

James Sullivan

Marist College

Poughkeepsie, New York

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For the Marist College Archives and Special Collections

Transcript – James Sullivan

Interviewee: James Sullivan

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Marist College Alumni

Marist College – History

Marist College (Poughkeepsie, New York)

Marist College – Social Aspects

Summary: James “Jim” Sullivan discusses his early years and his studying as an undergraduate at Marist College. He talks about memorable events on campus and his post-graduate career. He compares Marist College from his time and the contemporary Marist College and how it has developed and changed over the years. Additionally, he reflects on the future of technology in education and whether higher education will be worthwhile in the future.

[00:09](#) **GN:** Today is October 21st, 2011. We have an opportunity to interview Jim Sullivan, Dr. Sullivan. You're the class of?

[00:23](#) **JS:** 1966.

[00:24](#) **GN:** '66, Good morning, Jim. How are you?

[00:29](#) **JS:** Good morning Gus. It's fun to be back here.

[00:30](#) **GN:** It's a delight to have you come. We're doing this interview now for the Archives and at the end of it we will ask you to sign a paper that would allow us to use the material gathered for publications or whatever research is going to happen to have using these records in time to come. Jim, can we start this way? Could you start life before Marist your early years where were you born brought up grade school high school?

[01:03](#) **JS:** Sure I was born in 1945. My family had just three years before I moved to Farmingdale, New York. We live there from '45 to '55 move then in '55 to a house not too far away in Rego Park. My early school years I attended Catholic schools throughout high school I went to St Leo's grammar school in Corona in New York. I was a five-year-old kid riding a bus, two buses from my house to get to the Catholic grammar school. When we moved to Rego Park I went to Resurrection Ascension Parish where the Marist brothers taught from Grade six through eight. Had them in grade six, seven, and eight. I then went to Archbishop Malloy High School also run by the Marist brothers. It was kind of like going to Paris Island back then back in the 50s, in the early 60s.

[01:59](#) **GN:** Were the Brothers rather strict in regulations and enforced?

[02:03](#) **JS:** Unbelievably So.

[02:05](#) **GN:** You had a Brother Victor there.

[02:06](#) **JS:** Absolutely Brother Victor used to hang out on the on the roof over the cafeteria and would look for kids whose hair was too long. Yeah and then would rush down and literally cut it off in the middle of the play area. It was an interesting place to be. It was a very interesting place to be.

[02:25](#) **GN:** What years were you at Molloy?

[02:27](#) **JS:** '58 to '62.

[02:29](#) **GN:** '58 to '62. It was one of the first years then.

[02:33](#) **JS:** Yeah they opened in '57. Yeah, they went from St Anne's to Jamaica.

[02:38](#) **GN:** Yeah, I was there for that first year and then I had come from St Ann's Academy which Molloy is ...

[02:45](#) **JS:** Yeah there some legendary people there. Brother Ernest who taught math. Lot of really, really good people. Some really interesting character too.

[02:57](#) **GN:** Yeah were you involved athletics in any way?

[02:58](#) **JS:** No.

[02:59](#) **GN:** Track. [...]

[02:59](#) **JS:** And if you went to Molloy and you were not involved in athletics, you were kind of a non-person it was a very much involved in athletics, basketball. I mean they sent basketball players to the N.B.A. Baseball same thing they sent baseball players from the major leagues.

[03:18](#) **GN:** Well they had Lou Carnesecca there from St Ann's originally. Then Jack Curran came later and is still there.

[03:23](#) **JS:** Jack Curran is still there. I still see his name occasionally. After I graduated from Molloy in '62, well just before I graduated from Molloy, it was decided that I was going to go to college. My mother and father decided that for my part. I really hadn't thought much about it at that point I was actually thinking about maybe go into the army and again. They wanted me to go to a Catholic college. So I applied to three or four St Bonny's, Siena, a couple of other places. Got accepted into Marist. Never visited the campus. Things were done very differently back then.

[04:03](#) **GN:** Contrast to today where you see this group marching around and getting interview. Before you leave the high school, activities. Did you work in the summer did you have hobbies did you play ball at home?

[04:16](#) **JS:** I played a lot of sports at home. Yeah, I played a lot of football, a lot of baseball stickball. I never played basketball. It was never sport I really was interested in. I worked when I was in high school. I worked in a drug store over in Jackson heights for most of my high school

years even worked there for a year after I got into college. Activities at Molloy, I was involved in a lot intermural stuff not into scholastic stuff.

[04:46](#) **GN:** School paper? Yearbook anything like that?

[04:49](#) **JS:** School paper, no, Yearbook, no. When I went to teach I wanted to get involved in that stuff. It was kind of a tough place to be because I was working in the afternoon I got out of school at two thirty quarter three. I had two trains to get home and then I had about a half mile walk from the train station back to my house so staying after school was not something that a lot of my friends that did it and certainly I didn't do it very much myself and as I said most of the sports you were pretty much if you were involved in sports especially track, you were there forever.

[05:27](#) **GN:** But you are well-dressed going to school.

[05:30](#) **JS:** Absolutely tie jacket absolutely. God help you if you didn't have that on.

[05:36](#) **GN:** Moving on. Why Marist? Outside of that it was Catholic, was it close enough? In other words not too far away, did you board here?

[05:43](#) **JS:** Yeah, I boarded here. It was about ninety miles and five miles from my house. Why Marist? I guess it had something to do with my association with Marist Brothers. Obviously, it had something to do with that. There were so many of them I really liked and they were really good teachers. And as I said college to me was something that I was really partially interested in. I will be honest my first year at Marist, I didn't really like it for a lot of reasons ... most of which was I really didn't think I belonged here and that all changed and we can talk about that later on but it was close. It was at that time if you want to know what I cost room, board, unlimited tuition was 1450 dollars.

