

Salve Regina Memory Project

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Interviewee: Ray McKenna from the office of Safety and Security

Interviewer: Renee Dube, class of 2025

Introduction: *The following interview was conducted with Ray McKenna, the interviewee, and Renee Dube, the interviewer, for the Salve Regina Memory Project. It took place on Monday, March 21st, 2022, at Salve Regina University.*

Renee Dube: So, Dr. Quinn tells me that you grew up in Newport. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Ray McKenna: Well, I grew up about a mile from here. My dad was a professor here and an administrative leader at Salve, and [I] grew up in Newport and had a lot of friends here. [I] grew up in a big family [with] seven children, I was the middle child. It was nice growing up in Newport, probably a little jaded; [I] took it for granted that I was living around the water, and you know, living in a place like Newport.

Renee Dube: How and when did you start working at Salve?

Ray McKenna: I started here in 1985, and my dad actually mentioned the job to me. I was working as a carpenter and I didn't have the best health benefits, and I was getting older, which was kind of a joke now that I think about it. I was twenty-three and I couldn't be on their [my parents'] insurance, because I wasn't in college, which was how it used to run then. Nowadays you can stay on your parents' insurance until you're twenty-six which is a pretty good deal. So

anyway, that was one of the reasons I wanted to do something different. My dad again worked here so I thought, I always liked Salve, so that's kind of how it happened.

Renee Dube: So, what did your dad do here?

Ray McKenna: Well, he was a politics [and] History professor, a little like Dr. Quinn, and he then later became a university administrator. He was the special assistant to the president [is what] they called him [assistant to] Sister Lucile [McKillop]¹, who the library is named after.

Renee Dube: Have there ever been some notable events that you've had to deal with here?

Ray McKenna: Yeah, there have been several. Boy, I looked at that question and I thought gee where would I start? But, definitely one of the most notable ones would be like if you've heard of the movie "True Lies". Arnold Schwarzenegger is in it, you may or may not have heard of that. That was filmed, the first twenty minutes of it, all at Salve. So, if you haven't watched the movie watch it because Ochre Court is featured in that, and they were here twenty-five years ago. Or even longer ago, about '94 or '95, yeah. So that was something because Arnold Schwarzenegger was here when he was kind of, I guess, at the peak of his movie career you could say. And it was interesting because originally, it was supposed to be filmed here over winter break, but they got tied up down in Florida. If you ever watch the movie there is this part of the movie where they are in the Florida Keys, I think. But they got held up so, of course, they show up here when? Right when students come back from winter break and of course, what's interesting about that is all the filming was at night and I worked evenings then. But we in security were hired by the movie company to be the security because they wanted that personal touch. We knew the campus, we knew everything and so I actually worked for James Cameron²,

¹ Sister Lucile McKillop was president of Salve Regina University 1973-1994.

² James Cameron was a prominent film director known for his innovative special effects on movies such as Titanic (1997).

a director in Arnold Schwarzenegger. And I'll say this you know Arnold Schwarzenegger, I mean I was with him a million times, and [he was] very gracious and he met students, he went around, [this was] not a part of the official plan. They were supposed to kind of sneak in here over winter break and sneak out. But as it turns out they were here right in February. And all the students got to meet him.

Renee Dube: That's amazing!

Ray McKenna: It was, if you see the movie, it's very interesting how they did it. I know all the little tricks they did. Rubber dogs and you know blanks and all that kind of stuff, it was very interesting, very interesting. So that was definitely one of the [highlights]. There were some other ones but that was one of the best.

Renee Dube: Do you want to share any of the other ones?

Ray McKenna: Well, a lot of people, trivia, I guess. Salve... Newport hosted the first X-Games. You know the X-Games, now it's a big thing, the first two X-Games were in Newport. [It was] Taco Bell and ESPN getting together and so, we ended up housing all the kids who were the skateboarders and BMX bike riders. They put a big half-pipe here on campus and all I can say is, it was the rowdiest group we've ever had on campus and that was in the summer. We never appreciated how well behaved our students were until we met this crew. It was rough because these kids were from literally all over the world. BMX riders, skateboarders, and they housed them in Miley. And the first year didn't go so well because once you were in the competition and you lost, you were still here for the two weeks. So, they didn't get rid of those kids, so those kids were just frustrated watching the kids that beat them continue on. They had some adults living on campus, the guys who did, you know like... who jumped out of planes with basically a snowboard and parachuted, they were here too, but those people were well behaved. When we

wound up with a bunch of young unchaperoned guys, it was pretty wild. And the next year we had them but it was more chaperoned and once you lost in competition, you were sent home. Some kids were here from New Zealand, Australia, England, Japan; it was really something. It was fun, but it wasn't so much fun to be working that. But it was something else, yeah.

Renee Dube: All right, in your day-to-day work, what takes up the most time in your job?

