to learn French. That did not go over well. [Laughter] So, they said we have to establish a trinity house. I think somewhere around 1913 or something like that is the beginning. Saint Anne's hermitage and then the slow growth from there, too.

Jim O'Shea (00:04:30):

I remember that. We both went to Poughkeepsie high school. When I was in elementary school, I was a Boy Scout and we had a theater club at St. Peters. We used to put on plays once a year, I became a singer. Generally, we did musicals, and they were great fun. I sang through high school and into college, and then kind of gave it up.

Gus Nolan (00:05:00):

And you played the piano too? [Laughter]

John O'Shea (00:05:02):

I didn't play the piano. I played the bugle, though. We did have a band. We used to march in the parades here. I recall even at Saint Peter's cemetery blowing the bugle during Memorial Day. Taps. They were honoring the military people, particularly.

Jim O'Shea (00:05:22):

We were both bugle players. Now, at Saint Peters, because there was no money you couldn't have uniforms, so our uniform was a white shirt, white pants.

Gus Nolan ([00:05:32](#)):

Moving on a little bit: early careers. I'm wanting to put this in perspective. I think the Korean War comes along in here somewhere, when you went into service. Is that right?

John O'Shea ([00:05:53](#)):

Yes. The Korean War started around 1950. I was in college at the time and I was given a deferment from the draft to finish my college education. As long as I kept my grades up and everything, which I was able to do. Then in my senior year, not being sure about what I wanted to do as far as the military was concerned--it was obvious that I was going to be drafted if I didn't decide something else--a friend of mine told me about a new program that the Navy had established that trained officers for Naval service. In my last couple of months at Fordham where I was then going to college, I went down and visited the federal building on lower Broadway and had to get there three AM and stand in line to get a chance to get in and see these people. I filled out some forms and took a couple of minor tests and had a brief physical exam, and then they put me on a waiting list. It took several months before I heard from them any further. Meantime, the draft was holding me in advance just to give me a chance for this Naval opportunity. At the end of that year, which would have to be 1951, I did get a notice that there was a class being formed in January, and that I was eligible if I still wanted to do it. I was to report to a New York office down in lower Broadway again, finish my signing in.

Gus Nolan ([00:07:50](#)):

Where was the training place?

John O'Shea ([00:07:53](#)):

My training was at Newport, Rhode Island, where I spent the better part of three months in training and received my commission in May of that year. I was assigned to a Navy destroyer, the USS Ingraham, which was based in Norfolk, Virginia. I spent the next three years on that ship, being deployed to many parts of the world, including one tour of duty in the Korean War. When the three years was up and I was eligible for release, I decided to accept that even though I had an offer to stay in and make a career out of it. At that time I had gotten married, had one kid and another on the way, and traveling around the world and leaving the family behind was not something the family was interested in. I left the navy at that time and came back to Poughkeepsie, where I've been living since.

Gus Nolan ([00:09:03](#)):

Tell me about high school, and after that. I know you're venturing into an electrical business, maybe even during high school. Did you work for your father in those years?

Jim O'Shea ([00:09:17](#)):

Yeah, and did some work up here, at what was the Marist Brothers at the time, helping out my dad. We went to Poughkeepsie High School which is now Lourdes--Our Lady of Lourdes High School.

John O'Shea ([00:09:33](#)):

It was Lourdes after that, but--

Jim O'Shea (00:09:36):

Yeah, they've since moved. And interesting enough, I had the contract, I was electric contractor to rewire the old high school to make it Lourdes. That was quite a job. It was almost a two year job.

John O'Shea (00:09:51):

Our father started the electrical business in 1929. He supported the family that way until we were growing up and Jim ended up going to work with you.

Gus Nolan (00:10:03):

You would have been kinda young though to be advanced in the business, getting these contracts.

Jim O'Shea (00:10:12):

I suppose considering what they have today. [Laughter]

Gus Nolan (00:10:18):

I don't want to go there too quickly. [Laughter]

Jim O'Shea (00:10:19):

I graduated from Poughkeepsie High. I went to Clarkson University in Potsdam. Because I was thinking, at the time, of taking over my dad's business, I studied electrical engineering. So, I have that degree. Then came back and worked with my dad, and eventually took over the business. Probably, far as I know, I was the only engineer working in the contract who lives in the Hudson Valley, and that got me a fair amount of business. Because I was doing automation and other high voltage, relatively complicated-

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Gus Nolan (00:10:55):

Did you know a Brother Francis Xavier? He was involved in the gym here at the VA.

Jim O'Shea (00:11:01):

Yes.

Gus Nolan (00:11:02):

And then Nilus Donnelly comes along later, and he does the chapel and the Donnelly building.

Jim O'Shea (00:11:06):

Yeah. We did the chapel. That was our first building here, although my dad did some other work earlier than that in the buildings that were on the campus that they were living in at the time. And then we did Donnelly Hall, and Leo Hall, the five-story dormitory, and followed up with the field house, the McCann field house.

Gus Nolan (00:11:36):

Sheahan comes first though, before Leo.

Jim O'Shea (00:11:39):

That's correct.

Gus Nolan (00:11:40):

I came here on campus in '68. Well, I came here to teach, then. I came here in '44 [Laughter], ended autumn '48--to the ending high school and starting Marion College as a student. So, I was both a student, and then a college member, than a faculty member. And now they pay me to stay home, you know, "retiree." [Laughter].