[06:32](#) **GN:** Amazing.

[06:32](#) **JS** Amazing. When my son graduated from Marist in 2000, the last check I wrote was for 27,500 and god knows what is now.

[06:44](#) **GN:** 42 something but which dormitory was in construction? Was Sheehan up?

[06:52](#) **JS:** Sheehan was the first year it was up. It was my first year here. My friends who had gone here were living in Donnelly for the most part. In fact they were living in Donnelly. I got

into Sheehan and it was... third floor was freshmen. The second floor was sophomores. The first floor was seniors, juniors. I think it held about 120 and 130 kids.

[07:16](#) **GN:** And then Leo went up.

[07:17](#) **JS:** Leo was brand new. I got into Leo, my sophomore year and then Champagnat Hall. I spent two years Champagnat. So I had three brand new dorms in four years. At that time Nilus Donnelly just all over the place with his tractor, digging stuff up, putting stuff up. The guy was amazing, he was amazing.

[07:40](#) **GN:** And there are stories about how they were decided to build them there. They were originally going to put them out on Route Nine and they would have to go down so many feet and Nilus and Linus, they were a combination. Linus Foy, I think was the president.

[07:58](#) **JS:** The youngest college president in America when he was named. He was twenty-seven I think when he was named. He was brilliant, brilliant guy yeah.

[08:06](#) **GN:** He is still very active here you know.

[08:07](#) **JS:** I see his name and the alumni stuff all the time.

[08:11](#) **GN:** I see him every day. He lives in my neighborhood and we're good friends.

[08:00](#) **JS:** I had him as... He was one of the first people to really get involved with the computers. In the fall of '62, he taught freshmen class in computers and I thought that was just amazing that the college president. I didn't know much about college presidents and what they did. I found it amazing that this guy was willing to take on college, a freshman class and we were not Math people and it was made very clear. He made it very clear that he knew we were not math people. We were here to satisfy the one-year math requirement but he was terrific. he's a great guy. Just absolutely approachable.

[08:54](#) **GN:** Very democratic.

[08:57](#) **JS:** Fair and you just, he never ... He was so brilliant but he was so down to earth.

[09:03](#) **GN:** What raises me to say that is some of the decisions like putting up the dormitory... Nilus says to Linus, "Why don't we just put it up on the hill? Where there is rocks already?" And he said, "Alright, you know we'll put it up there." At that time too there might have been still be a stone wall around the place out front and it was beginning to crumble. And again, Nilus, you

mentioned the bulldozer and Nilus says, “You know should we try and fix it or take it down?” No committee meetings, no conferences, no decisions. Take it down. It had been put up to kind of protect the Marist brothers who were here from the outside world. And then that has all changed radically. We want everybody to know we’re here. So they've taken it down and to this day. Well it's been replaced by an iron fence you can see through. I mean it's hard to get... I wouldn't say it's hard to get in here but they try to channel how students will come in rather than just crossing Route Nine which is another story about the dormitories. Well the first you didn't go so well but you came back, you seem to get is a little taste for Marist.

[10:25](#) **JS:** Yeah I fell in love with Marist and toward the end of my freshman year, I fell in love with it I think I probably told you I spent most of my first year. Over at Max or Franks’, the bar. As did a lot of other kids.

[10:39](#) **GN:** Or the Derby. Brown Derby was downtown.

[10:14](#) **JS:** Happy Jacks. All those places and it wasn't because I was away from my folks. It was just I just hadn't fallen in love with college and I guess for first semester my grades really showed it. I think I got my first index was like a two-two-five and I think my second one was a little bit lower than that. But then I ran into some really great profs and I got involved in the theater guild and guys like Jim Britt and Joe Belanger who I just had enormous admiration for and got involved in a play the end of my freshman year in the spring and fell in love with that. I really enjoyed that and I turned things around and I ran in to some profs who were terrific. George Sommer and just so many other. So sophomore year. My college year really was sophomore, junior, and senior. That’s when I was actually a student and actually got decent grades.

[11:36](#) **GN:** Did you ever have a history teacher Cashin?

[11:40](#) **JS:** Eddy Cashin. No, I didn’t. I'm sorry I did, He taught a course that we used to call the Cowboys and Indians. It was about the American West. Yeah. I had Eddy Cashin. Gee, he was another really good guy, really good guy, a smart guy.

[11:59](#) **GN:** Funny guy. Interesting stories.

[12:02](#) **JS:** I had him for one semester for cowboys and Indians.

[12:04](#) **GN:** This is a bullet that just missed, you know. Well how do you know? It didn't hit him. So... that the teachers and how about the camaraderie and friends? There were no women, yet right? On campus at least.

[12:24](#) **JS:** No, we had St Francis' Nursing School. That was the place. And Dutchess Community College, that's where we would get our actresses from in town. But one of the great things about this place and I didn't appreciate it in my first year and I came to love it in my sophomore, junior, and senior was that everybody knew everybody. You couldn't walk down any part of the campus without running into people that not only you knew but you knew well. When I came here, my freshman class graduated I think 176 kids. At most in my senior year we had Sheahan was 120, Leo was 300 maybe, Champagnat maybe 500. We had, I think, under 1000 kids on campus.

[13:13](#) **GN:** Well they were going to stop a twelve hundred at one time, capping it. And then they moved it up to fifteen hundred you know because the more the dormitories went up you know the more then it became attraction for the New York population. And so that the first year or two they didn't think that they would have to do that, that they thought they could draw from the Hudson Valley but Linus was the one who figured it out is that there's not enough student population in this area. We had to put up dormitories and then he was able to swing the deal with getting the government to pay for them. State bonded funding for the dormitories. We just had to pay the interest on it and so we are providing a place for the kids to come to. So that whole cycle developed.