Ray McKenna: Well, I guess you would say patrolling the campus, I mean, just kind of being a presence. I mean I don't want to say I write tickets on people, that's not a good thing. But it varies, we are letting people in and out of buildings, we might respond to some type of incident, somebody is injured, we give rides to students on crutches, that sort of thing. You know it's the day shift, so it's a little bit lighter duty. I don't do minor maintenance stuff like the evening guys or the overnight guys might do. So I'm fortunate in that respect unless it's a weekend let's say, but generally speaking I'm patrolling campus, I'm doing what they call lockouts, I'm unlocking doors for people all day. That sort of thing.

Renee Dube: Going off of that, what is the most fun part of your job?

Ray McKenna: The most fun part of my job. That's a hard one only because what is fun? I mean, no, I can tell you what it is. It's interacting with the work-study students in our office. I love teasing them, I guess. And you know I love having them around because they keep us grounded to the students. In other words, if I want to know what is going on around campus, all I have to do is ask one of our work-study students. They'll tell me, you know? Unless it's a big secret they want to keep from us, no, I'm kidding. But yeah, that's my most fun; interacting with our work-study students. Yeah, you know how that works, right? They are our dispatchers, and you know [it's a] tremendous responsibility. It really is, you know, for them to be a work-study. They take an emergency call. Sometimes it's literally a matter of life and death with someone

who is having an asthmatic attack or someone having an allergic reaction; it can be serious. But, yeah, they do a great job with it, they really do.

Renee Dube: Does Safety and Security have good relationships with the city of Newport? Have there been any times where the city has been annoyed with Salve over campus parties, noise violations, anything like that?

Ray McKenna: Well, I guess that that goes with the territory, you know there are students downtown who get a little over rowdy. But I would describe our relationship with the city of Newport or maybe more importantly with the Newport police, as excellent, and the Fire Department as well. Obviously, our director Mike Caruolo is a retained Newport police officer, and his predecessor before that John Mixter was also a retired Newport police officer. So, there were some conflicts with the city, but we have an excellent relationship with them, excellent. I would describe it as excellent, yes.

Renee Dube: Have there been any tragedies or difficult situations that you have had to deal with?

Ray McKenna: Yeah, there have been a few I hate to say. I mean we did have a student many years ago accidentally fall off the Cliff Walk and die. You know it was a very long time ago, but I was working that morning when a student called us and said that a jogger had seen, a student's body at the base of the cliff. This would be behind O'Hare; this would be before the fence was there. But yeah a student... and he was a local kid; his name was Brian Putney, and he got killed, you know he fell off the Cliff Walk sometime in the middle of the night. Very, very tragic, I wasn't here that long, maybe three or four years but that was very tragic. We've had other incidents where students have been killed. We had a student killed in a fire just up the road here,

David Bulman. But there have been some very serious incidents, very sad incidents you know, but that particular one really sticks out to me.

Renee Dube: So during the COVID pandemic how was your daily job impacted?

Ray McKenna: Tremendously, I mean wearing a mask is odd and when you're interacting with people, I know that everyone had the same problem. You get so much from an inflection in someone's face. I can't see it if you smiled, I wouldn't know if you were sticking your tongue out at me. I wouldn't know it, you know if I'm wearing a mask, and you're wearing a mask so that was very difficult. And I have to say, the students I think adapted very well to this, I mean very well because if I was eighteen or nineteen, I can't even imagine wearing a mask. I mean this is ridiculous. Obviously, I had to do it and you know getting the vaccinations was fine, but you know I think it really turned the place upside down. And you know, having so few public events, we had no summer groups at all, basically the last two summers. That... I know has been very difficult for the school's bottom line because we were relying on these summer conferences quite a bit, just to pay the bills, and we've canceled those. Thankfully they're coming back this summer, but that has been just very difficult. You know I never imagined it was going to come to this, it being so long. We thought I think after that first semester when everyone went home after spring break, we thought that maybe they will come back when Easter break ends, right, and be gone a month. But that got extended to where people [were] coming back piecemeal to remove things and it's been very, very odd, I'll say that; it's been strange.

Renee Dube: So, Dr. Quinn tells me that Sister Esther Whalen, who was an assistant to the president, Sister Lucille McKillop, would be picked up at her home by Safety and Security and then be brought home again after work. Did you have any interactions with her?

Ray McKenna: Just about a thousand, maybe two thousand. Yes, I knew Sister Esther very, very well. And she was not just with Sister Lucille but she kind of continued on along with Sister Therese, maybe not in so much [of] an official capacity. But yeah, Sister Esther was something. She was a workaholic, very dedicated to work, very demanding on some levels because she wanted to get things done right. And she dealt with the Board of Trustees, she dealt with the Circle of Scholars which is older folk from the community who come in and take like a class, I don't know if John teaches one of those, but you know it's for personal enrichment, that sort of thing. But Sister Esther used to handle all of the school's printing. She would of course run the Sailing team for many years, which was very renowned. She was quite a character; she was something else. We became, as she got older and really couldn't drive anymore, we kind of became, I guess for lack of a better word her personal care attendants. [In] other words I need a ride here, I need this, I need that, she was something else I'll say that. I adored Sister Esther; I really did.

