

Donna Berger

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, NY

Transcribed by Rosie Genovese

For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

Berger, Donna

Transcript – Donna Berger

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Marist College (Poughkeepsie, New York)

Summary: Donna shares about her life growing up and working in Upstate New York before coming to Marist College as a student. She speaks about how she got her first job at the college and how she thinks things have changed over the years. She goes on to speak about faculty, community, grant writing, and leadership at Marist College.

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

Today is September 24th, 2021, and we are back to having our interviews for the archives at Marist College. And today we have the honor of interviewing Donna Berger, who has been here for a number of years, and she has a wonderful story to tell. So Donna, say hello and say a few words.

Donna Berger ([00:29](#)):

Hello, everyone. I'm just excited to be here with Gus. This is gonna be fun. Very unexpected, but fun.

Gus Nolan ([00:37](#)):

Okay. What I'd like to do, it's like in four parts: early years, early employment, coming to Marist, and then looking back. So there's like four areas, maybe 15 minutes each. There's no timeline. It's just a note page that I have. Could we start? Tell us something about your early years, where were you born, raised, siblings, in kind of a few words, but not that many few.

Donna Berger ([01:04](#)):

Yeah. Well, I was born in Tonawanda, New York, which is in upstate New York, near Buffalo, and moved here when I was about 18 years old.

Gus Nolan ([01:15](#)):

To Poughkeepsie?

Donna Berger ([01:16](#)):

To Hyde Park, actually. Hyde Park, New York. And I decided to, well, I was working and I decided to...

Gus Nolan ([01:27](#)):

Back up a little bit. Go to where were you in grade school.

Donna Berger ([01:32](#)):

Oh, wow.

Gus Nolan ([01:32](#)):

Those early years.

Donna Berger ([01:33](#)):

Yeah. Grade school was in Tonawanda, Alexander Hamilton. And then I went to Hoover Junior High and high school.

Gus Nolan ([01:42](#)):

In high school, let's take a little bit there now. What kind of high school was it by today's standards? In other words, academic more, physical therapy, or? Excuse me.

Donna Berger ([01:57](#)):

It was just a regular public high school, a local school, and I did not finish my high school education. So, was working some jobs that were, I think I remember I was working at a pizzeria at 16 and so on, and then I moved at 18 to Hyde Park.

Gus Nolan ([02:20](#)):

Are you an only child?

Donna Berger ([02:21](#)):

I am an only child. Yes. I have two stepbrothers who I'm very close with. So I don't know how much background you want there, but we...

Gus Nolan ([02:34](#)):

Well, I'm trying to get a picture of you growing up, in high school now. Any activities, were you involved in choir, drama, band, sports, anything like that?

Donna Berger ([02:44](#)):

I played the clarinet.

Gus Nolan ([02:46](#)):

You did? In a school band or just privately or with a club?

Donna Berger ([02:51](#)):

No, this was through school and my dad bought me a clarinet and I would play, and I was in the orchestra at the school. My parents divorced when I was around 12. I think I had a hard time with it. At the time I didn't think I was, but things got a little bit rocky in school, and so on and so forth. So I stopped going to school. And then when I left the Tonawanda area and came to Hyde Park, I got married at 18 and my husband, Bob, was going to the Culinary Institute, which brought us here. I started working in restaurants. And I was working, there was a five star restaurant in Stormville called Harold's Restaurant and I got a job there and that was very instrumental at that time in my life. It was a very...

Gus Nolan ([03:58](#)):

Okay, go back a little bit. Harold's Restaurant, is that one of the few five star restaurants in the area?

Donna Berger ([04:03](#)):

Yes.

Gus Nolan ([04:03](#)):

Did you know a Linda Dickinson?

Donna Berger ([04:05](#)):

Yes, I did. And her husband worked there. Jimmy. Jimmy and I worked together. We were there at the same time. Ava Dershwit was the chef. Before it became five star, it was the only four star chef-owned restaurant. And Harold was the Maître' D and he had always wanted to have his own restaurant, and they made that happen. They lived right at the restaurant, upstairs. And I got my husband a job there

too, because he was going to the culinary. So he started working as a chef and they were very good to us. It was a wonderful experience working there. They just taught you how to be very meticulous about everything that you did, from polishing the wine glasses and getting ready for service in the evening. So it was an excellent training, and a lot of the people that worked there at the time had their children come to work there just to be trained in the whole setup, the way they did things was very, very structured.

Gus Nolan ([05:13](#)):

Yeah. I have a side bar, to interrupt here. In my training with the Marist Brothers, we were charged to occasionally, well, all the time, to set up the Brother's dining room, and one of the things in that Brother's dining room we had, French brothers, and they didn't get wine every day, they got a thing called piquette, which was a happy mixture of wine and water and something else. But for the wine glasses, they were carefully shined by the students blowing into them and then wiping them out, which was eventually prohibited for some strange reason.

Donna Berger ([05:48](#)):

Right. Which is why we all have masks on today. Right?

