Salve Regina Oral History Project

Date of Interview: 6/23/2017

Date of Completed Transcription: 6/28/2017

Narrator: Dr. Lois Eveleth, Philosophy

Interviewer and Transcriber: Allison Graves, Class of 2018

Dr. Lois Eveleth has been a Professor of the Salve Regina Philosophy department since 1969, and was an undergrad at the college. During this interview we touched upon her start in the Philosophy discipline, what Salve was like when she first started as a professor, the Financial Crisis and campus tension in the early seventies, and her thoughts on Sister Lucille McKillop, the construction of McKillop Library, the proposed name change for Salve, ghosts, and her feelings on the current state of the Philosophy department.

Allison: So, you’ve been teaching here [at Salve] since 1969…

Dr. Eveleth: Yes!

Allison: In the Philosophy department…

Dr. Eveleth: That’s right!

Allison: So what exactly got you into Philosophy and then brought you to Salve?

Dr. Eveleth: When I was an undergraduate I was a Classics major, and I studied Latin and Greek, and I started graduate school at Catholic University. And I came in contact with people who were in Philosophy there, cause they have a very large, very vibrant Philosophy department, and I said to myself: ‘Self, I think I would like that.’ So I decided to transfer into the grad program in Philosophy, but I discovered you can’t do that, you have to get all the undergraduate stuff first. So, I did that, and in a few years then I was ready to start the graduate program. So then I started at Loyola in Chicago.

I’ve always been with the Sisters of Mercy all through school and so it became natural, and I lived in Fall River and Tiverton, so it was just natural I should be interested in Salve Regina.

So I got my first contract in 1969…seven year…and I’ve been going on since then, it’s a long time. I can’t believe how fast time goes though, you know? I think of the line in...do you know the *Fiddler on the Roof*? [In] The musical, Tevye, he says I don’t remember getting older, you know, and I think of that so often. Where did the time go? I don’t know, so it’s kinda episodic, accidental really, because if I hadn’t met philosophy majors then I probably wouldn’t be interested.

And now I’m a graduate of Salve also, in the undergraduate, so we had had, at that time, we had three required Philosophy courses, so I had some insight into it, a little bit, after three courses, but it was quite a revelation and Catholic U when I saw all the great questions that Philosophy raises. It’s like a contagious disease, you know, you catch it from somebody else. So that was it. Salve of course was very different in those days.

Allison: How so?

Dr. Eveleth: Oh, ok, how so? Where do I begin? First of all, the size; there were fewer students. When I came, Salve was in dire straits really...I wouldn’t [say]…dire might be a strong word… it was difficult, in fact the faculty missed a few pay rolls, it was that bad. There were fewer students, and there were fewer faculty members, and one of the noticeable things you know especially is the growth in all this time is of staff people. That’s been…the numbers have been exploding. And when I say staff I mean they’re not administrators like deans and presidents, and they’re not students, and they’re not faculty. They’re directors and coordinators, you know, the usual thing. So that number has exploded, so it makes Salve seem a lot bigger than it is, because really we only have about 120 faculty and as colleges go that’s quite small.[[1]](#footnote-1) And we have about 2100…I think that’s about the number now…of students.[[2]](#footnote-2) Again, that’s a small college. So in some ways Salve is very small, but in that way it’s very large.

Another…apart from the student body… they’ve made deliberate efforts to keep the campus beautiful. It’s an extraordinarily beautiful campus and the historic preservation people ride hard on us every so often to keep things correct, and don’t put plastic where wood should be and all kinds of things that would be a big furor. One of the first big furors we had was the elevator in McAuley. At that time a student who was in a wheelchair…we didn’t have many disadvantaged or physically handicapped students for a while, but we had one young guy in a wheelchair and he couldn’t get to his class. We had classes there in McAuley at the time, and so he really complained: ‘Gee so how can I get to my class?’… So the elevator doesn’t work, it’s the old-fashioned kind, you open the door, and the metal grate you had to slide it across and hold it open while you wheel your wheelchair in, and he just couldn’t manage it, so he complained. So they said: ‘Hey he’s right, we never thought of that.’ So they planned to put in a whole new super-duper brand new elevator. And somehow somebody squealed to the Historic Preservation Society, and they came down on horseback and they said: ‘You can’t do that! That’s a genuine…whatever the name of the elevator was…from 1880. You can’t do that!’ So they didn’t put the elevator in, they just changed the student’s schedule. But since then they’ve been very cooperative with the Historic Preservation, so it’s a nice blend. So we have the…people around, and we have the grounds, and very nice buildings. They’re historically accurate, as far as I understand they are accurate.