Jim O'Shea (00:12:09):

Well, I did not have the lowest bid for Sheahan, so we didn't do that. But I did get Leo Hall.

Gus Nolan (00:12:19):

Back to you, John. I read an article in the Poughkeepsie journal--it was written in 2010--about the O'Shea business, and you. Kind of a biography of you. It had mentioned at that time that you came in '55 to Marshall & Sterling.

John O'Shea (00:12:42):

Correct.

Gus Nolan (00:12:42):

And there were two offices,?

John O'Shea (00:12:43):

Yes.

Gus Nolan (00:12:44):

And twenty-five employees?

John O'Shea (00:12:45):

About that.

Gus Nolan (00:12:45):

And when they were writing this, there were twenty offices, and 360--now, of course, this is '55 to forty-five, fifty years later, this great expansion has taken place. What was the secret to that? What led Marshall & Sterling to blossom as it did? I mean, you could tell me was the personality of the people who headed it, of course.[Laughter].

John O'Shea (00:13:19):

Yeah, that's true. Our growth was a combination of things. We started getting into special programs where there was a market for them. And over the years we made a number of acquisitions of other firms where the principal may have been deciding to retire and sell his business. Or, other reasons why it happens But there were opportunities that we took advantage. I started out as a trainee and became a sales executive, is what we call it today.

Gus Nolan (00:14:00):

Did you go around to homes collecting dimes or dollars once a month?

John O'Shea (00:14:06):

No.

Gus Nolan (00:14:07):

I remember the insurance man coming to my house in the thirties and the forties.

John O'Shea (00:14:15):

That the way the life insurance business went, but we were in the property and casualty business. It's pretty much of a different field. So, anyway, I took over as president in 1980. The former president retired at that time. As we were continuing to grow moderately, I started a strategy of being more aggressive in acquiring other businesses. I think over the last forty years or whatever it is, last thirty-five years, we've probably made close to thirty acquisitions.

Gus Nolan (00:15:01):

Coleman insurance was one, because [Inaudible]. I had a discussion with the woman one day. I said, "You're not Marshall & Sterling!" She says, "Yes, we are." I said, "Well, why don't you change the sign outside?" "Well," she said, "we changed it two years ago." I mean, I go by there every day, you know, and I didn't realize that this acquisition had taken place. How far a reach are you? Do you go to the Midwest?

John O'Shea (00:15:28):

Well, we have offices right now--back in the sixties, we started our first office in the Virgin Islands on Saint Croix. And over the years, through a couple of acquisitions, we now have six offices down there with probably about seventy-five or eighty employees. Currently, we have, I think, twenty-six offices, and our employee count is up to about 450 employees.

Gus Nolan (00:16:06):

Another piece of the article talked about the difference over the years where was much more interpersonal, whereas now it's so technical and machine-like. I think you were saying that because technology has taken over so much of the operation, you don't get to talk necessarily to the same people you're dealing with. So there's that need--or you were talking about one of the things you missed in the transfer of time, as it were, and the development that's taking place. But I think you are very personal yourself. You manage to talk to people, I'm sure.

John O'Shea (00:16:48):

Yeah. I mean, all of our people have to counsel the client base as they have questions or needs. It's a regular thing now today, staff people do more of the interpersonal relationships than the sales executive might. The sales executive's job is to be selling, not servicing so much. The automation part of it has certainly taken over a lot of record keeping. We don't have files with paper in them anymore. Just very minor compared to the way it used to be. You talked about our reach--we now have offices in Florida, Virginia, Michigan, California, and several in New York state. Probably have at least, I don't know, fifteen or twenty in New York State.

Gus Nolan (00:17:45):

Do you get pitches at the office, to go and visit the places like in Saint Croix in the winter? [Laughter].

John O'Shea (00:17:52):

I do. I haven't gone to Saint Croix recently, but I have been down there many times.

Gus Nolan (00:17:58):

Yeah, I could see that happening. Alright, moving along again, now, let me come to the involvement at Marist, which is really what I'm trying to uncover. Both of you have had--physically building the place--a good part of it. And you had a son graduated in '81, I think, Steve graduated from Marist?

John O'Shea (00:18:20):

Yes, that's right.

Gus Nolan (00:18:22):

And Patty, who I learned since has an operation down in the South Road here that I'm interested in visiting.

Jim O'Shea (00:18:31):

[Inaudible]

Gus Nolan (00:18:35):

Right, right. You don't have any gift certificates, do you? [Laughter] Talk about what was your entree into Marist?

John O'Shea (00:18:50):

My very first would be, much like Jim, when my father would be coming up here to work with the Brothers. As I was a young teenager, a few times he'd ask me to come along, and I would get in his truck and come up here. The Brothers were doing much of the work on their own. They could do some carpentry and do some stone and masonry work--

Gus Nolan (00:19:14):

And sometimes they got it right! [Laughter]

John O'Shea (00:19:15):

But they didn't know anything about electricity, so they would call my father whenever they got to a point where they needed some advice and need materials. He would arrange for the materials that they would need to be up here, and spend his time here. I know much of it was donated time, but in any event, it was something that he loved to do, and he enjoyed working with the Brothers.

Gus Nolan (00:19:41):

There's also the other estate at Esopus. The Marist gym over there was another. I remember you coming over there. I was a student there in '45, I think it was, '46. Then Francis Xavier starts to build the chapel.

The gym--there's a huge gym there, out of proportion to the rest of the place. It was everything; it was the recreational, it was the assembly hall. So, I have that familiarity, and I'm sure you do.