[14:07](#) **JS:** The other thing and I don't think it exists and in most other places and maybe it's very different here now I don't know. Not only did everybody know everybody. But the faculty knew you and you knew the faculty even if you didn't have them in class they knew who you were, in Donnelly hall was the cafeteria and most of the faculty...

[14:30](#) **GN:** The offices of the facility right around the circle.

[14:32](#) **JS:** And they would come into, they would have their dinner there. And they'd coffee and it was not unusual to sit down at a table and have a couple of professors come in and sit down and talk with you. That was a really unique thing about the place they knew you and when people know you can't really screw around too much because it gets out. It gets out very quickly. I remember Joe Belanger saying somebody said we were in rehearsal, my freshman year. And somebody said to Jim was doing a nice job on that part or Jim did something nice I don't what it

was. And Joe said, “It was told to me.” Joe said, “Yeah it's a shame he's going to flunk out.” And that got back to me and that hurt because it suddenly dawned on me that yeah maybe if I don't start getting back on track, I'm going to. And they took a genuine interest in you. They really did.

[15:32](#) **GN:** And he was a straight arrow. Joe would tell you you're an absolute disaster.

[15:38](#) **JS:** He is a good guy, they were all they were all, the faculty here. I can honestly say I never had a bad prof in four years. I'm not sure any other people can say that. People here with legendary reputation is D.A. Drennan. He scared the heck out of people. He was tough. I loved the guy. I love... I took him three times in one year. I loved him I thought he was great. witty smart. unbelievably smart. He would give tests that were just unbelievable.

[16:21](#) **GN:** I was a proctor here in the dormitory one time. Well, it would be '69 I guess it was and there was a book-burning ceremony at the last day. Kids burning his book. Some didn't like him.

[16:35](#) **JS:** He had a black metaphysics book.

[16:37](#) **GN:** They were not particularly pleased. Roscoe Balch, did you ever have him?

[16:43](#) **JS:** I had him freshman year. Roscoe Balch.

[16:46](#) **GN:** Another legend.

[16:47](#) **JS:** He was a good guy. Good teacher. He knew his stuff. He knew his stuff and one of the interesting thing was back in those days, cuts were monitored pretty cool pretty closely but Roscoe for whatever reason never really took attendance on a regular basis and that word got out pretty quickly. And it was a morning class I know that. It was like an eight o'clock eight thirty class and we were over in Donnelly and there's a rear door entrance to the class. There was a front door entries and a rear door entrance to the class and people would bail out as soon as they saw that he didn't have his book, his mark book with him. They would bail out. I mean we... like it was like middle school kids, it really was. He came in one day and he had the book here, tucked in his jacket and kids bailed out and he goes “Aha!” and pulls the book out.

[17:42](#) **GN:** Moving on what did you study will you were here.

[17:45](#) **JS:** I started out majoring in history. Ran into George Sommer, my sophomore year and said I want to teach English cause I thought he was terrific. So I changed my major in the first semester of sophomore year in English.

[18:01](#) **GN:** Did you do Old English with him?

[18:02](#) **JS:** Yep. Yeah. I took him for every course that he taught. Everything that he taught I took I took a course and knows those are the days you could do that kind of stuff. They weren't all that many English teachers back then.

[18:15](#) **GN:** There weren't. No I forget what kind of system it had. We had a time when it was sixty-sixty core program. In other words you had a choice for sixty credits, you chose what you wanted and the department decided that the other sixty like you had to take English literature, American literature or writing course, a speech course, Bob Norman?

[18:39](#) **JS:** Yeah sure I had him freshman year for composition.

[18:43](#) **GN:** For composition. Alright so we've seen... you're growing and liking for it and moving it just one thing more and any particular assignments or involvements that you had? You mentioned the theater but for George Sommer, a paper that got you particularly interested in a phase of literature?

[19:12](#) **JS:** George Sommer was famous for signing these ten, fifteen-page papers, research papers you know way back in the day before Google and before anything even remotely resembling a computer existed.

[19:23](#) **GN:** Technically [...]

[19:25](#) **JS:** And he graded those with a fine-tooth comb but he was a great showman. He really knew how to put on a show and he knew his stuff. But he made it so interesting and he made it so dramatic. He would feign indignation at something or he would feign anger with something and I just stick to sit back there and just sat amazed with him because I thought he was not only a good prof, a good teacher and a good guy. And demanding. But he was fun. He was fun to be in the class with. When you took him for it's like I had him for four courses one year I mean you can't do that without getting to know people on a real level. I remember one time we were in George and I and his wife Ann were over in Max with a couple of other people and we were sitting down having a good time, having a couple beers, and just talking. Again that was one of the amazing things about this place. You can't do in most campuses and I said "Dr. Sommer, I will get you one more beer." Anne yells, "If you get him one more beer Jim I'm going to have him fail you." (laughter) As far as getting involved with I'm not sure I understand the question

about the papers. I will say that everything about this place, I loved. Every single thing. There's not one negative thing I can say about this place or the teaching staff. And the people who went here are friends, my best friends to this day.

[21:11](#) **GN:** Is that ... I was going to ask that now? Did those relationships continue that you developed here? Some of them...

[21:16](#) **JS:** There were two guys who were older than I am one year older and they graduated in '65. Bobby Hackett, Dennis Finney they're my best friends.

[21:23](#) **GN:** Denis F was in the theater stuff, big guy in the theater.

[21:25](#) **JS:** Right that's where I met Dennis. That was in 1962 and you know we've been. We see each other five times a week our wives are best friends. Bobby, I see a couple times a month. We play golf. We go out to dinner.

[21:45](#) **GN:** What is Denis doing now?