Gus Nolan ([05:51](#)):

Yeah. But that was before science had made its impact into the culinary world and these things. During those years, you were still living in Hyde Park?

Donna Berger ([06:05](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Gus Nolan ([06:07](#)):

Alright. And how far was Hyde Park to where you went? 20 miles or?

Donna Berger ([06:11](#)):

Oh, I think it was closer to, to 38, 35, 38 miles. So we would take our rattle trap car and drive to Harold's. We would go on a Saturday morning to set up for Saturday evening. So it was an all day experience. But it was a wonderful place to work. One funny story, there was a table and it was one of the Roosevelt's family was sitting at the table and they had ordered a \$350 bottle of wine. Now this is at the time when, we're talking about in the early eighties. Right.

Gus Nolan ([06:56](#)):

I see. So it's post FDR, I mean, FDR had passed away in '54, '56? '46! He passed.

Donna Berger ([07:04](#)):

Yeah. It was one of the relatives was there. So anyway, I was watching them and I said, "they left the wine on the table", the bottle, and they left, they had to catch a train or whatever. So we had the wine glasses hanging outside in the dining room and I just thought, well, everybody's chattering and having a nice time. Nobody's gonna notice if I have a sip. So I took the glass down and I poured a little taste because I had never tasted \$350 bottle of wine. And I never tasted it, because I put it up to my mouth, it skipped over my tongue because Harold came up behind me and said, "Young lady." And the next day

the whole staff got a lecture because of me. And he did this theatrical kind of, he said, "when the first guest arrives, the curtain rises and you are on stage", and it went on kind of like that. Needless to say, I learned my lesson. I learned a lot from that whole experience and I'm very grateful for it.

Gus Nolan ([08:15](#)):

I have to interrupt because it, it destroys my outline here because... I know we were going to go in a certain series of pieces, but how do you explain your simple background of leaving high school and having a PhD? What's the trick there?

Donna Berger ([08:35](#)):

Well, I think it's determination. I was always good in school. So I was very good in school, but I think when parents split up, and when you're at a vulnerable age, all kinds of things things can happen. And I probably got in with the wrong kids, and so on and so forth. But the change occurred, two things. One, I left the area, so all of the nonsense...

Gus Nolan ([09:07](#)):

Upstate New York.

Donna Berger ([09:09](#)):

Yeah. I left the area and came here, went to Harold's. I would say that that was a part of it. I ultimately split up with my first husband. We were too young. I married my...

Gus Nolan ([09:23](#)):

I heard you say that, 18 years.

Donna Berger ([09:24](#)):

Yeah. And I met my husband of 33 years shortly after we split up, and he was a PhD in physics. A very brilliant man, probably the most brilliant person I've ever met in my life, and we got married. Well, he put it this way. I did my GED. I studied for a year, and I took the GED. I applied to Marist and I got a very high score on the GED, I got into Marist and I started part-time and I was still working part-time at that time. I did that for one year, met Brother Joe Belanger and Professor Waters was one of my professors, Waters.

Gus Nolan ([10:24](#)):

Oh, Waters, Ed Waters.

Donna Berger ([10:25](#)):

Yeah. Ed Waters.

Gus Nolan ([10:27](#)):

Here's another take off, that is special to the, everything had to be... for another word, failed, you know?

Donna Berger ([10:33](#)):

Oh yeah, yeah. And he taught me a lot. Actually, I took a class with Ed Waters first and it was a writing rhetoric course. And my husband kind of guided me through, he would choose my professors for me in the beginning. But that was I think probably the main change. Well, my mother would say it this way. She said, "Donna, when you were a kid, we couldn't get you to go to school. And then all of the sudden you became an adult and we couldn't get you to stop going to school." And that's kind of what happened. So I ended up coming to Marist part-time at first and then moved into full-time.

Gus Nolan ([11:12](#)):

Was your major here?

Donna Berger ([11:13](#)):

My major was English Literature with George Sommer. He was very instrumental.

Gus Nolan ([11:19](#)):

We're back to the particulars now.

Donna Berger ([11:21](#)):

Yeah. He kind of influenced me. I was so shy, to be honest with you. I was in the library. I was getting some books out and George passed me, and I was in his Lit 1 class, and he said, "you're an English major, aren't you?" And I was afraid to say no. So I guess I said yes, and then I became one. It was something that, if my memory serves me well, that's pretty much what happened. And then I stopped my job and I went full-time. And Xavier Ryan was another person.

Gus Nolan ([12:06](#)):

Oh, you weren't in that group. Were you?

Donna Berger ([12:08](#)):

Yes, I was in the Science Immune Program.

Gus Nolan ([12:10](#)):

Oh! You said enough. Alright, now I know where we are. You guys were unique, he was a unique person. And developed that whole mentality of ways of knowing and how do we know what we know, and all of this stuff, so... When you look back, basically nobody thinks about it. That kind of says a few things. Alright, well, this is Marist. Where do you go from here?