One thing that we had in the beginning too was that almost everybody was a Catholic. Students were Catholic, the faculty was Catholic, administrators were Catholic, and it was like part of the air you breathe, you never thought about it. Everyone knew what the mission was, what we were supposed to be accomplishing. Now it’s different cause we have people who are either not Catholic, or not especially on the same wavelength, however you want to describe it, so now we have to put our mission on the wall, so like ‘that’s what we’re after,’ you know? You see the placards and framed copies of the mission on the wall, so that’s different. We have more diversity among the faculty, and diversity among the students. Diversity is good, admittedly, we see other perspectives, but there’s always a challenge of maintaining the soul of the institution, the mission and the purpose of it, after all. I for one do not want to teach at Roger Williams South. No, I don’t want to be like Roger Williams, I want to be in the Mercy Catholic tradition.[[3]](#footnote-3) And I think many, if not most of us are like that, so I think that there’s a question in the mission and the identity of the institution, we used to be able to take it for granted, but we can’t do that anymore, we have to be more deliberate about it. So I think as far as changes, I think that’s a big change.

Allison: Yeah.

Dr. Eveleth: And of course it’s co-ed now. The males started sneak in…in the ADJ program.[[4]](#footnote-4) We used to be called the Criminal Justice Program, back in 1970, criminal justice. But of course, it’s broader than that now, it’s not only criminal type justice, so they wisely changed the name. But they had a few men coming in in the evening to take courses, and they began to realize ‘well there’s no need for them to sneak them in the back door in the evening, why don’t we go co-ed?’ So naturally they went co-ed. It was quite a change.

Allison: Yeah,

Dr. Eveleth: The girls were happy.

Allison: [Laughter]. You mentioned earlier, about the missing [of] a few paychecks, the Financial Crisis…

Dr. Eveleth: Yes,

Allison: Can you tell me more about what that was like for you?

Dr. Eveleth: Well, I wasn’t a big spender, and I don’t have a family. And so it didn’t hit me hard, but people who had children…it…it really was hard, and they did complain, and they blamed the President[[5]](#footnote-5), but what could she do, she didn’t raise money especially…so there was just generally hard times. So it didn’t affect me, and I’m not a big spender and I don’t have family so it was alright. But I can sympathize with the people who had children and they really had to be concerned about that. It was only about two payrolls, really. Now as we look back on it, it doesn’t seem like much, but at the time, it was two paychecks, it’s enough for families that live from paycheck to paycheck. The enrollment was very very low, I think it was about 700 students all together, and that’s bad. You can’t have…run a college really significantly with 700, not only because of finances, but because of diversity of curriculum, and diversity of experiences that you want the students to have.

So they were troubling times, but it worked out. We had a marvelous president come in, Sister Lucille[[6]](#footnote-6), and she was a real fighter, and she helped to change things around. She had an upbeat message. I think the former president, Sister Mary Christopher, was kind of beaten down after a while and just disheartened. She was a brilliant woman, brilliant sociologist and she had everything going for her, but I think she was old, and she was getting sick, and I think that she was just beaten down by all the flack that she got.

There was even an underground newspaper on campus. That was really exciting. It was called *The Thorn*. And the idea was to be a thorn in the President’s side. And a few years ago somebody went to the Archives and tried to find back issues of *The Thorn*. But somebody had removed all the issues, it’s one of the mysteries on campus: ‘Who removed the back issues of *The Thorn* from the Archives?’ So it’s one of the mysteries we’ve never solved. But it was well written, it was a collaboration of students and faculty members in the Sociology department, they were the most activist people around, I guess. So between the faculty and the students working on the newspaper it was really clever, clever. And they had cartoons, cartoons, a lot of cartoons of Sister Mary Christopher. Now Sister Mary Christopher was a big woman, alright, and so you can imagine the cartoons they drew of this big woman with a veil on, it was really unfortunate. She didn’t like it and of course it was crude, it was disrespectful, but it was, secretly, it was funny. And everyone rushed out when they saw the issues of *The Thorn* here and there on campus, we would rush out and get your copy of *The Thorn*. But we don’t do that now, everybody is so hopelessly and politically correct, we don’t have underground newspapers. No one knew really who was responsible, we had hints, you know, but no one ever admitted it. And they just appeared here and there on campus, and everyone rushed to get the copy of it. It was an exciting time, people were alive.