[21:46](#) **JS:** Dennis retired. He was an English teacher in a couple school districts on Long Island. He got access the few times, finished up in Huntington, retired the same year I did, 2006. And now he visits his kids in Chicago and Massachusetts.

[22:06](#) **GN:** Did you know Tom Moran?

[22:09](#) **JS:** Tom Moran? No.

[22:12](#) **GN:** Well he was another George Sommer associate as it were. In fact he came... I think we didn't even have Leo yet. There used to be dormitories in Donnelly and he's [...] sequence and then he stayed with George after he graduated. He taught at Lourdes for a year. And he went on to graduate school. In that early years, he's one of those fellows that talking about George Sommer was so friendly with him. Ann asked me, "Where is he now actually lives in Park Avenue? He did very well for [...]"

[22:52](#) **JS:** I guess so. Donnelly was the place where they had four people rooming together.

[22:56](#) **GN:** That's right and they had the famous Murphy beds. They come out of the wall and put them back up you know and they could be a study hall during the day etc.

[23:07](#) **JS:** There was a time back in, I remember in January of '63, the end of my first semester here. It was like a typhoon had come through the kids in the buildings. People came back in January and found three quarters of their roommates had failed out. It was like a bloodbath. You walked in your room and you find your roommate is no longer here. It was really ... It was bizarre. A lot of kids failed out in January.

[23:40](#) **GN:** In January because generally they don't push it that hard till June.

[23:43](#) **JS:** They did and way back then if you fail the class back then. Not only did you get zero quality points. You lost quality points. It was like a minus. They did away with that rather quickly I think after my freshman year. But there were a lot of kids that failed out my freshmen year. A lot of kids.

[24:04](#) **GN:** You like everything. What was the hardest thing for you in college? Like the routine early classes...?

[24:11](#) **JS:** No. Once I got into sophomore year I found everything really pretty easy. I learned how to study. I became a student so that made life a lot easier. I was pretty responsible. The hardest thing about this place was graduation day. I really didn't want to leave. I wanted to stay here.

[24:35](#) **GN:** Well is there a sidebar to that? Was the war on? Was Vietnam?

[24:37](#) **JS:** The war was on. They hadn't really ratcheted up yet. That was coming in '67 and '68. There was some mild protest about it here but almost nothing during my years here. And similarly drugs were non-existent here when I was here. Utterly nonexistent I mean the word you never even heard the word and people drank a lot.

[25:07](#) **GN:** That was the drug, alcohol.

[25:08](#) **JS:** That was the drug. There was no such thing as that here. And I thought that was and how quickly that changed in the next couple years.

[25:17](#) **GN:** Once the war came big time, Jack Eberth is a name ... you don't remember?

[25:23](#) **JS:** Jack Eberth? No. Was he a student?

[25:26](#) **GN:** Yeah, he was a student from Long Island and got drafted while here, while in senior year. Even though it was not to be. It happened and they said, "You can adjudicate this but you

have to come and you know go through it and we'll but once we call you, you're called." They don't make a mistake so you got to go through the routine. He works here now for us he was telling me this story about how he got called and again the kind of the spirit of Marist because he was in senior year and in good standing, they send him a diploma. They let him finish in absentia. You know that made all the difference when he got out of service. They went into I.B.M and did very well.

[26:18](#) **JS:** The war was an interesting thing because it's so much dependent upon where you lived. I lived in a very big draft board in Jamaica, in Queens when I was 1A and I was 1A for a long time. I never got called. I never got called. Then I got deferment because I became a teacher. That elapsed and then they went to the birthday lottery and I pulled a really high number there.

[26:43](#) **GN:** Tell me about the theater. Best shows you're in. Best remembrances at least?

[26:50](#) **JS:** Great memories about that, I guess. I did about seven shows.

[26:56](#) **GN:** A participant in the show or staff?

[26:59](#) **JS:** Yes yeah except, I missed one show and it was *My Three Angels* which was scheduled to go on the day Kennedy got killed and was postponed for a couple of weeks, that Thanksgiving weekend.

[27:15](#) **GN:** Was Steve Antony or Lanning?

[27:17](#) **JS:** Stephen Lanning was around that time. Joe Belanger was after my freshman year. He was still there my second year and I think Jephtha Lanning came in in sophomore year and then pretty much.

[27:28](#) **GN:** Jim Britt is running back of all of them.

[27:30](#) **JS:** Jim Britt was the director of all the years I was here. I did *The Wall*, *The Visit*, *A Hatful of Rain*, *A Man for All Seasons*. That was my last show. I was Cromwell in that show. That was a lot of fun. That was in the theater, in the new theater because prior to that it was...

[27:54](#) **GN:** Over in Champagnat. When they used to use the gym for... I had Ron Pietro here last week. Ron is the former basketball coach. He talked about ... He's got a tape of a basketball

practice in that gym. You know it's a really shoe box you know but that's again part of memory lane.

[28:23](#) **JS:** I think a lot of it too is... most of the people who went to this place certainly when I was here were just garden-variety, run of the mill, middle-class kids who didn't have really big expectations about anything and so whatever they got was kind of the norm. This is the way it is.

[28:40](#) **GN:** Most of them, a good number of them were first-time students of the family to go to college.

[28:45](#) **JS:** Absolutely and the parents weren't sophisticated enough about the whole college process. And certainly the kids weren't. So other places had the spectacular venues and we never saw them because we never went to them. And so we didn't have it. You know it's like the old saying you know my parents were poor but I never knew it.

[29:09](#) **JS:** Yeah, we ate every day, we thought that was good enough. Move on after Marist, what happened after graduation?