Donna Berger ([12:44](#)):

At that time, and this kind of leads into working at Marist, but I liked linguistics very much, and I was taking a class with Julianne Mar. I took several linguistics classes with her. She was my professor, but then she became the Academic Vice President at Marist. She was the first female Academic Vice President. And I was graduating right around that time from Marist and I was looking for a job, and I asked her if she needed any help in the office. She said, "well, I could use an assistant." So I started out part-time in the fall of 1985 and then went full-time by the 1st of September, I think. No. September, I started in '85 and I believe I was part-time, and then it turned into full-time in January of '86. Yeah.

Gus Nolan ([13:44](#)):

And then for the university, where did you get your degree?

Donna Berger ([13:49](#)):

For the university? Well, I got my bachelor's from Marist in English Literature, and then I went on for a master's in English Literature at SUNY New Paltz. And interestingly enough, George Sommer... I never took a Chaucer class. George Sommer wanted me to take Chaucer, and I got away not doing that, went to New Paltz and, wouldn't you know, that he taught the last class that I took and it was Chaucer, as an adjunct at SUNY New Paltz. From there I decided to take another master's here at Marist, and that was in Educational Psychology. And I graduated, I believe it was '94, with that master's.

Gus Nolan ([14:43](#)):

That was Royce White, and...

Donna Berger ([14:46](#)):

No, Royce I had as an undergraduate. No, that was David Rule, and Linda Dunlap was in that program.

Gus Nolan ([14:58](#)):

Yeah. Those times come back.

Donna Berger ([15:00](#)):

Jan Stivers.

Gus Nolan ([15:01](#)):

Oh, okay. Jan Stivers.

Donna Berger ([15:02](#)):

Jan Stivers was one of my professors. Ron Crowell was another one of the instructors.

Gus Nolan ([15:14](#)):

Bill Idol anywhere?

Donna Berger ([15:15](#)):

Bill Idol. Did he teach one of... no, I never took a class from Bill Idol, but actually Ed O'Keefe and I team taught one of his graduate classes.

Gus Nolan ([15:27](#)):

Alright, alright. That's the name I wanted to get to here. Didn't you write with him?

Donna Berger ([15:30](#)):

Yes.

Gus Nolan ([15:31](#)):

Okay. So you got a doctorate out of New Paltz? Where does the doctorate come from?

Donna Berger ([15:42](#)):

Well, the doctorate I did a little bit later, that was after New Paltz. SUNY, Albany. I started a PhD program. So I went on for my PhD in Educational Psychology and Policy Studies.

Gus Nolan ([16:03](#)):

Okay.

Donna Berger ([16:04](#)):

Yeah. And that I finished in 2003.

Gus Nolan ([16:08](#)):

Okay. You started working as a part-timer, then you went to full-time. What was the banner under you? Were you working for administration, or you're working for... When did the grants thing come into it?

Donna Berger ([16:28](#)):

That was during the time when Marc VanderHeyden and Linda Cool were... Marc VanderHeyden was the Academic Vice President and Linda was his Assistant Vice President. I was actually Marc's assistant. And then when Linda came on, I think there was a change where they wanted to have somebody... They wanted to create a grants office for faculty. They saw it as kind of a symbol for elevating research or advancing research and scholarship at the college. So Marc asked me to start the Grants Office. And we were actually working on grants through the Academic Vice President's office at that time, which was not a very good set up because it can get very hectic. So eventually he created an office for me.

Gus Nolan ([17:24](#)):

Was there a model out there? We are looking at some other colleges that had it, Sienna, or you know, that had a Grants Office? Or did you start this from scratch?

Donna Berger ([17:37](#)):

Well, in a way it was started from scratch. We did go over to Vassar College because Linda Cool's husband, Ken Cool, was running the Grants Office over at Vassar and they had an odd set up and they, in my opinion, still sort of do. The routing forms, for getting the grants approval, we used from a model of one of Vassar's forms. I did a lot of research early on of how other schools structured their Grants Offices. Usually there's a pre-award and a post award office.

Gus Nolan ([18:18](#)):

Where do you do the research for that kind of thing?

Donna Berger ([18:21](#)):

Well, I became a member of the National Council of Research Administrators and they have amazing resources. And as a matter of fact, that organization should be credited for a lot of the things that I found out in those early days, because I went to a conference there. It was very scary to be honest with you because these were very experienced, very smart people, and they had run offices for years. And we really didn't have anything in place at Marist at that time. I'm talking about the mid-nineties. So in that sense, we built it from scratch. We had to have certain policies to accept federal awards and so on and so forth, and certain practices in place. And so now I think it's evolved to something that's quite strong. I

work very closely with the Business Office. And I think part of it too, a lot of times people work in their separate offices, but when you're a Marist graduate you don't see those boundaries between offices. You kind of just, you work together. So I work very closely with the Business Office and other offices.