Renee Dube: Are there any other notable people that you have worked with? Anyone in the security office?

Ray McKenna: Well, I've worked with a lot of nice people. Again, I really do... I am really fond of a lot of our work-study students and people I've worked with over the years. And some people I'll still talk to them, they'll call me, they'll send me Christmas cards that sort of thing, which is great, watching other people get married here, have children, come back with their children. Even a couple of people who have had their children come to Salve I've run into. But, yeah, one person I would say that was very notable would be Tom Flanagan; he is still here. Mr. Flanagan [is] teaching management classes; he was kind of a mentor to me when I was here. He was the Vice President of Administration, so he was the boss's boss if you will. As far as this job and the outlook on what was expected of us, he really set us all straight on that. Some people, I think,

came here thinking I'm going to bust the students and do all this other stuff; it's not really much of that, it's more about helping them through their journey, through life kind of thing. I mean you guys come here, you spend a lot of money, it's a very serious thing going to college, and you want to get through it for your career. [It] has huge social implications, I know so many people who've met their future wife or husband here or have met future business partners here or just lifelong friends. It's a huge, huge thing and he [Tom Flanagan] always used to remind us of that kind of thing. Yup, great guy.

Renee Dube: Dr. Quinn mentioned that your father Bob McKenna³ was mayor of Newport and was the Vice President of community relations for Salve. Can you talk a bit about that?

Ray McKenna: Yeah, he was, he was the mayor. This was back in the late 80s, early 90s. And yeah, my dad was a very political guy, he was a state senator before that, he was a state representative before that. So, he was in politics for many, many years. Yeah, my dad was very well respected here. He worked very closely with Sister Lucille and of course, she came here right when Salve transitioned into accepting men, which of course it was originally strictly a women's college. And of course, he was here when Salve went from a college distinction to a university distinction. There are a variety of reasons why that happened I guess, but he was here for all that. Having your dad be the mayor, that's kind of cool I guess. My kids would say, hey Dad why don't you run for mayor, and I say no I'm not crazy!

Renee Dube: How do you think Salve has changed over the years that you have been here?

Ray McKenna: Well one thing I'll say about the physical presence of Salve, when I started here, which was a long time ago, 1985, I used to always think Salve existed within this neighborhood,

³ Robert J. McKenna was Mayor of Newport, Rhode Island from 1988 to 1994. He was born on February 23rd, 1931, and passed away on January 15th, 2012.

now Salve is the neighborhood. In other words, we've acquired so many properties, and I'll give credit to Sister Therese who really made it an important effort because we used to have so many neighbors who were kind of nasty to us who really didn't like us. And they would go out of their way to say things about the students, exaggerations, things that weren't really true. They didn't know how good they had it, some of these neighbors. So, Sister Therese, when she came along there were a lot of properties purchased. So now I kind of feel like I don't deal with neighbors nearly as much as I used to. It used to be like Mr. so and so just called, you got to go talk to him, or Mrs. so and so called again, you need to go talk to her. That changed dramatically, and now it's like if you move into this area from Narragansett to Ruggles, Bellevue to the water, you've basically moved in on our campus. I've said to some neighbors, if you've moved in next to the dump don't complain about the smell, you move next to the airport don't complain about the noise. You've moved onto a college campus I said, right? Our students again are kind of a cut above the rest. In other words, very well behaved, we really don't have a lot of problems that other schools have within the immediate neighborhood. I'm not going to mention anyone, you might be able to figure it out. That's the big change, we really took over the neighborhood, I mean very much so. More so when I started it felt like there were so many concerns about neighbors and you know that's just gone, for the most part. I mean there are a handful of neighbors that we have to deal with.

Renee Dube: OK, is there anything else that you would like to talk about? Anything on your mind?

Ray McKenna: No, I just, I'm just glad the pandemic is over, I think, I hope, I don't know. I feel so glad that they didn't make students stick with everything until the end of the semester which I think a lot of us thought they would do. You know that they'll just continue this through May regardless of lifting the mask mandate, just relaxing a lot of things. You know, telling

students you can't have really friends in your room, you can't have people outside the university. That was significant [it was] one of the reasons you come to school ... I mean parents were meeting their children in the parking lots. They couldn't have them come in their dormitory because we wanted to restrict access to the buildings; it was really difficult so I'm really glad things have finally seemed to open up. Yeah, that's really good right, especially for someone like you. You're a freshman, you came in here with the restrictions on, and now they are just kind of lifting them. So, I think of someone who is a sophomore right now, they were basically under this whole thing the whole time. So, I'm really glad that that has finally evened out. So that's it.

Renee Dube: Alright, well thank you very much for your time, very much appreciated. Thank you for taking part in the Salve Regina Memory Project.