[29:15](#) **GN:** After graduation, I figured I was going to get drafted. So my plan was to goof off for the entire summer. And that was my plan and my father asked me, "So what are you going to do now?" the day I got my diploma and I told him, "Well you know who's going to hire me I am going to get drafted." I thought I just kind of like lie around on the beach for the summer and my father was an Irish immigrant and this did not serve his ethic really well. He said, "You've got a week. Get a job." So this is a true story. I think it was Monday, the next Monday. We graduate on Sunday I guess I don't know. Yeah well within a day or so, I'm sitting down reading the paper and I see an advertisement for the Catholic High School in Queens that needs an English teacher. I said I can do that. I had never taught English. I never taught ... I never took an education course I never even thought about becoming a teacher. To me it was just something I didn't want to do. I love George Sommer and I love Stephen Lanning. I love the way he taught but that was not in my thoughts. So I called up and I said, "I see you got an eye out for an English teacher job. I wonder if I can get an interview?" and they said, "When are you available?" I said, "Anytime." She said, "Can you come over in an hour?" I said, "Yeah. I can be there in an hour."

[30:35](#) **GN:** This is for where? Christ the King?

[30:36](#) **JS:** Bishop Reilly High School which is now St Francis Prep. Gorgeous building, gorgeous building, huge. I went over there. The supervising principal sat down with me. Joe Buckley, he was a priest and I had a job in fifteen minutes. So I came home ... It was ... I don't know June 10th something like that. I came ... My father came home. I said, "Dad I got a job." He said, "That's great." he said, "What you going to do?" I said, "I am going to be a teacher but the job doesn't start till September." That didn't amuse him either. He said, "You still got to get a job." I got a job that summer and I started teaching and ten minutes into my first class I knew this is what I want to do for rest of my life. I loved it.

[31:21](#) **GN:** What were you teaching? You're teaching English.

[31:22](#) **JS:** I was teaching English; tenth grade English and I had to take over a senior class for a while when somebody gets sick. Those people I know sixty-three years old, sixty-two years old.

[31:34](#) **GN:** And what was it? It was across the board. You had composition, speech and drama and novel and the whole array of....?

[31:40](#) **JS:** Yeah. There weren't a lot of electives back then but it was your basic tenth grade survey course, eleventh grade survey course, twelfth grade. You know...

[31:47](#) **GN:** The English region was coming. And you've got to square that. Forget about 5 A. You're not going to do it. What was the one all of the twenty questions about literature...

[31:58](#) **JS:** Forty questions, you had to take twenty of them. That was the question C. The other was you taught everyone to take either A or B. Where you could write...

[32:07](#) **GN:** Compare two plays, two novels.

[32:08](#) **JS:** Yeah right. Yeah. It was a great time. It was six and half years and I loved every minute of it.

[32:16](#) **GN:** And what happened after six and a half years?

[32:18](#) **JS:** After six and a half years, I got married. I became department chair at Riley in 1971 or 72 I think. And it was a great time. Well I can only teach two classes. You were only allowed to teach two classes if you were department chair. I had seven people in my department. I was twenty-five years old. I was single. I lived down the block from the school. It was like being on

vacation. It was like literally ... I was spoiled rotten, spoiled rotten. And then I met my wife. We met in community theater. I decided it's time to grow up and go out and you know learn what the real world is like. So I applied for a friend of mine was working in the public schools on Long Island and an opening occurred in January '73 so I went out there. I left Riley on a Friday and started Walt Whitman High School on Monday as a, you know, garden-variety English teacher.

[33:19](#) **GN:** The salary twist was quite significant.

[33:22](#) **JS:** Actually it really wasn't. It was about a thousand twelve thirteen hundred dollars difference because I got a stipend for being a department chair. I had a masters plus some credits and I think it was about twelve hundred... thirteen hundred.

[33:37](#) **GN:** What about the community theater thing? How does fit in here?

[33:39](#) **JS:** A friend of mine who was teaching at Riley was going to audition for a play, *You Can't Take It with You*, that Kaufman and Hart play. I said, "Geez, I haven't done that in a long time. I'd like to get back into the community theater." So we both went to audition and we both got parts. I played the love interest and my wife, ultimately who became my wife, played the girl and we did it in a parish over in Bayside. That was June of 1970. We did the play and then we got married a year later and that's when I decided it was time to move on. I went back to school I got my certification. I was an administrator because I didn't have any of that when I was at Riley. You didn't need any of that I didn't have certification as a teacher until the last year, I was at Riley. You didn't need if you were breathing and you had a degree you could teach. So my wife and I got married and I spent the next thirty-four years ago in South Huntington schools.

[34:49](#) **GN:** Would you say looking back then that the Marist experience in the classroom played that significant role for you to go on and become a teacher?

[34:59](#) **JS:** Yeah and I didn't ... I didn't realize it was going on. You know it was just the kind of thing that hit me. I honestly, I was not a great fan of Archbishop Molloy High School for all kinds of reasons. Most of which were my fault but I would have to say that there are one or two people that I really didn't think were particularly good in the classroom. I thought most of them were really pretty decent. 100 percent of the people I had at Marist were great and they were good teachers. They were enthusiastic teachers and they were fun to be around and they were bright. They were witty. They were articulate and they were friendly and I guess all of that just

kind of got absorbed into me. And when I did suddenly become a teacher and suddenly said, “Wow, this is great.”

[35:52](#) **GN:** It's a nice way of life. You know it's a quality of life and the people you're meeting and so on. I always thought about that I don't want to put words in your mouth but... this spirit that you're exuding here about how it affected you and you went on...

[36:07](#) **JS:** If you like it and you're good at it, it's the greatest job in the world. There's no job better than that. Every day is different. Every day teaching yourself something, you come out at the end of the day, smarter than you went in that day because you've learned something. You can really make a kid's life different. You can change a kid's life with and it doesn't take much sometimes and I always like that and there are kids that I taught that I am best friends with. I still see them to go to their weddings. I still run into them whether they were really bright or they weren't bright at all you know. I still see them all the time in town and it's nice when they come up and say I had you in 1974.