Gus Nolan ([19:34](#)):

Yeah, but I'm surprised. Who in the Business Office would be aware of these kinds of things? If you go back to Tony Campili, he was a Marist graduate. And his explanation, his line is, hire him because he didn't want anyone else to know how dumb he was. But even the staff in those days were not PhDs by any stretch of the imagination, or even MAs, I think. They were college graduates more than likely, but to talk about this level of applying to foundations and institutes and so on...

Donna Berger ([20:15](#)):

It's a different. Yeah, you're right. And at that time I remember Tony... In fact, we had a conversation. He got scared when we got our first grant, big grant. We didn't start small. We started with an over million dollar grant at the time with Science on the Move with Andy Malloy. So that was a real eye-opener for the college, because that was the first time that we got that kind of money from a federal grant, that I'm aware of. And it still was a model of, a wonderful proposal. But I remember when we got that, for example, we didn't have what's called a Federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate, and that's a disadvantage. So Tony, to his credit, he got on the horn with the National Science Foundation and negotiated that rate, and it was called a Predetermined Rate. And then later on Vicki Mullen came up to me, and I ultimately became friends with her but I didn't know her at the time, she came up to me in the Donnelly coffee shop. And she said, "I'd like to help you with that Indirect Cost Rate." Because I had been looking to get one in place for several years and she actually did the first rate agreement with the Federal Government so that Marist could recoup the overhead, which is indirect costs.

Gus Nolan ([21:39](#)):

Yeah. I think parallel to that in my view of learning here without knowing anything where the grants that came from the New York Dormitory Foundation, whatever it was, that provided the fund for the building of Champagnat, Leo and those grants. In other words, a lot of our students, they live on campus, but we don't make any money. We only make money for the tuition and their money for the most part pays for the building that we have a loan on. I probably had that not correct.

Donna Berger ([22:24](#)):

Well, those kinds of grants I was not involved with. That was probably prior to my time even.

Gus Nolan ([22:33](#)):

Oh yeah. See was Linus and Ed Waters. And also there was another Assistant President here, he eventually... oh, he went to St. Rose. I think he became President of St. Rose in Albany. Those names quickly disappear from...

Donna Berger ([22:59](#)):

Mark Sullivan.

Gus Nolan ([23:01](#)):

Yeah. Right, right.

Donna Berger ([23:01](#)):

Yeah, I worked with Mark Sullivan early on, but it was mostly Faculty Academic Grants, was my area. We got involved with some building grants, like the Hancock Center, there was a new lab that was put in in Roger Norton and I worked on that. We received that grant, and it was a big grant. But it wasn't for bricks and mortar. That's a construction grant.

Gus Nolan ([23:31](#)):

A side question. Do you get six percent, like a real estate agent for every grant you get?

Donna Berger ([23:36](#)):

No, I wish I did. No, no. That's been suggested by one of my friends on campus. I think Roger Norton was the one that said that I should get... but no, no, it doesn't work that way. We just get to do another grant.

Gus Nolan ([23:56](#)):

So you are at Marist now and you're fundamentally in the same role, right? You came as assistant to VanderHeyden... Not VanderHeyden, the Academic Dean and then you moved along in there, but it's like in that Administrative Office where you are helping do things, get things financially for the most part. That's kind of what it is. Okay. Side question, have you ever moved to go elsewhere? Have you knocked on the door and say, "Linda?"

Donna Berger ([24:39](#)):

Well, actually, the Cary Institute of Ecosystems, I came very close to going there. And the reason that it was interesting to me was because their whole environment is grants. It's like being part of a big Grants Office where everybody understands that grants are important, understands that the policies need to be in place. And so it seemed like an ideal environment, but no, I didn't go there.

Gus Nolan ([25:16](#)):

By way of the success story of it, I'm sure that people are tempted to say, "Why don't we get Donna to come and work with us?" You know? But that will lead into the next thing about, there's a question later on down, but it's important here. Do you feel some kind of attachment to Marist?

Donna Berger ([25:44](#)):

Oh, absolutely.

Gus Nolan ([25:45](#)):

The question would be, what is the glue that kept you here for all those years?

Donna Berger ([25:53](#)):

Oh, that's a good question. Well, first of all, when I first started working, I was working with all my faculty, you know? And we didn't have too many part-time people at the time. I had one adjunct faculty member through my undergraduate years, and she was considered a super adjunct. Madam Bolston, who taught French.

Gus Nolan ([26:21](#)):

Did Madam Greg not take you in classes?

Donna Berger ([26:24](#)):

No, I did. I had Madam Greg too. I took five French classes. Can I speak a word of French now? No. But Madam Bolston was an adjunct professor and I was working with her, but she was the only adjunct that I ever took here. So I think that partly it was that I got to work with faculty that I knew and loved, so there was a lot of connections in that way. And it took a while for me to realize that I was becoming a colleague. Early on, I still felt like a student, but over the years now, that's changed the most.