There were demonstrations, there was a sit-in at Ochre Court, there was a sit-in in the President’s Office. Now, U.C. Berkeley these days…well except for the burning, no one burned anything or broke windows or anything, they had sit-ins and they had demonstrations. There was once a parade down…Ochre Point Ave. A big parade of students…some of the slogans: ‘hey, ho’… Sister Mary Christopher’s last name was O’Rourke, her family name…‘Hey, Ho, O’Rourke must go’ ‘Hey, Ho, O’Rourke must go.’ It was too bad. We look on it now as kind of harmless given some of the violence that we have today, people you know burning cars and breaking windows and burning things, by comparison it was gentle and mild, but it was funny too. So that was in the early seventies. And things began to change there, not only for that but because…as they began to take federal money for student loans…

…

…and as they began to take federal loans they had to be sure that they had diversity in hiring, and diversity in students being accepted…and so that was part of it. And I think that the federal money did make a difference in the institution…is that what you meant?

Allison: Yes, so, in the eighties with the…becoming co-ed…there was several instances of possibly having a name change for the school?

Dr. Eveleth: Oh yes, yes! They hired a group of consultants and Salve Regina sounded very feminine. Of course it was, Hail Queen. It was the first two words in a medieval hymn to the blessed virgin: ‘Salve, Regina, Mater misericordiæ,’… ‘Hail, Queen, Mother of Mercy,’ and so they though the feminine tone of that might be a turn off for the male students. No one thought at the time that Notre Dame might be a turn off. That was saying that Notre Dame would have the same problem, and no one thought of that, so some of the administration decided that we ought to have a consultant come in, so he did. It was a company that came in, they hired, I forgot the name of the company, but they recommended that the name be changed to Newport College. So that was floated to the faculty, and the student body, and the alumni, and the people who were the most vociferously against it were the alumni. Secretly, I think what happened was the alumni who were contributing to the college, their opinion carried a lot of weight. So people pulled back from that. But for about two years this was going on, and it looked as if it might happen, because a lot of institutions were changing their names and so it seemed, you know, almost a trendy thing to do, and if you’re embarrassed about your Catholic identity, how better to solve your embarrassment then to make something as neutral as the Newport College?

Now, what also complicated it was at the time there was a junior college in Newport, and now I don’t that I can remember the name…it was a junior college[[7]](#footnote-7)…it didn’t last too long, but one objection to the name change was that there would be some confusion between what was Salve and what was this junior college, since there were now two colleges in Newport. So that was a factor. They didn’t want to be confused with that community college, it was small college and they weren’t academically sound so Salve didn’t think they’d want to be associated with them. And also because the alumni were so vociferously against it. I think those…as I remember it…those were the two factors. So it didn’t become the Newport College, it stayed Salve Regina. It was a real conversation, you know, subject for conversation for about two years, and people thought this might happen after all.

Allison: Wow.

Dr. Eveleth: It’s hard to imagine now but, two years…What do you think? Do you think it would have been a good change?

Allison: Um, I think they definitely should keep Salve, maybe if they added the “Newport College” it might have attracted some other people,

Dr. Eveleth: Yes,

Allison: But Salve was such a tradition, especially with the Sisters of Mercy, that they should keep [it].

Dr. Eveleth: Yes, I think you’re right, because once you have a lot a lot of people graduated from Salve, it has a name of reputation, and people…if you change the name, people would wonder ‘well, whatever happened to Salve Regina?’…is it something else, is it gone away? ...So many colleges do fold, once it gets a reputation established then it should keep its name. As Notre Dame, people argue, well what would you do with Notre Dame? Is Notre Dame gonna change its name? Our Lady? Notre Dame, Our Lady? Not gonna change that, but you know that name. So yeah, that was it.

Allison: Ok, so, the library used to be in McAuley,

Dr. Eveleth: Yes.

Allison: What was that like switching over to this big…?