John O'Shea (00:20:14):

I recall that my father would go over to the facility over in Esopus fairly regularly, as needed, to take care of situations that came up, and helped them out as he could over there.

Jim O'Shea (00:20:28):

One of my favorite stories of Esopus was, they would get their water out of it from the river.

Gus Nolan (00:20:36):

I was just going to bring that up. The power house--or, what do we call it--down at the river, anyway. The intake was there.

Jim O'Shea (00:20:45):

They decided to, in the building, to put the controls on one side of a particular room, and the starters for the motors on the other side. And, so to get from one wall to the other, the Brothers, working on their own, dug a trench. They put a conduit in the trench, and then they pulled in all the wires, and we were over to help make the connections. Then, because it was near the water, they wanted to make sure the water didn't get into the pipe. So they poured boiling hot roofing tar in that trench to coat the pipe. Well, it was so hot it melted the insulation on all the wires, and they couldn't even pull them out. [Laughter]

Gus Nolan (00:21:30):

That's one of the stories that we could talk about. It also was that, to get down the mountain side, to where that power house was on the river was itself, gigantic. Eventually, they opened a road through. I remember winter's going down, and there was a fellow named Mr. Curtain. He was a retired fireman, lived in the gatehouse down on Route 9 W, and every day he made that trip down to check that checklist.

Jim O'Shea (00:22:05):

To check it, yeah.

Gus Nolan (00:22:05):

'Cause that's where we got the water from. That failed, we failed, you know? Later on, Richard Rich comes along and he puts wells in, and we tried but we missed. They went down one time and then we had this Brother Edwin, who just missed by a quarter of a minute. [Laughter] Moving again, now. You do play a big part here at Marist for more than twenty years coming on the Board. I've noticed that was 1994, I think it was, you came on Board. What was the genesis of that? You didn't just walk in and say, "Well, I'd like to be a member of the Board." I'm sure Dennis came and knocked at the door. [Laughter].

John O'Shea (00:22:52):

Well, I got a phone call from Dennis one day, said that the Board was in need of some additional persons, and that I had been considered. Would I be interested in discussing it? And I said, "Yeah, I

would." So we did, and long story short, the Board decided that they wanted me to join in, and I did. In '94. Still there.

Gus Nolan ([00:23:19](#)):

Oh, I know. The happy news, of course, is that you were on the finance committee then, and I can imagine now, too.

John O'Shea ([00:23:27](#)):

Correct.

Gus Nolan ([00:23:27](#)):

And every year we had a balanced budget, which we're so grateful for, to keep the lights on.

John O'Shea ([00:23:34](#)):

That's one of the achievements in this college is that the budget has always been a balanced budget. And hopefully, in most years, having little surplus at the end.

Gus Nolan ([00:23:47](#)):

As a member of the board, you would also be a participant, I'm sure, in decision-making about where to go next. Maybe like in buildings? I don't know if the Lowell Thomas was up--it probably was--but the Dyson building, and then the new library. I mean, that went up four years later.

John O'Shea ([00:24:12](#)):

I think the Fontaine building was also built in the nineties, as I recall.

Gus Nolan ([00:24:16](#)):

Yes. Okay. Right. They had to take down what was our Fontaine building here, was kind of a study hall and offices for the faculty. It was attached to the old library, if you wanted to call it that. It was a dormitory, a refectory. It was attached to the chapel. So that whole thing had to be moved out to put up the library that eventually came along. In this decision making, I said, well, is there a number of parts? Tony, Campilli talked to us once about not only, do you have to build a building, you have to think about maintaining it. And maintaining it like with lights, electricity and service, and roof, and you know, that this is all part of it. Do you bring in experts to figure this out, or do you guys sit down with pencil and paper and say, "What are we going to try and do here?" I mean, like, the library--I'm sure that was a multimillion dollar operation.

John O'Shea ([00:25:24](#)):

Yes, it was. The college does hire architects and engineers to help establish the plans and the design of the structure. They also estimate the costs, which eventually decided when the contractors put in their bids. But much of it is done outside of the internal team. But with the support and involvement of the building and grounds committee and the staff of the college, here.

Gus Nolan ([00:26:01](#)):

You knew Jack Gartland.

John O'Shea (00:26:02):

I knew Jack very well. He was my next door neighbor.

Gus Nolan (00:26:05):

The grounds committee, I remember he'd been part of that for so many years. If there's anything that strikes people coming here, it's the beauty of the campus. I mean the, array, the use of the river, the array, and then the view down to the river--that whatever card or they call it--from up on top of the hill, you can see right on down. That has made this place what it is. From, from your vantage point, what is the most satisfying of the structures now that have gone up here? Why am I forgetting the name of the building over there--it's housing the computer department that's named after the chairman of the--

John O'Shea (00:27:01):

Hancock building?

Gus Nolan (00:27:01):

Hancock. I'm having mental problems. [Laughter] You look around, do you want to say, "This is an amazing thing," but this building or this particular thing that strikes me in particular,"?

John O'Shea (00:27:17):

Yeah, I think the Hancock building kinda set the pace for the exterior appearance of a lot of the buildings now. All that stonework was beautifully done. And that is a very attractive building. Subsequently, the student center was a redesigned, refinished with stonework to match. The new dorms that are under construction as we speak are all being done with this stone exterior that is actually very attractive.