Gus Nolan ([27:03](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Donna Berger ([27:03](#)):

But yeah, I think that Marist is a special place. I think Dennis Murray has done an amazing job here.

Gus Nolan ([27:13](#)):

I have no idea what time is. I don't care. This is then related questions. You have an occasion to talk to a number of office people, don't you? In other words, you know people in finance or the treasury or whatever we call it, the budgeting, and that aspect of it, purchasing, all those kind of different things that go on. Do you find a kind of similar spirit? Or is Marist a stepping stone? This is a good place to stay while I have it, but maybe New Paltz would be better, you know? Is that sentiment...

Donna Berger ([28:03](#)):

Yeah, I think I know what you're saying. I never looked at Marist as a stepping stone and maybe that's a fault of mine. I don't know. But I have seen in some cases where we've probably had people come here in higher level positions, perhaps it's a dean or, I don't know, vice president level that...

Gus Nolan ([28:26](#)):

Presidents have gone out of here.

Donna Berger ([28:27](#)):

Yeah, right. Well look, when Dennis stepped down and we had a new president come in and that didn't... Things felt different then. Because Dennis was very much, he knew people's names. You'd see him around campus, at any event. I even said the other day, I said, "you know, you can't go to an event where you don't see him." Somehow, when he was not here it didn't feel that way, and the president wasn't as active. His replacement, then. So I was thrilled when he came back. I don't know if everybody was, but I was. I was so happy.

Gus Nolan ([29:12](#)):

I mean, the vote was going down. I think if we didn't get him back...

Donna Berger ([29:15](#)):

Yeah. It just felt like we were back where we should be. I know a president can't stay forever, but...

Gus Nolan ([29:22](#)):

Oh no, he deserves rest. And he had a terrible year. I don't know, two years.

Donna Berger ([29:26](#)):

What a year. What a time to come back.

Gus Nolan ([29:28](#)):

Yeah. I've admired him for taking the courage to come back, and so on. But the other question was, do people that, I don't know if they do anymore, come from IBM here or from Texaco or from the state? Is there a comparison about life at Marist? Are the benefits equal, is the social life acceptable? I had two different experiences. I went to IBM on a sabbatical two different times. I went to Texaco. Every seven years, you get a sabbatical. You're here long enough, you get several of them. So, the difference between IBM and Texaco would be night and day. And I was just wondering, do people come here with a night and day, this is so different, or this is too tough? What's the pulse?

Donna Berger ([30:28](#)):

Well, I think that we used to get a lot of people from IBM. One of my dear friends, may she rest in peace, she just passed away this past year, Mary Ann Hoffman. She left IBM and she came here and the transition for her was... she just fit right in at Marist. And she did an amazing job. She was salt of the earth, you couldn't help but admire her. She was here, I don't know how many years she was here, but I think she was here probably 15 years. And she seemed to me like a Marist person. I don't know how to describe a Marist person, but she was totally committed to the college and she was just wonderful to work with. And if she had a job to do, she reached out and she got people involved and it was like the Marist I always knew. But I think there's others that have made the transition from IBM, for example, and the culture's different. It's more of a corporate culture. And I think some of them have a hard time adjusting because it's different.

Gus Nolan ([31:46](#)):

They don't go home at five o'clock, necessarily. Yeah. There is work to be done.

Donna Berger ([31:50](#)):

Yeah. And it's also understanding academics and faculty, and it's a little different.

Gus Nolan ([31:59](#)):

They're different people, the faculty. I mean, some of them are obnoxious at times. I was among them, but that phase of it is true. Okay, change the pace a little bit. Changes at Marist. You have seen a good number of changes.

Donna Berger ([32:22](#)):

Yes.

Gus Nolan ([32:22](#)):

Okay. Let's start at the top. What would you say about some administrative changes? Because you've seen some vice presidents, you've seen academic deans, you've seen chair people, and so on. You have to deal with them occasionally. What major changes have been taken, in your view?

Donna Berger ([32:46](#)):

Well, obviously the building, the physical space on campus has changed tremendously since when I was a student. We had most of our classes in Donnelly Hall or across the street when Julian...

Gus Nolan ([33:00](#)):

I'm familiar with that. I taught in both places, with poles in the middle of the hallway and all this.

Donna Berger ([33:09](#)):

Yeah. Every change just made the campus more and more beautiful, and it's just incredible. I remember when I was taking tennis it was down in a parking lot. I don't even know what's there now, but it just was so, so different. Every building on campus has changed for the better, it's just been modernized. It's incredible. So the buildings obviously changed the campus physically over the years.

Gus Nolan ([33:40](#)):

And the lawns too.

Donna Berger ([33:42](#)):

And the lawns. Yes.

Gus Nolan ([33:42](#)):

There was the kid about Dennis measuring the lawn, you know.

