

Salve Regina Memory Project

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Interviewee: Dr. William Stout

Interviewer: Renee Dube, class of 2025

### **Transcript**

**Introduction:** *The following interview was conducted with Dr. William Stout, the interviewee, and Renee Dube, the interviewer, for the Salve Regina Memory Project. It took place on Wednesday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022, at Salve Regina University.*

**Renee Dube:** So, Dr. Quinn tells me you are a Newport native. What were your experiences like growing up around here? Did you have any interactions with Salve or its students during these years?

**Dr. Stout:** So, first I should correct Dr. Quinn. I'm not a Newport native. I lived for one year in Newport and then I grew up in Middletown. My experiences were very different from how I find things today. It was a much quieter town then. So as a ten-year-old I would ride my bike from Middletown into Newport; [I] rode all over Newport. I would probably be more reluctant to let a ten-year-old do that today than I would have back then. I went to De La Salle Academy on Bellevue Avenue, it is now De La Salle Condominiums, so that has changed. [I] didn't really have any interactions with Salve or its students, I was a younger boy then and Salve at that time was all female. So that really didn't happen.

**Renee Dube:** Alright, so after high school where did you go to college?

**Dr. Stout:** I went to the College of the Holy Cross up in Worcester.

**Renee Dube:** And what degree did you get there?

**Dr. Stout:** I got a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics.

**Renee Dube:** And then after college what did you do?

**Dr. Stout:** So, let's see. So that had been during the Vietnam War. They had just switched to doing a lottery system and I think if you asked any young man if he remembered his lottery number from that first drawing, they would say yes. Mine was 227. I finished my time at Holy Cross and went on to graduate school. The economy was not doing great at that time and after my second year I declared my draft status to be '1A' (so I was eligible to be drafted) because my number was not going to come up. I did that and I went to graduate school in Colorado for two years at Colorado State University. I got a master's degree there and then went down to the University of Virginia and completed my education in getting a PhD from the University of Virginia. And then I worked in [the] industry for eight years, I guess. Spending some time with a company called Analytic Services. They were based in Northern Virginia and with Analytic Services we did work for the Air Force. Working primarily at the Pentagon and helping with short turn around kinds of questions that the Air Force had. Often in response to inquiries they got from Congress. And then I also worked at SYSCON Corporation. They had an office here in Middletown where I did work for the Navy primarily.

**Renee Dube:** Alright, from there, how did you end up teaching at Salve?

**Dr. Stout:** So, immediately prior to working at Salve I was working at Analytic Services. And I did a project for a general in which, effectively, I was evaluating the claims of a weapons system. Was it going to be as accurate as the developer said it would; was it going to come in under budget, this kind of stuff. And my report effectively said, no it wasn't. It will never be as good as they said it would be. The right thing to do is kill this project and move on to something else. And the general called me in and said, in effect, Dr. Stout, love your report, but you don't understand. I'm the program manager for this project, which means I get as much funding as I can, and I keep this project moving forward. So, your report is top secret, I'm destroying it;

thank you very much. I left that day and decided I can't continue to push around papers like this. It's a waste of my time. So, I ended up getting what I thought was going to be a part time position teaching at Marymount University. It might have been Marymount College at that time but still in northern Virginia. And later that summer they came back to me and said one of our full-time faculty members can't come back, she is taking maternity leave. Is there any chance you could come full-time for us? So, I talked with my boss at Analytic Services and told him what had come up and I asked whether it would be possible for me to go half time at Analytic Services and full time at Marymount? He said sure. So, I did that. That year was a very hectic year because half time for a company like Analytic Services doesn't really mean half time. It means you do whatever your clients want you to do, in however how much time it takes you to do that. Then you can have this other job. So, I got paid half of my salary for doing a full-time job plus my salary for working at Marymount. And while I was doing that, I said to myself "Well, this is really what I want to do." I found out that Sr. Lucille and Chris Kiernan were going to be at a conference down in D.C. that February. I called Salve Regina to see if I could meet with them for breakfast one day. And that's what we did, and I talked to them about coming up here to teach and they said I would have to go through the interview process. I said that was fine. They arranged for the interview process, and I ended up here. How you get jobs can be quirky.