[36:54](#) **GN:** Fast forward your son coming to Marist. Was that a hard thing for him to? How did that fit into things?

[37:02](#) **JS:** I didn't push him to go to the Marist I was going to let him we took we did the parent routine of driving around going to campuses, visiting campuses, I mean I knew enough about how to do this that my parents did not know about. And it was a different world back in 1996 when he was going to college he applied to any number of schools and.

[37:27](#) **GN:** Was he bright?

[37:28](#) **JS:** Yeah, he was. John is a bright kid. He's a phenomenal writer and that's what he's making his living at. He's sometimes lazy. I mean he was not a great math kid but he was bright he got 3.0's (that three of those and you know where have you.) Indexes and he did pretty well in high school he could have done better but you know we all could have. What I like about him most is that he's really a decent kid. You know as I used to tell parents if you can admit that your blood relation to your kid and not be embarrassed by it, you're ok. He's a very decent, decent kid. He applied to about eleven colleges and got accepted into all of them. They all gave him money of one kind or another. Except Marist. Yep, he didn't get anything from Marist and of

course that's where he chose to go and it was not because I pushed him you know we came up to Marist, we looked at Marist. We walked around Marist I told him this was what was here when I was here, this wasn't here when I was here. It was just his decision so I said OK John where do you want to go he said.

[38:33](#) **GN:** Did he have friends here did he know anybody here.

[38:35](#) **JS:** No none of the kids from his high school that he was friendly with came here. And there were kids from his high school who came here but he didn't really know them. And he was high school with twenty-five hundred kids. But he liked it very much and he had a good time here and he did well, got a lot of rewards. Somewhere there's a plaque with his name on it in the theater.

[38:59](#) **GN:** Was he in theater as well?

[39:00](#) **JS:** Yeah, he did some theater here but what he really did was write... He wrote a lot of shows and he was voted the best student writer of plays... and it was produced up here and he got.

[39:16](#) **GN:** They used to have the competitions the kids would put their own plays on.

[39:20](#) **JS:** Yeah, he got a couple of awards for that. And he's making his living doing that now so but he had a good time up here and it was fun coming back up here when he was here. It was at that time were you could say, "Wow God Almighty."

[39:36](#) **GN:** Where did he live?

[39:37](#) **JS:** Initially he lived in Sheahan then Champagnat and then the town houses across Nine

[39:51](#) **GN:** It was the beginning of the new development.

[39:53](#) **JS:** Those were gorgeous buildings. Whew, when I think back to where I lived. Those are like palaces. Incredible.

[40:03](#) **GN:** When you come on the campus now what strikes you most? Where do you begin? This building... you have not been in this building?

[40:15](#) **JS:** No. This building was completed the year my son graduated so it was not... It was not used at that point. It's amazing to me, you know. Even today. As I said the last time I came here

was eleven years ago, it's almost unrecognizable from then. The buildings that are here now that the entrance that stone entrance is brand new. It's got to be.

[40:38](#) **GN:** This summer.

[40:39](#) **JS:** Yeah really impressive because when I first came here, there was a little sign right on nine that said "Marist college." And if you didn't know where it was, you would have past it. Yeah, I was there was no sign way down in Fishkill that said Marist college straight ahead. There's none of that. I think it's like a time warp. It really is. It's amazing. It's beautifully done. It's a very well, laid out campus. It's a very inviting place. I think.

[41:12](#) **GN:** So you were here through Linus' years. But you weren't here when Murray came on. Dennis Murray is the president now.

[41:17](#) **JS:** No he came in... I guess around the early seventies.

[41:21](#) **GN:** Late. '78. Foy was here for twenty years, the youngest president. He started twenty-nine and finished at forty-nine. And then Murray came on about '78, '79... and has been for the last thirty-two years or whatever.

[41:40](#) **JS:** That's an amazing, amazing run for a college president.

[41:43](#) **GN:** It is. They said when Linus left, he had been here twenty years. And I said there will be never another President for twenty years. This guy is here but he had seen an opportunity to do something with it. You know I mean we're not Vassar. They have a lot more over there. The buildings, campus but they don't have the river. And the river has become such a piece of the architectural development here saying you're putting things here facing the river. This building in particular. I want to take you over to the Hancock building later if you have time. That's that new building.

[42:21](#) **JS:** Yeah, I passed it on my way here.

[42:22](#) **GN:** That is another one of the big plan about using the facility...the campus you know to enhance it and make it so attractive when kids come on this, "I could live here?"

[42:43](#) **JS:** The architecture is really striking, very striking.

[42:50](#) **GN:** When you were here, it was hardly unknown. And now with you get N.B.C. News Marist College Poll. The reputation of the place in terms of I don't think I could get in here now.

Much less teach here. So this whole... All the boats went up you know, in other words the requirements to get in and so on. But there's still something we had that they don't really have and that the bonding that was so common that you talked about I think that is really... I don't know what your son would say about that.

[43:30](#) **JS:** No he had the same feeling about it he liked this place. He felt very comfortable up here and he made a lot of good friends up here. Obviously, it was a bigger place when he was here and it wasn't that much opportunity to sit down on an informal basis with professors but he was able to do that occasionally. He was very happy here and I was very happy that he came here without pushing him to go here and he looks back on this as a fond memory where he actually learned to be a writer and was able to do had opportunities to do that kind of stuff in a big place. You know going to U.S.C. Or NYU or places like that, that's probably not going to happen.