Donna Berger ([33:45](#)):

Yeah. And it's beautiful. And the grounds people keep everything, so, so perfect. So those were changes, but also, I think we changed a little bit with people. We had people that... well, you yourself. The Marist brothers who built this college. Andy Malloy, Brother Belanger. There's a whole host of people that were just the early Marist, you know? Dr. LaPietra, he taught me physics. I think that was another C+ I got. So in that sense, there were some just pillars of the community that I totally respected for their work and commitment to the college. And that, I think, was extended to other people. I think if anything's really changed, as far as people, is that we don't have the occasions to... I think Dennis brought some of that back, for the community to get together, but yeah. Everybody knew each other.

Gus Nolan ([34:56](#)):

Well, Donnelly at the center point, all the faculty offices were there, you know? Now departments don't even talk to each other.

Donna Berger ([35:05](#)):

That's right. Yeah.

Gus Nolan ([35:05](#)):

So science is over here, and communications over here, and there's such a difference between them.

Donna Berger ([35:12](#)):

We used to have faculty retreats. In fact, when I was in the academic vice president's office, I had to organize those and we would go to William's Lake and Whalom.

Gus Nolan ([35:23](#)):

Yeah, Whalom. I remember those.

Donna Berger ([35:23](#)):

Some faculty probably didn't wanna go, but everybody knew each other and they had such a great time. At least I did. I thought it was the most exciting event of the year.

Gus Nolan ([35:37](#)):

In the winter.

Donna Berger ([35:38](#)):

And a lot of good came out of that because we would have a theme and work on it for a couple of days. Actually, the book that I wrote with Ed and Barbara Carpenter was involved, when we wrote the self-management book for college students. That was after John Gardner from the University of South Carolina did that whole two days for the faculty. And we got some ideas and we started working on making some of the things that he was talking about happen.

Gus Nolan ([36:09](#)):

Is the book still available?

Donna Berger ([36:11](#)):

Yes. Yeah. It's still actually used at the college. We've revised it several times and they're still using it for...

Gus Nolan ([36:20](#)):

What about Ed O'Keefe? Are you still in touch with him?

Donna Berger ([36:22](#)):

Oh, yeah. We argue politics once in a while, but he's in Florida. I haven't seen him in many years now. He used to come to Poughkeepsie more often when his son still had a house in Poughkeepsie.

Gus Nolan ([36:38](#)):

He writes a lot of letters to the editor of the paper down there. I remember visiting him once. Some of them get published, but not many them because he's not allowed to say. Okay. Give me a view of your students. When you were a student and now, what's the major three different points between them? One would be financial, I suppose.

Donna Berger ([37:12](#)):

You mean as far as, um...

Gus Nolan ([37:15](#)):

Describing a Marist student of 1985 or '83 and the Marist student of 2020. Is there much... Are they the same person?

Donna Berger ([37:29](#)):

I think that, yes and no. As far as age and all of that, they're similar, but I think that there's less modesty, as far as dress and things like that.

Gus Nolan ([37:49](#)):

Yes, I've seen some of the women on campus, and guys as well.

Donna Berger ([37:52](#)):

And I don't think at the time when I was coming up, you just wouldn't dress that way. The other thing I think is that the students are more challenging in a way, and maybe that's for the good, I don't know. When I was in class, I would ask questions and I would listen, but I would never confront a professor, or anything like that. And I don't know that students do that now, but I have the feeling that may be more the case. That they're more aware of what recourse they have to challenge certain things than our group did.

Gus Nolan ([38:42](#)):

Financially, I think there's a big difference. When you have 7% of the freshman class of parents in the one percentile, versus first generation college kids, nobody in my family went to college. That was '70's, '80's. That's pretty much what it was.

Donna Berger ([39:03](#)):

And I think the fact that they're paying and can afford it, that that's some leverage that students sometimes, I've heard, use a little bit. And also, if they look at themselves as that they're purchasing their education, that can have a tremendous impact on how you interact with people. Right?

Gus Nolan ([39:26](#)):

There was once where they used to put these, maybe they still do, little dramas on for orientation week and life at Marist, and this is the way it is. And kids are around the stage, and they're playing the parts of students. And so one, the situation was, come on, we're going out. Let's go. We're going out to have a few beers. No, no, I have a biology test tomorrow! I have to pay... well my parents are paying so much. No, it costs me so much money, but it's not your money. That kind of drew the crowd. The parents watching it said, "Oh my god, you know, these guys are hitting it." And someone took VanderHeyden and said, "If you could take this lump of mine and make him one of those, I'll pay the \$30,000 a year." It was just like, if you could do that, make this kid like that up there, who responds so bright, intelligently. So you can appreciate the people.

Donna Berger ([40:40](#)):

And I don't know whether the work ethic has changed. I think that a lot of people, not just students, but even administrators, they don't want to read anymore. They don't want a lengthy explanation of something. It's just like, give me the bullet points. Some things can't be bulleted. Sometimes there's more complexity.

Gus Nolan ([41:02](#)):

Do you think, is grant monies out there for as long as we exist? Or is the well running dry on grants, do you think, from foundations and institutes and so on?