Gus Nolan (00:27:48):

The new dorms--I was gonna say a lot of work has been going on, but it hasn't stopped. I mean, you know, every time you come on and you come up the North Road and you come in down there, there's that new dorm--

John O'Shea (00:28:03):

You see that building.

Gus Nolan (00:28:04):

It's gonna open in January. A lot of people don't even know it's there. I was talking to somebody the other day, they said, "They just opened one!" I said, "Yes, but there's another one behind it, soon to be open."

John O'Shea (00:28:17):

Well, before they were all together. I'm gonna correct myself: this library was the first of the style with the exterior stone, not the Hancock.

Gus Nolan (00:28:28):

Okay. Then I guess was the campus center that came after the library. Not the Dennis area. We did the whole view, or what they call the Marist--it's just Marist up on top of their "campus center," I think

would be the word we use to describe it. And there's also a dormitory. There's three levels of dormitories along the corridor there that looks out on the river.

John O'Shea (00:29:01):

In the student center?

Gus Nolan (00:29:03):

In the student center, right. I have talked to students about the fact that they have enjoyed the views they have here because they're not going to afford them later in life. [Laughter] You know, many of them aren't. I had a Godchild who lived over in Gartland before they took it down. And that was also a view to behold, you know, and so she carried on with that. Addressed this question. If you had to explain to someone, what do you point to as kind of the major factors that--'cause there's probably several-- that has changed Marist from a little Brother's college in Poughkeepsie to the Marist College now: Lee Miringoff and the Marist Poll, with national recognition with the girls' basketball team playing up and down the country. Is it because we're near New York City? Is it because we are located on the Hudson? What would be the driving force, would you say?

John O'Shea (00:30:15):

I think it was the leadership of Dennis Murray, for the most part. His vision of what this college should be like was instrumental in initiating a lot of projects, building projects and programs for students, and so on. He gets great deal of credit for all of that.

Gus Nolan (00:30:42):

Yeah. All right, but along with that, no one comes to campus and take a course with Dennis Murray, per se. You know that because you're up there at the top, but I think there's a Marist tradition. New York City had five high schools, or seven, that are feeders and the [Inaudible] the train stops here. I was on the first committee when Middle States came to do our first evaluation back in the mid sixties, and they were inquiring why we didn't build in Esopus. It's a much more country-place campus, and so on. Well, the railroad [Inaudible]

John O'Shea (00:31:25):

But it didn't have the transportation,

Gus Nolan (00:31:27):

They didn't have the transportation. You got to get there, is part of it. At one time there was passenger transportation, but very limited. And now there's none, and there hasn't been any for fifty years, I'm sure. Just freight goes up and down. The other parts about it--Dennis would be one--what has brought the financial impact that it has? Another is there's a certain willingness of the graduates, now that they're graduating, look back and see money's been well used, I think. So, which is part of the Board and the decisions that have been made? Or do you think we should do something more with the football team?

John O'Shea (00:32:16):

Oh, I don't know. I don't think Marist at this stage is ready to go out and be a national power for football.

Gus Nolan (00:32:28):

No, no, no, no.

John O'Shea (00:32:29):

I think the sports program has come a long way. But, I think pretty much people are content the way it is.

Gus Nolan (00:32:42):

I had Rik Smits in class. I said, well, you might remember that name.

John O'Shea (00:32:47):

Oh, absolutely.

Gus Nolan (00:32:47):

And we were off [Inaudible]

John O'Shea (00:32:51):

He got much publicity for Marist College.

Gus Nolan (00:32:54):

Yes. He did that. And the girls teams, in their own way. There's not the one person, I don't think, but--

John O'Shea (00:33:02):

That's correct.

Gus Nolan (00:33:02):

In fact, it's hard to get into a girl's game here if you just come out and say, "I'd like to come into the game." So that would be there. The other part about it is--you are more a visitor, you don't work here and around-the-clock thing--but can you talk about the interaction with students, or what you have come across with terms of students who are involved here? My question is, there does seem to be a character of, it's not Harvard. It's not Yale. It's not Vassar. The girls are pretty much the same as the boys in attitude, and I kind of look for "what is the magic about this?" Is it Sean Kaylor, who goes out and is able to give talks? Or can we show more alternates to allow people to come in? And the other point you mentioned before, the different programs that we have--for the handicapped, for one. And for the--we had to put down for number of years, I'm not sure how continuing it is--for minorities who are coming out of public high schools in New York for the most part, come here for a summer to get a taste of college work. You know, what are we like? I'm just talking away here, but I don't know what your feeling here about this is.

John O'Shea (00:34:46):

Well, I have to admit that I don't have a great deal of interaction with the students. What limited amount I did have over the years impressed me because I would very frequently ask them what they thought about their experiences here and how they liked it, and so on. One hundred percent of the time they were positive and enjoyed their time here. They thought it was productive for them, and they

appreciated it a lot. I do meet a lot of students. I have a scholarship program here, which helps some of the local kids here who are students here. And we have a lunch, and we just had it last month, where you get a chance to meet the kids. They are just a fine bunch of people who really appreciate getting a little help for their education. But they just love being here at Marist.

Gus Nolan (00:35:38):

I think that that's part of the story. I think you have been generous particularly in that, and not only here. I work at Vassar on Tuesday mornings, eucharistic minister, and I know there's a John O'Shea pediatric hospital.

John O'Shea (00:36:01):

The hospital, yeah.