[44:17](#) **GN:** Do you know who the professors were that he had? That where that writing developed? Don Anderson, would you know that name? Or Bob Lewis or?

[44:24](#) **JS:** He didn't have Bob Lewis because Bob Lewis was here when I was here. John? What was the name you mention John Anderson?

[44:37](#) **GN:** Donald, Donald Anderson.

[44:40](#) **JS:** I should have asked him. You know who's the professors were that he had. And I did not... I mean coming here today.

[44:49](#) **GN:** Did he have me? Gus Nolan?

[44:52](#) **JS:** I don't think so.

[44:54](#) **GN:** Was he an English major?

[44:57](#) **JS:** Yeah, he was ... No, he was a communications major.

[45:00](#) **GN:** Oh he could have had me somewhere along the line. Don't say anything about it. C. Plus Gus. Couple different questions. I don't know what you would think about it. We spent nine million dollars to put up a stadium over there you know when they were asking about ... They sent out a survey to the faculty and to the graduates and alumni. What do you think about what

Marist needs? Do we need a science building? Do we need new classroom building? You know, do we need improvement to the administrative offices? Do we need a new theater? Do you need a stadium? I had stadium about the bottom of the list. Now I look over at it now and I say this was really a good investment, you know. You have to be here on a Saturday afternoon to see what it can do to a place. We have a marching band now.

[46:00](#) **JS:** I think that it's essential for a school to have that kind of thing going for it because you need that and lots of people want it whether you think it's important or not, other people do. I think you have to be careful not to get so involved in athletics that it becomes the thing that runs the horse. It runs the show. And a lot of schools, most colleges, most big-time colleges have football programs that lose money on them. There aren't all that many, not every place is a Notre Dame or UFC. It's costing them an awful lot of money to run a really big time program but it doesn't cost all that much money to run a really decent football program that will attract kids. I mean you're not looking to become a Division One school here and if you are that's a huge mistake. Athletics are an outlet.

[46:57](#) **GN:** It is an attraction for I mean I was just talking to Linus Foy again. We were at a football game. There's about ninety kids suited up with Marist stinker helmets. Some of them paying 40,000 dollars to come here and their main attraction, they are good students, what are you going to do without it? But if you didn't have a place for them to go and to use all that extra energy, they would have found someplace else. They are not going to play Notre Dame Football. Well not that that's such great ... but they have a chance in their own way to kind of make it and it's the focus then for that part of the afternoon and all week is in preparation for it so those things work well.

[47:54](#) **JS:** It's pride and the place it's something to do. As you said it's an activity it's something you can... get away from books for a while. As long as it doesn't become the thing that drives the show I think they're great/ I think that's terrific and Marist has a good reputation with its basketball teams. It does very well. It's girls' basketball, women's basketball very well. Football is you know you're not going to be Notre Dame but then who is?

[48:25](#) **GN:** Were you here for any of the regatta events?

[48:29](#) **JS:** Yeah.

[48:30](#) **GN:** Again that's ... there's a certain dedication involved also in track and where there's not so much the glory but the person kind of working...?

[48:40](#) **JS:** Oh the crew people I mean they were out of bed at four o'clock in the morning, five o'clock in the morning going down to the river and in the fall.

[48:47](#) **GN:** Yeah, it's cool.

[48:48](#) **JS:** Yeah, it's cold. I had a lot of admiration for those guys. Wasn't anything that really interested me? Yeah the guys who did it you know and they did it for four years. I know a lot of guys I went to school with did it for four years.

[49:02](#) **GN:** What's your take on computers?

[49:07](#) **JS:** I know what my take is on them in public education. It's probably very different in college I think well I'll speak about public education because that's where I've been and that's where I still am I think they are incredibly overused. I think they have become the be-all and end-all of classroom observations. I think we're hiring lots of kids who know how to use all of these things but don't really know a heck of a lot about what they're teaching. I think people have become utterly dependent upon them. Much too much... As far as educational tools are concerned there are some things that are really worthwhile and are very good but now we're talking about using Blackberries as teaching devices. To me that stupid. That's just utterly stupid. We're investing lots of money and we're forcing people to make use of these things and I don't think we really know why we want to use them. My mantra is there is no substitute for a good teacher who knows what he's or she's talking about?

[50:26](#) **GN:** Good teacher in front of the students. Distance education is kind of a myth. In terms of a good teacher it's not a myth... So much is that a good teacher in the York and you're here in Poughkeepsie or the other way around you know the teacher is here and the students don't come to campus, they lose a lot, I think.

[50:50](#) **JS:** Yeah, a college degree on line is I don't even think it's a college degree quite honestly. I supervise a lot of young teachers and I said if you are enthusiastic about this and if you honestly know what you're talking about kids are going to follow you, you're not going to have... such you won't have discipline problems. Kids become discipline problems when they're bored and when they feel that you don't really care about them. And you don't really care about what

you're doing. If they like you and they know that you're working hard and you believe that they can do with what you're asking them to do, they'll follow you into hell. Most kids will do that. The vast majority of kids will I don't think I think smartboards are really great for math classes I think they're terrific for math classes. The rest of the stuff I'm tired of going to classes and seeing PowerPoint presentations. I'm really tired of that and I tell my kids. I don't want to see that stuff. I want to see you as a teacher in front of a group of kids because...

[51:47](#) **GN:** Talking to them.

[51:48](#) **JS:** Talking to them, interacting with them putting on a lesson. Yeah anybody can do a Power Point. And it doesn't take a lot of skill to do it and it masks a lot of ignorance because you've got it up there. You know you copied it out of the book and it's up there on the screen and it's as if you know that stuff well if you need to read that stuff you don't know it. So that's kind of like my take on computers.