Donna Berger ([41:21](#)):

Well, I think there's money. There's quite a bit of money out there. I think it's very competitive, you know? Because the money that's out there, and now with the Biden Administration, there is more money for certain initiatives from the Federal Government. So that's changed. And we used to always say that when a democratic president got in that there was more money that was thrown into different things.

Gus Nolan ([41:50](#)):

One other point about changes at Marist, in the development of programs, master's degree programs. Is there a doctorate? Well, there is a doctorate in the sense of... but this is another aspect. You were here when the master's program started, right?

Donna Berger ([42:10](#)):

Oh yeah. Well, I took a master's program here.

Gus Nolan ([42:14](#)):

That's true. Yeah. Okay. I'm thinking of Dan Kirk doing the first one in psychology, whatever it was, whether it was educational or was just plain psych, I don't know, but on his whole point about it, fighting with the state. Again, call Dan, and someone thought I wasn't busy or he's busy, so Dan says, "Well, I'm gonna sit here until he's not busy." So that kind of experience was, again, I think what made Marist pretty much what it is.

Donna Berger ([42:50](#)):

Well, and that's an interesting thing in terms of change. The faculty. I mean, I think of Midge Schratz, and I was walking through the library and they were debating, there was some committee meeting of the faculty, and she was so outspoken about what she thought about things. But it had character, and it had commitment those days. And I'm sure that's still true among the faculty. I may not see it as much as I did then. I like that energy that the faculty, when I was going to school here, had.

Gus Nolan ([43:31](#)):

She now is somewhat limited. I had an occasion, we had an anniversary, Liz and I, we had a little get together at Shadows, and Midge and Liz were good friends for years, played cards and walked and a number of things together. So she came, but she's in a wheelchair, she couldn't walk in, but her head is still there. All her marbles and all of that, just physically. Well, she's 90-something now I think.

Donna Berger ([44:04](#)):

Wow. Well, she was one of my professors. I took two classes with her during the master's program and I loved her classes. She was amazing.

Gus Nolan ([44:14](#)):

Okay. Let's look ahead. Where do you see Marist going? Tell me how you see it 10 years from now.

Donna Berger ([44:26](#)):

I think that the foundation that is here is a solid one and that we will do well. I mean, we can't afford too many more COVID outbreaks, but yeah. But I think that Dennis and the faculty and administration that built this college did a fabulous job. And there is somehow a commitment among the people that have come later to make this school all that it can be and work.

Gus Nolan ([45:02](#)):

I'm glad you said that because I had a feeling that that was not as strong as the way you just presented it. I didn't know that the faculty was committed. Obviously they are, because they're still working. I mean, the reputation of Marist is still high. It's not an easy place to get into, in terms of the standards that we've held. You do have to go to class, you can't just stay in the dormitory. So we have some academic... Whether that would be preserved...

Donna Berger ([45:42](#)):

And it's different among the different schools too. What I may be thinking about in one area, like I think of Elisa Woolridge, who just got faculty of the year. She works tirelessly with students and so do many of her colleagues in that department now.

Gus Nolan ([46:08](#)):

What department is she in?

Donna Berger ([46:09](#)):

She is actually a chemist and she's in chemistry.

Gus Nolan ([46:14](#)):

Oh, so, science.

Donna Berger ([46:14](#)):

She's in the School of Science. And she came, I know this because she just mentioned it yesterday, or the other day when I went to listen to her talk, but she came in 2002. And she mentioned Richard LaPietra. So I think that people that came in during that time, and maybe that's what it is, maybe that's a part of it that people that knew the faculty and administrators who built the college have a little bit of a different orientation. But I think that that gets passed on when people stay like Elisa. I have no doubt that that department will thrive, and that the students will stay and do well. It is more separate than it used to be. You're right. The different schools are in different buildings. They don't necessarily have the exchanges that they... And I think that that would be a nice thing to have come back. That is one thing I've noticed. I went to a couple of events the last few weeks and there was the new dean of communication and we only saw people from communication there, we didn't see, or I didn't see, except for a few administrators. I didn't see everybody there. There were other deans from different schools, but I didn't see faculty there. Years ago, if there was an event and it was an important event, everybody went. And all of the academic deans would go and all of the vice presidents and administrators and would bring people from their area. I think that was important. And that's something that we've lost quite a bit. And I always note, who's not there. Especially if it's somebody I think should be there.

Gus Nolan ([48:13](#)):

Right, right. I'm a little bit hesitant about the new president in this. He's a Notre Dame graduate, that's fine. But his major is in finance. And then you look at Dartmouth and you look at Amhurst. His background is very strong in the world of money.

Donna Berger ([48:39](#)):

Well, he's a historian also.

Gus Nolan ([48:42](#)):

He's a historian. Okay.

Donna Berger ([48:44](#)):

But, you're right. He does have a financial background.