Gus Nolan (00:36:02):

Yeah. Where you have been quite generous there, too. Again, something else here. Looking into a crystal ball, what do you see on the future? Where do you see Marist maybe twenty years from now? Is it becoming, I don't know, too technical? Is computer science going to run the operation, or will the interpersonal still be active in it?

Jim O'Shea (00:36:37):

I think it'll continue on the same growth that it has. You can't get too technical in today's society. You're gonna have to be into that.

Gus Nolan (00:36:47):

Oh yeah. You can't say it's not there.

Jim O'Shea (00:36:49):

But I think the location and the reputation will continue to grow. I think there's a good future for Marist College. The question is, how much growth from here we do.

Gus Nolan (00:37:05):

See, that was a question about the new dormitories. What are these new dorms--and actually there is no more students going to come. It's just that the students here are going to live in better--we're gonna take them out of the hotel. As nice as the Gartland apartments were, they were limited. I think they were more wooden structure and not going to be long-lasting for the next thirty, forty years. So, to put something like this up, it seemed to be a worthwhile investment.

John O'Shea (00:37:40):

Well, yeah. The student population has been growing. Freshman classes have been getting bigger every year. Not by design, but it's just the way it's working out. We've had a situation, as you know, where we've had over a hundred students down at the Residence Inn on South Road 'cause we didn't have housing space for them. Other students live in the community and rented homes, and many of them would prefer to live on campus. That was the motivation for starting the new dormitory project. There are also under consideration some new programs. We started the science center this past year where we're training physician assistants. And we'll be training, for the first time, someone to get an advanced

degree for physical therapy. There are some other things under consideration that will advance that segment of what the college does. I think there will always be some growth in the programming here to attract students and to give them the basis that they need going forward.

Gus Nolan (00:39:01):

I spoke to Eileen, the secretary for the president had an interview, and I was asking about that same question about living on campus. And I said, well, what was her explanation of it? When she came here, there was a desire for the kids to get off campus. They wanted the freedom. They're going to be away. They're on their own, you know? They're not under the thumb.

John O'Shea (00:39:30):

And they can party easier. [Laughter]

Gus Nolan (00:39:31):

Yeah. And that life would be much more free and, and they would enjoy it. It turns out that that's not the attitude now. They want to come on campus. This is where the action is. This is where their friends are. There's the recreational center. So, that was kind of a driving force. And moreover, to be out from under the thumb--no, they want the protection. Particularly with the girls. I think that the idea of living on campus with their friends, rather than an apartment some place, would be a thing that they would want.

John O'Shea (00:40:10):

In addition to my son graduating from here, I had two grandchildren graduate from here, also. When my grandson was a student, he lived off campus in a home with several other students. My daughter bought a house on Mill Street and there were as many as six students in the house at one time there. And they liked being where they were and doing whatever they wanted to do. And it worked out very well. But I think the attitude, as you say, is changing and they just like the idea of being here, and they love what's going on in these new buildings.

Gus Nolan (00:40:51):

That's the other part. Many of them have grown up with their own rooms. The idea of "dormitory," which I grew up with--with twenty other guys and a common bathroom--that's kind of not on the screen anymore. They don't want that. They want their own room. And they have a nice situation, you're not that far; there's the quads and there are different ways for them to meet and have conferences and meetings within these buildings so that they don't really have to deal with that. You mentioned the enrollment. I heard from Roger Norton in computer science and he talked about one of the needs that we're going to have to keep enrollment up in the northeast, is drawing up college students to come to us.

Speaker 1 (00:41:54):

Either there's not that many of them, or the interest is to go on a different route than just to come to this typical kind of Marist College. He thought about the need of more publicity in the Midwest, Southwest, or California. I think we have ninety full-time students from California this year, so our word is out there. In fact, we're getting from Hawaii, so they're coming in. About the diversity, we also have fifty students living in Italy, in Florence. I talked about the need to visit the campus as well. I haven't had a chance to visit that campus yet.

Jim O'Shea (00:42:48):

Don't you have one in Ireland also?

Gus Nolan (00:42:52):

I think we have study programs. I don't think it's a college operation, but I could be wrong.

Jim O'Shea (00:42:58):

The last time we were over there a couple years ago, I remember driving past a sign and it said, "Marist."

Gus Nolan (00:43:06):

Okay. Yeah--

Jim O'Shea (00:43:08):

Fairly big sign.

Gus Nolan (00:43:09):

There's a Marist College in Dublin. It's not a college, though. In Europe, the secondary schools take on the word "college," which is one of the reasons that we're trying to take "college" out of Marist. Eventually, I guess, Marist University, and we're not far from that. Years ago, one of the reasons we weren't able to even think about it, was library holdings. That's nonsense now. With computers, that kind of doesn't hold. So, that that word may be coming. Wait and see. I'm not sure.

John O'Shea (00:43:51):

Well, the computer science program is one of the more popular ones on this campus and it's very effective in the way they deal with their students there.

Gus Nolan (00:44:02):

Right. And they place them well.

John O'Shea (00:44:04):

There's been very good placement.

Gus Nolan (00:44:07):

I've heard stories of guys graduating and getting salaries that make their professors be embarrassed, in terms of they're not getting anything like that.

John O'Shea (00:44:18):

And our partnership with IBM has been a very good.

Gus Nolan (00:44:21):

Oh yeah. I was a good friend with Jim Fahey for many years.

John O'Shea (00:44:27):

Yes, I know Jim very well.