Dr. Eveleth: Oh, it was monumental. Monumental. First of all, there was the building of the building over there. McKillop, it was named after Sister Lucille McKillop who was president, who saved Salve. So actually she was honored by [it] being…named after her. So that in itself was a story because, again back to [the] Historic Preservation people, they said be careful what you do, it has to be consistent with the neighborhood. So the architects had their homework, they had their assignment, they had their marching orders. You had to do something: a new building, a modern building, with all possibilities of technology and all this; but it has to be somewhat like Wakehurst. So that was the idea. I don’t know, I guess the architects figured that what we have now is supposed to be somewhat like Wakehurst, so next time you’re in the neighborhood looking at the two buildings, is the library something like Wakehurst? It was designed to be, it was supposed to be, anyway the Historic Preservation people were satisfied so the building went up and then all the books had to be brought over and walls were put in where walls had not been before, some things were closed off, for example there are a lot of doors, if you notice, there are doors in the walls that don’t open [In McAuley]. All those had been open, because many of those had been used by servants, the top of the building was for servant’s quarters, those were residence for students as well, and they had classrooms all over the building as well as Mercy and Ochre Court. Those were the classroom buildings: Ochre Court, McAuley, and Mercy, what we call Antone now, before the addition was placed on it. You know what I mean by the old part of Antone?

Allison: Yes.

Dr. Eveleth: So it was a massive thing and they had to do it…they tried to do it mostly in the summer when the classes wouldn’t [meet]…there were just a few summer courses and it wasn’t as upsetting as it would have been if they had done it during the school year. It’s somewhat like the same challenge of revising O’Hare this past year or so. While during the school year, it’s hard to do while there’s hundreds and hundreds of students around all the time. So they try to do it on off times as much as they could and they realized of course McKillop, the new library, was so big that they’d have to enhance their holdings so they had to buy a whole new [collection]…[and] things to fill out and provide services. So the new building provides services and facilities and opportunities that the old building never had, so when you think back and how it was almost barbaric. You wouldn’t know how anybody learned anything. And of course there was no internet, no Google, no Amazon or anything like that so if you needed a book you had to go out to a library and find the book. Now you just go to your laptop and \*ch ch ch\*, you know, and you can find the book and order it and it’s there in a day or two. It’s a marvelous arrangement, and wonder now how did we ever get anything done! How did we get all these books and articles, it’s amazing because you had none of that before, so we’re grateful for that. Could you imagine doing homework or doing paper without internet?

Allison: No…

Dr. Eveleth: Yeah, well the library provides all that.

Allison: You mentioned Sister Lucille a lot, did you ever have any interactions with her, was she…what was she like with the faculty and student body?

Dr. Eveleth: She was a very dignified lady, she was physically very attractive, she spoke with authority, she spoke clearly, she was a mathematician, and she was very strong…strong-willed in what she did. I didn’t have much personal interaction with her, I was a very humble faculty member. I always admired her because she was sent here. She was a Sister of Mercy from the Chicago Provence, and she had been assigned to come to Salve because they believed Salve was closing, and we couldn’t survive much longer… But when she got here she decided on her own this place is not gonna close, I’ll see to it. This place is not gonna close, I’ll see to it! So one of the messages she gave to the faculty, she says: ‘You and I are starting a “Whispering Campaign”’ she says. That was her famous line, she kept saying that we are starting a “Whispering Campaign.” We are saying Salve is wonderful, and Salve is strong, and Salve is going to make it. So you see you have to get that out, get that message out, so it looked as if it worked, our “Whispering Campaign.” And it did begin to turn around.

I think too, she was savvy about public relations, she was savvy about economics…about budgeting and also she was able to get a big loan. This was really a telling thing, background here, the Sisters of Mercy at that time were nationally divided into nine areas or provinces. Now the local province had only schools, Sisters in this area had no hospitals. Now hospitals have a lot of cash flow, the Chicago province had lots of cash flow, so she got the Chicago province to lend Salve Regina buckets of money, alright, so it saw them through the hard times and allowed for good public relations, good advertising, she was very savvy about public relations and so she got that massive loan from the Chicago province to see Salve through…over that transition where they had not enough money. So she was remarkable on that, she was a real wizard on that. I think that she deserves the library named after her, and she deserves a lot more because she really saved the place. I personally…had no interchange with her, she had a good helper in administration: Sister Sheila Megley.[[8]](#footnote-8) I think she called her Academic…I think she was the Academic Dean…I remember for sure now, but she…they worked well together and so she had good help, she had a good support system there as well…yeah…She’s dead now.[[9]](#footnote-9) She’s long gone, to her reward. She’s in the great seminar room in the sky.