Gus Nolan ([48:46](#)):

What I'm afraid of, just imaginary, because I have no evidence, is the tip that we lose a lot of the academic that we do, less of the science and less of literature and less of the languages and the year abroad, that kinds of things that give a cultural body to the college, to mammon of money. More people, graduates in computer science getting offers of \$50,000. And teachers say well, I guess now they're all getting, I'm not sure they're all getting \$50,000, probably they are. But it's just that idea of money being so important that the college would not yield to that temptation. I could be way off. Am I way off?

Donna Berger ([49:51](#)):

I had a different impression of... When I saw that the new president had a financial background I thought, that's good, because in this day and age you need somebody that's paying attention to what's going on with the books, and to make sure that there's enough money to sustain for the future. So I had a different impression that way. I didn't get the impression that it would be guided by finances so much. But I don't know. I don't know him. I wasn't on the search committee.

Gus Nolan ([50:33](#)):

I suppose a lot of it would have to do with the director of admissions. I mean, the schools that we go to to try to get people to come here would have something to do with it too. You go to schools with good academic backgrounds and of course we have a bigger sweep. We're not just going to the Bronx and Queens. And there's more outside of New York than in New York here now. Across the country, you know? I think we have like, 90 from California or more, 90-something, so this is kind of a wider sweep to draw. But I'm just hoping that it remains as it is now, a happy balance between one and the other.

Donna Berger ([51:25](#)):

Right. And there's a lot of challenges today, as everybody knows. Some of the problems that have occurred at other schools, Marist has not really faced some of those things head on.

Gus Nolan ([51:43](#)):

Yeah. Right.

Donna Berger ([51:44](#)):

And depending on how the college positions itself, in terms of almost everything, it's going to make a difference. In terms of who its faculty are and who its administrators are and the ideas that they bring. God knows when an administrator changes, the ideas for the college can change too, just like in politics. There's a big difference between Trump and Biden.

Gus Nolan ([52:09](#)):

Tell me about it.

Donna Berger ([52:10](#)):

And I think we experienced a little bit of that when we had the transition between Yellin and when Dennis left. That was a real eyeopener for us. Most of the people nobody knew, except...

Gus Nolan ([52:31](#)):

Those that picked him.

Donna Berger ([52:31](#)):

They didn't know anybody but Dennis, except for people that were here years ago, before me.

Gus Nolan ([52:41](#)):

I heard we sold the farm. Did we sell the farm?

Donna Berger ([52:43](#)):

I believe we did it. Yes.

Gus Nolan ([52:45](#)):

Did we sell the real estate in New York?

Donna Berger ([52:47](#)):

I don't know what the status of that is. But yeah, I think they're probably gonna.

Gus Nolan ([52:54](#)):

It kind of leads into where, when I interviewed Doc Doherty, I said, "Doc, if you had a chance to speak to one of the members of the board, or go to them, what would you say about Marist?" He said, "I speak to a guy from the board every day." Gerry Dahowski or something like that.

Donna Berger ([53:20](#)):

Oh, yeah.

Gus Nolan ([53:20](#)):

They're drinking buddies! What is this? But seriously, if you think of retiring before that, they say, "Donna, we'd like you to come and address the board on what you think Marist needs or what it should do or what it should not do." What would you suggest for the future of Marist? Where should the emphasis be? What would you do?

Donna Berger ([53:51](#)):

I think that a sense of community that we had, I don't know that that's there as much as it was in the past, and I don't know how Dennis did it, and the faculty, but it was there. And it was something, it was palpable. You could feel that you were part of a community. I think we risk losing that. And maybe it's because I'm over in the grants office and I don't get out as much as I should, but that's something that I think is very instrumental in retaining faculty, and retaining students and administrators, and just creating a vibe on campus that's so important to everyone to feel a part of it. And then you have people that will work harder also. So that would be my main...

Gus Nolan ([54:46](#)):

Wanting to be here.

Donna Berger ([54:48](#)):

Yeah. And somehow creating mechanisms to do that.

Gus Nolan ([54:54](#)):

The events that bring people together.

Donna Berger ([54:56](#)):

Some way to bring people together more often. I mean, we have Founder's Day. I love Founder's Day. I don't know that newer people have the same feel for that. I never miss a Founder's Day if I can help it.

Gus Nolan ([55:13](#)):

It was September 23rd when I got my Founder's, the 20 year award thing. Did you get yours?

Donna Berger ([55:23](#)):

Oh, yeah. 16 years ago.

Gus Nolan ([55:28](#)):

Very good. Well, any closing remark? Anything I didn't touch that you'd like to touch?

Donna Berger ([55:35](#)):

No, I think we've touched a lot. I mean, there's so much that, over 36 years, you can think of all kinds of things. And we just discussed some things that I had in the back of my mind. But I appreciate your time in doing this. It's wonderful. Wonderful. And I'm happy to be a part of it.

Gus Nolan ([55:55](#)):

Well, you're joining a rather unique group, I would say.