Gus Nolan (00:44:38):

Question. I think you know the answer, but I want to know how you get to the answer. Is Marist College worth the investment? The investment is financial: 50,000 a year for four years. A lot of effort and stuff going into it, being away from home, study time, et cetera. And at the end of it, you may get a job, you may get a good job. You may not get a good job. How do you continue to college? Or should we do more things? Should we have a more diversified electrical engineering program? On a practical level that would appeal? You'd still have to have the ability to be able to do it. Can we stay the way we're going? Is it worth the investment?

John O'Shea (00:45:45):

That's the debate that's going around the whole country. [Laughter]

Gus Nolan (00:45:48):

I know, that's why I'm asking you. [Laughter]

John O'Shea (00:45:50):

I'm not sure I've got any quick solutions. I think four years of college is still a value to the student. I think the majority of people who have been to college, or who are in business today, would agree with that. The problem that the prices keep going up and the student debt issue is one that's going to be lingering for a long time.

Gus Nolan (00:46:13):

Perhaps there will be a solution for that not too long down the line if something can be worked out at reasonable interest rates. I mean the student who graduates here spent \$200,000 to get the education, and he owes 400,000, with the interest tied into it. So that kind of a balanced has to be--hopefully something can be done. That's one part of it. I know this has been going on and we're right in the midst of it. Fortunately, the application lists to come here are still as vibrant as ever, I think.

John O'Shea (00:46:55):

Oh, absolutely. We get ten times more applications than we have room for. That's not the way it is with many colleges these days.

Gus Nolan (00:47:04):

I hand it to the Board to build this place the way they built it. You come on this campus, you say, "I could live here." Those kids who are of that mind.

John O'Shea (00:47:21):

There was an article in the newspaper yesterday about a young girl who was going to be coming here to play, and she had offers from other schools. And she said, when she visited this campus and saw what it was like, she decided this was where she wanted to go. A lot of students have come up with the same conclusion. Just love the appearance, the location, and everything about the school.

Gus Nolan (00:47:50):

And if you come here during Christmas time when we have our tree lit, that would be something else!
[Laughter] And the tunnel.

John O'Shea (00:47:59):

They did a nice job with that tunnel. I really think so.

Gus Nolan (00:48:02):

Even if they come through it on skateboards, okay. That's the way that kids operate now. They do it with a certain ease and facility and getting on with it, and so on.

Jim O'Shea (00:48:15):

The tuition's not such a problem anymore. All over.

John O'Shea (00:48:19):

Yeah, I don't think a typical student Marist is paying as high as \$50,000 a year. Not to the college, anyway. There are the personal expenses.

Gus Nolan (00:48:27):

I guess, just like some other things, you don't exactly pay what they're saying on the label.

John O'Shea (00:48:39):

With student aid, yes.

Gus Nolan (00:48:39):

They can get student aid, and then there's jobs on campus that are available. We do have a lot of student help doing things.

Jim O'Shea (00:48:50):

I recently found in my desk at home, a receipt for tuition to Clarkson. 1952. \$270. Private college, the whole tuition: \$270. Incredible.

Gus Nolan (00:49:11):

I think I have touched most of the things dealing with Marist per se. About the college's possibility of survival, and growth, and change, and interests. Four years is a maturing time as well. Parents love to see them away for four years that they can grow up. "You take care of them for four years," you know? I remember a friend of mine, his daughter came home from college and he wanted to pay her to have an apartment so he wouldn't have to hear her coming in whenever she would be coming in. "I don't care, I just don't want to have to keep awake to see if you're coming in and out." Kids are going to grow up in their own way. And also Dennis has talked to me about computer and distance education. He's still very strong on coming on campus for four years, and the distance education much more for advanced degrees and specialties.

John O'Shea (00:50:37):

Besides the studying there's a great advantage to living with other students. The interaction and the maturity that comes.

Gus Nolan ([00:50:48](#)):

The diversity, as it were. People who come from other cultures. What's important to you is not necessarily what's important to them, and you still have to be able to live with it, and you find out they're pretty nice people.

John O'Shea ([00:51:02](#)):

Sure. It's a great growth right there, an education.

Gus Nolan ([00:51:06](#)):

Even learning about philosophy--not only how to make a living, but how to live. How to deal with problems, how to see them in perspective. Some personal interests. You still play golf?

John O'Shea ([00:51:26](#)):

I do. Not as much as I used to, though.

Gus Nolan ([00:51:34](#)):

Do you play golf?

Jim O'Shea ([00:51:35](#)):

I never touched a club in my life. I never had the time. As a contractor, the summer time was our busy times. I never had any interest in it. My interest went more into the political. I served four terms on the Poughkeepsie Town Board as a councilor. I was always interested in politics and still am. Not as much as before, but still. Particularly, two years ago I really had to get active because I had a daughter who was running for judge, who was elected. She's now Dutchess County family court judge. That was my activity. And now it's Marist Center for Lifetime Study.

Gus Nolan ([00:52:28](#)):

What a program that is.

Jim O'Shea ([00:52:31](#)):

Terrific. You can't believe it. Six hundred active members who go to class! Six hundred! And we have over 900 on the waiting list. That's been my interest for a few years now.

Gus Nolan ([00:52:48](#)):

We lost a big piece of that, I'm speaking of Jerry White and his music.

Jim O'Shea ([00:53:00](#)):

Oh, Jerry, yeah, sure.

Gus Nolan ([00:53:00](#)):

I gave one lecture. I lectured on the history of development of Marist. Over here, and then Millbrook or someplace-- isn't that where there's another site, east of the county?