Allison: To bring it back to Philosophy, have there been any big changes with academics…

Dr. Eveleth: Yes!

Allison: The student body who are becoming majors?

Dr. Eveleth: Yes, we have more majors now than we ever had, and we’ve just this past year designed a whole new curriculum. And it’s greatly expanded to meet, well needs in the variety of people who have various interests and orientations and so on. And so there are more options. So the new catalog whenever it comes out is gonna have far more Philosophy courses than we’ve ever had. It takes great organization of course because you have only six faculty members. We are understaffed so we have to be very careful about covering all those courses in the catalog, planning. In a sense, it’s like the History department, the History department is also understaffed. They need more people as well. So when you’re scheduling courses for the fall, spring, fall, spring, and so on you have to be very careful so that’s what we’re gonna have to do. I would suggest you look at the catalog as soon as it comes out, we should have some very impressive courses, Asian courses, and marvelous things. Even just this morning, I was at Orientation. We had one more major coming in, freshman. Now that’s unusual because freshmen usually don’t know anything about Philosophy, they haven’t had it in high school. It’s one course that you don’t teach in high school. So the fact that she already knows what Philosophy is, I was bowled over you know, this is marvelous!

Allison: Is there anything you’d like to add…any memories that we haven’t spoken about?

…

Dr. Eveleth: There’s supposed to be ghosts on campus…have you heard that?

Allison: Yes.

Dr. Eveleth: Yeah? Alright, there’s supposed to be one in what used to be Carey Mansion, used to be one of our halls, and it’s not anymore, but that was haunted. The top floor of McAuley is supposed to be haunted. And I think right now those are the only two. I’ve never seen a ghost…I would love to see a ghost! [Laughter] To see what it’s like! People are supposed to be terrified by ghosts, but anyway, do you believe in ghosts?

Allison: Yes.

Dr. Eveleth: Have you ever seen one?

Allison: I’ve never seen one, but I’m currently living in Watts…Watts is supposed to be haunted, too…so it, it sometimes feels kind of weird in the room, so…

Dr. Eveleth: Oh, well see anyway, that’s…that’s about it…what else could be of interest?...I can’t think of anything off hand…The important thing for Salve is to maintain its heritage because if it loses that it loses everything, cause we’ll become just like any other…I say Roger Williams, become like Roger Williams. And nothing against Roger Williams, I just don’t want to be at Roger Williams, I want to be at a Catholic university. The spirit is different, the air is different. So I think that’s the important thing, about our history. Our history should be also our future…I can’t think of anything else.

…

Allison: Are there any faculty members that have since left Salve…gone on…that had a big impact on the philosophy department?

Dr. Eveleth: Well, um, they’re dead. [Laughter]. So, I’m sure they’re in their reward now. Yes, they all were important because the department has always been quite small by comparison with say Education or Nursing or ADJ and so on, and so it’s quite small, and so we do have an impact on each other. So when they go, they’re very much missed. There’s nothing impersonal about our connections with each other, we know each other, and we care about each other, and so when anyone leaves or retires, we notice it of course, but as I said they didn’t go on to any other college. They’ve always just left and retired and left and that’s it as far I know. So…that’s our story.

Allison: Well, thank you very much for speaking with me.

Dr. Eveleth: My pleasure, good to meet you.

Allison: It was nice to meet you too,

Dr. Eveleth: And I hope I helped in some way.

Allison: Yes, absolutely!

1. 125 full time faculty members as of June 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2,124 students enrolled as of Fall 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Roger Williams University is located about 14 miles North of Salve Regina in Bristol, Rhode Island [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ADJ is the acronym for the Administration of Justice program which offers both an Associate and Bachelor’s degree, as well as a minor. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The President at the time was Sister Mary Christopher O’Rourke. Her term lasted 1968-1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Sister Lucille McKillop was President from 1973-1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Junior College was located in Vernon Court, which now houses the National Museum of American Illustration. The Junior College was open from 1961-1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Sister Sheila Megley was the Academic Dean from 1974-1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Sister Lucille past away in 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)