[52:14](#) **GN:** Correlation to that though but a kind of part of the same thing, I had the director of, student activities. A woman here Debbie Bell, she's the dean of students and one of the question to her was how have the students changed between your first coming here and now twenty years later you know. And she talks about a couple of things. One: the number of kids who are drugs by prescription of the parents or the doctor to keep them warding depression, keep them enthused you know alert, inspired. And she said you wouldn't believe that part of it. The second, the loneliness or the inability to make new friends because they have their phones and they are calling back home and they're not talking to the kid next to them. That's one of the little problems we're developed here.

[53:19](#) **JS:** Walking down the street with the thing in your hand. And then bumping into everybody because they're not looking up. It just frosts me. It just drives me absolutely crazy. It really does because we turned education into sound bites and flash images. Kids are losing their ability to concentrate because it's hard it's hard to concentrate. You have to force yourself to concentrate and you don't have to do that anymore and kids don't have to go into the dusty and maybe that's a good thing but I still ... I do enjoy summer's papers and in the library. Rummaging.

[53:58](#) **GN:** Readers guide's to literature.

[53:59](#) **JS: PMLA and JEGP.** Even in grad school when I was in St John's and getting my master's degree going into the library late at night coming out of there at ten o'clock at night because I had to do research now. You know you punch it up on Google and there it is. There's a lot to be said for that. There really was. It taught you an awful lot. Kids are not as smart today as they used to be and you know, I'm sixty-five, sixty-six years old and that sounds like sour grapes but they're not. There was a time when three-point five index actually meant something. Yeah everybody's got it now everybody's got it now you know if you have got 3.0.

[54:45](#) **GN:** The other is the bonding thing. I've taken class here just sitting in a class and soon as they come out instead of talking to each other, they're on the phone talking to somebody and so the lack of that ... you talked about everybody else I'm not sure you could say that so much now.

[55:06](#) **JS:** No, they are texting everybody else.

[55:08](#) **GN:** They're texting that is good number of other people I don't know how wide is that range.

[55:15](#) **JS:** There's a kid in my family who ran up a seven-hundred and twenty phone bill. Wow seven hundred twenty dollars for a phone bill because of texting and all the apps that he downloaded onto it. Seven hundred dollars for a phone and it just makes no sense and is getting worse it's getting worse but it's not helping people become smarter. Yeah, kids were a lot smarter than fifty years ago and they are now.

[55:41](#) **GN:** Key question for you to give me an answer to because it's being put on the table. Why bother with college? When at the end of it you really don't get the job that you want. You're paying a lot of money to a good college. What's in it? Is it worth it? Why?

[56:03](#) **JS:** There's a lot of people there are a lot of people who have said that if you took the money that you spend going to college. Let's say its forty grand now for four years one hundred sixty thousand dollar you took that money and invested it well maybe not now. Invest But if you invested ten years ago you probably come out with a really nice piece of change after four years if you invest that money for four years and went out and worked and didn't go to college and that's probably a true argument that you would be better off financially. I don't know that everybody has to go to college I think we've and colleges and schools and parents have argued

that sort of reason that every kid has to go to college no matter what and what comes out of that is that we have to import all those people who used to be craftsmen. If I go to I bring my car to the same guy that I've been going to 25 years. Relatively young guy owns his own business. He's terrific. He's wonderful I love the guy he collects antiques cars but he makes a fortune. Everybody in my town goes to this guy and he's absolutely honest and he never went to college. he got a very successful business he runs and he'll be able to retire whenever he wants. I think we downgrade the goodness and necessity for having craftsmen. When I mean craftsmen, the mechanics and artisans people that create things whether that's an artist or an actor or whatever it might be or somebody... a carpenter. I think we need those kinds of things you like and there's a great nobility in those kinds of professions and there's their necessity.

[57:55](#) **GN:** Yeah Christ was one apparently. But how about another take on it? The quality of life a college opportunity would serve. The readings you're exposed to. The new ideas. The associations of friends that you might.

[58:15](#) **JS:** Absolutely. Financially it's proven that the person who goes who has a college degree earns about a million dollars more in his lifetime than I think it's a million dollars maybe it a half a million dollars more. So from a very mercenary point of view, sure that the college degree pays off. The intangible things that you're talking about the inquiry, the desire to learn if you go to college, you never continue to educate yourself it's a waste of time because college should teach you to do that. It should expose you to things that really can peak your interest in it. You spend a lot of time after college you looking into and reading about and learning about. Yeah, the intellectual life of a country depends upon those kinds of people. And I think I think we've sold college simply because it's embarrassing ... at least in Long Island I think it's embarrassing for a family to say my kid doesn't go to college.

[59:19](#) **GN:** It's a cultural, prestige... kind of thing.

[59:19](#) **JS:** Long Island is fairly affluent, you know, fairly well educated and I think that's, we had these cheating scandals now. Where people are hiring people, we saw that on Long Island. People hire people to take the SAT for them. Payed like 15,000/25,000 dollars. Because the guy guarantee them a twenty-two hundred on the SAT and he came though he got it for them. Who paid for that? The kid paid for it? Maybe. I think a lot of parents paid for it, paid that kind of money, you know that dishonest kind of thing. No matter what it is ... Get my kid into a really

good school. I think we've become mercenaries about it a lot. I don't think I think if you go to a college, I think you go to a place like this. It's not hug. I have wonderful memories of this place it was a very different place back now but I see a lot of that's still here and I saw it when my kid was here. It's preserved a lot of what I found really enjoyable about this place. And that was not just good teaching and it was not just living in three brand-new buildings. It was a whole ethos that existed here. And then I just found myself really comfortable with. Does every kid have to go to college? No. And I think we shortchange people who do by saying that.

[01:00:41](#) GN: Jim, it's been wonderful talking to you. It's about an hour or so we've been here I am going.