Jim O'Shea (00:53:14):

We do go to senior living centers to give courses.

Gus Nolan (00:53:22):

Did you ever get a hole in one?

John O'Shea (00:53:28):

I did.

Gus Nolan (00:53:29):

You did? Only once?

John O'Shea (00:53:30):

Only once.

Gus Nolan (00:53:31):

You have a picture of it?

John O'Shea (00:53:33):

I have a plaque that they gave me. That was more recently, that was about five years ago.

Gus Nolan (00:53:40):

Where?

John O'Shea (00:53:41):

In Florida. I used to spend some time down there in the cold weather.

Gus Nolan (00:53:47):

I met you there once at LaPlaya, at a Marist reunion kind of thing. Do you ever play on College Hill?

John O'Shea (00:54:07):

In Poughkeepsie here, College Hill course? Yeah, I've played there. Not very often.

Gus Nolan (00:54:14):

That last eighteenth hole, though. They asked me not to play anymore. [Laughter]

John O'Shea (00:54:23):

Damaging the course? [Laughter].

Gus Nolan (00:54:26):

Yeah, I'm a danger. I never got a hole in one. Do you still [Inaudible] at Vassar hospital? Do you have a part to play there?

John O'Shea (00:54:38):

I just recently retired from that Board after thirty-six years.

Gus Nolan (00:54:43):

There's quite new construction underway now.

John O'Shea (00:54:47):

It's amazing. It's a beautiful and big, big project.

Gus Nolan (00:54:52):

Will they replace the standing building when that's down?

John O'Shea (00:54:58):

Some of them, I think yes. But most of them, I believe, are intended to remain in use. Other uses, I'm not sure exactly what.

Gus Nolan (00:55:07):

I come Route 9 coming here, and you just see that whole hillside.

John O'Shea (00:55:13):

Right. That's how you notice now.

Gus Nolan (00:55:16):

You really see it under way, big time.

John O'Shea (00:55:17):

It's scheduled for opening in 2019. Two years from now, a little over two years.

Gus Nolan (00:55:26):

I just heard this someplace--these big buildings have a computer run-out about what they should be doing all in the next 200 days of labor, or whatever it is, and it's just mind boggling. You're also involved in local activities, though, besides Vassar. I forget what I did see about that. You were given an award recently from some organization.

John O'Shea (00:56:04):

Dutchess Community College did, earlier in the year.

Gus Nolan (00:56:08):

I just read the article. I just didn't want you coming in here without knowing who you are. I've seen you around, I've met you before, but I didn't know too much about the details. I said to myself, in 1994 when

you came on, you were already sixty-five years old, or almost. To take on a challenge like that. Most people turn the lights out on the desk and go home and read the paper and do the puzzle.

Jim O'Shea (00:56:49):

Nah, you're still a kid at sixty-five.

Gus Nolan (00:56:49):

And you put another 20 years into--

John O'Shea (00:56:55):

Yeah, I just came from my office. I still go to work.

Gus Nolan (00:56:57):

I went to the old Coleman building. I had some paperwork to do. I had both my house and my car with you. "See if he's nice to me." [Laughter] I'm one of a million. But I said, "Where does John O'Shea work?" They said, "110 Main Street." I said, "110 Main Street?" So, I came into Main Street way up I said, "Where would he have an office around here?" I kept on going down this street. You know, my heart was saying I didn't want to park here. [Laughter] Well, I could have, whatever, here I am. Finally, I cross over to 110 and you get this big parking lot and Marshall & Sterling. And I said, "Oh, this is more like what I was hoping." I went and I saw the secretary, I left you the letter talking about this event.

John O'Shea (00:58:04):

We built that building in 1990. We have outgrown our former place, which is on Washington Street. Served us well.

Gus Nolan (00:58:13):

Yeah, I bet. Is that just below the Derby now?

John O'Shea (00:58:19):

It's on the other corner of Clover Street.

Gus Nolan (00:58:23):

We're kind of winding this up, and I've been doing a lot of the talk and the directing of questions trying to get answers, because some historian down the line is going to read this and go through it and say the real question is "how did this happen?" And it happens through a lot of work over the years by people who participated and had a real interest in it. Now, could you tell me, is there something you would like to add to this story that I didn't bring up? Is there some little piece, "I wish he would ask me about something or other, 'cause we wanted to add this to it"? People you knew--did you know Brother Paul Ambrose, who was here for awhile? And Nilus Donnelly, of course, was here. And Jack Gartland, we've mentioned, is one of the mainstays of the college. Dennis, Rob Dyson has been a real supporting force for the college over the years.

Speaker 3 (00:59:43):

Somebody who's been as important as anybody else in the beginning and their growth was Nilus Donnelly. Of course, Donnelly Hall. And he was an interesting guy. Great guy. Twenty-four-hour-a-day

worker. I remember when I had the electric contract for Leo Hall, we built a penthouse for him. 'Cause he lived by himself. He was kind of a loner. But a great guy and a great worker. I remember when Donnelly was built, a lot of it was done by students. They brought these kids in from the different schools around the country and they worked twenty-four hours. They had three shifts of students who were doing the work. And then, for instance, we did the electrical work that they could not do. It was a low cost way of building the building, but of course, you had negatives as well as positives.

Gus Nolan (01:00:51):

Yeah, you have to do it over sometimes.

John O'Shea (01:00:53):

At that time, remote control first became popular for lighting. The advantage of remote control is the wiring to the switches was like telephone wire--very small wire, so you could have multiple locations. Brother Nilus decided that that's what he wanted for Donnelly Hall. So, as I said, the kids were doing a lot of work. That meant that for every room there had to be a wire from the switch back to a central location where there was a panel board of relays. And there was a relay for the landing in every room. Sometimes more than one. And so the kids pull all these wires into that relay room.

Gus Nolan (01:01:39):

Physically?

John O'Shea (01:01:40):

Physically, yeah. Physically installed them from each room back to the relay room. But they never labeled them! So, when it came time to connect them, they had, like, eighty cables and they didn't know what relay to hook them up to. [Laughter].

Gus Nolan (01:01:57):

Experiences is a hard teacher.

John O'Shea (01:02:02):

And of course, brother Nilus--two things I remember about him particularly, and you may be familiar, probably, with the fire?

Gus Nolan (01:02:12):

In the chapel?

John O'Shea (01:02:13):

No. There was a building along Route 9 that they wanted to get rid of. If I remember correctly, they had prices from demolition contractors, like, 17,000. And Nilus says, "Don't worry about it. I'll take care of it." So, he went out there one afternoon and spread a lot of kerosene around the building and tossed a match.

Gus Nolan (01:02:35):

Yeah, but a storm was coming. He knew there wouldn't be a lot of danger. Except [Inaudible] didn't think that way because they had cinders on the roof.

John O'Shea (01:02:45):

Yeah. Everybody going by on Route 9 called the fire department.

Gus Nolan (01:02:50):

I have pictures of that.

John O'Shea (01:02:51):

Oh, do you?

Gus Nolan (01:02:51):

Some Brother--Jerry Weiss, I think it was--took them.

John O'Shea (01:02:54):

And the other one, most people don't realize that earth has a buoyancy. Just like you push a balloon down in water, it'll pop back up. Well, the earth, it'll do the same thing, but of course much slower. And so for Donnelly, he installed a 20,000 gallon oil tank for the heating fuel oil. It's a pretty good size tank. He installed it and covered it up. And maybe a month later it started appearing above ground, because normally when you do that, you put a concrete pad on, or you fill it right away and the weight of the oil would keep it from surfacing. So they had a few things like that. But in general, you gotta give him a lot of credit for what he did.

Gus Nolan (01:03:45):

He was kind of a self-taught guy. He ran a bulldozer.

John O'Shea (01:03:47):

Oh, yeah!

Gus Nolan (01:03:47):

He ran a crane, and he got this service stuff after the war.

John O'Shea (01:03:56):

My understanding, and I don't know for sure, is that he came from a construction family over in Connecticut.

Gus Nolan (01:04:02):

Yeah, Donnelly Construction. In fact we called ourselves that. One guy in our group, he eventually left the Brothers but, there's a group in the education system that runs manual labor kinds of things as well. The name escapes me right now. He had gotten his administrative degree from Saint John's and he was applying to be assistant principal in this operation, but they wanted to know did he have any previous construction? "Oh yes. Nilus Construction, Poughkeepsie, New York." They never checked it to see if they was really such a company as Nilus Construction.

Jim O'Shea (01:04:53):

He did the work on the chapel, too.

Gus Nolan (01:04:57):

He tried to burn it down some years later. [Laughter] Well, didn't "try," I mean, the electrical. We had some Chinese Brothers that didn't quite get along together. That's who, he blamed it on. There were a couple of things, one was that maybe they left the incense on after midnight mass. It was Christmas or New Year's, or something like that, that they had this fire. Of course the thing was poured concrete. The pillars around the side and so on. Fortunately, he didn't try to put a concrete roof on it. That would have been a disaster.

John O'Shea (01:05:37):

Well, I remember the roof here for Donnelly, the beams were laminated wood. Nilus had friends who were structural engineers in New York, consultants and they probably did it pro bono. I remember a couple of them weren't long enough as they should've been. They should've been resting on a concrete column in the center, and then one on the outside on the periphery, but they wouldn't go that far. So, they took a right angle metal plate, bolted it to the column and set the beam on that. So instead of resting it on concrete, it was being held up by two bolts. If it wasn't a religious institution, there probably would've been big problems.

Gus Nolan (01:06:25):

Oh, yeah. We got away with murder.

John O'Shea (01:06:30):

And then in Gartland they had a guy who did all this work. Louis Greenspan.

Gus Nolan (01:06:36):

Oh, yeah. He was another construction man.

John O'Shea (01:06:40):

When we were doing the gym, the field house, they decided that they would do the roofing with college kids. Some of Gartland's kids who had friends and all. Of course, when they got heavy rain they found out they didn't do the right job and he ended up hiring a contractor to redo the whole thing.

Speaker 1 (01:07:06):

The last of the line of buildings, I think, was the McCann Center, the field center. Just like Donnelly has had a new roof on it, over the years. [Laughter] Well, they're there fifty years now, so that's fair. Well, I wanna thank you for this opportunity to kind of tease your memory and see what you can bring up. It's been a very interesting hour for me, or however long you've been here, and I thank you very much.

Jim O'Shea (01:07:47):

You're certainly welcome.

John O'Shea (01:07:48):

I hope it adds a little bit to the work that you're doing. Feel free to get back and ask questions if you have any more.

Gus Nolan (01:07:56):

It gives me a flavor like which I have not had before. You come with an experience that's hard to beat. When you get a teacher in here, or a secretary or something, they can't talk like you talk. [Laughter]