**Renee Dube:** Where you glad to have some other experiences in the workforce before you started teaching?

**Dr. Stout:** Yeah, I was. It ended up giving me a better idea of what math majors really needed to know and the way that problems are really addressed in industry. And they're quite different. I mean you think of how math questions are posed in class, and it's just here is the problem, find me an answer. Right? Everyone knows that. In industry, what typically happens is you come to me and say, "Hey Doc, I got a problem." "That's fine, tell me about it." And you outline kind of

what you think your problem is. In the end, we must step back and look at the problem a bit more closely to see what you are really trying to do. So, as the mathematician, you really must find out what their question is because often they don't know what it is. Anyway, it was just different. It told me you had to try to find some way to convey that to students and help them become better mathematicians, better able to discover what the real question is. Some of my problems in my courses were more open-ended projects where I kind of just pose a situation for them but don't tell them what to do.

**Renee Dube:** Going off that, do you have a favorite course that you have taught?

**Dr. Stout:** A lot of the courses have been fun. For math majors, I enjoyed the differential equations class because that was one where I could bring in problems that were more open ended, that were less well defined and give them as projects. One to two per semester to see if the students could handle that and sometimes providing them with sort of a guided approach. Find out about this. Once you've done that, then find out about the next topic. And so on. They just worked together, and they could see the progression of finding their way towards a solution. That was good. For the non-math majors, I have enjoyed a lot the Math 170 course. Originally that was a course that dealt with areas of mathematics that students might not normally see. An area dealing with what's called graph theory and then we typically did some probability and statistics in that course. Several years ago, I got permission from the department to do personal finance after doing the graph theory probability instead of looking at statistics. Because my own children, I realized, as they were taking loans out for graduate school and other things, they had no idea what went on while you were paying off a loan. They didn't know anything about personal finance, so I decided to introduce that topic into Math 170. That's the only section where I constantly get comments from the students indicating that was the best part of the course. That has been fun.

**Renee Dube:** All right, so you were here when Sister Lucille McKillop was president. What was Salve like under her leadership?

**Dr. Stout:** In some ways Salve was very different then. There were far fewer administrators, smaller offices, it was easy to just get in and just talk to whoever you needed to talk to. I would have said that the university was more concerned with education at that time. For instance, today if I'm a full-time faculty member and I've got a senior level math class that only three students enrolled in I would probably be told, teach it as a directed study. It does not count towards your course load. That did happen several years ago when I was still full time and I refused to do that. The idea of doing an independent study in mathematics is untenable at the undergraduate level. Students aren't prepared to work independently in mathematics; that's why we teach courses. Sister Lucille would have let us teach that, her administration would have said yes go ahead, teach that course. On the other hand, we had a year where faculty received no raises because the university didn't have the money for it. And another time where the university... If I remember it right, there was a fireplace mantel over at Ochre Court that's no longer there. It was sold for, I don't remember how much money, but Sister Lucille needed to do that to make ends meet. So, I would have said fiscally we weren't managed as well as we might have been. But educationally, I think students never got short-changed on courses. They always got the courses they needed, taught by full-time faculty as a regular course.

**Renee Dube:** Dr. Quinn mentioned that you were Speaker of the Faculty Assembly that that you may have sat in on the Board of Trustee Meetings. What was that like?

**Dr. Stout:** I did do that as speaker, and I assume it still happens. At that time, and I'm thinking that might still be the case, the Speaker of the Assembly was allowed to be there and could respond to questions that were asked directly to them by a member of the Board of Trustees. But otherwise, you were supposed to remain silent, you were there as a spectator. It was interesting,

they really didn't talk about the academic side of the university much. They talked more about the investments, how's the endowment going? What's happening with trying to get dormitories built, that sort of thing, so there was a different focus. But it was interesting, there were always social activities. There might be a dinner that you would attend, and you got a chance to meet the members of the board and chat with them so that was also interesting to find the different kinds of backgrounds they brought with to answer the questions that they had to deal with.

**Renee Dube:** When and how long were you in that position for?

**Dr. Stout:** I would have thought maybe two years. I would have said that was in the early 2000s. I would have to go back and check records of the assembly to see when exactly when I was doing it. But that's kind of when I remember it.

**Renee Dube:** Dr. Quinn also mentioned that you were on the search committee that picked Sister Jane Gerety as president in 2009, what was that process like?

**Dr. Stout:** That was interesting. I was told I was never allowed to talk about the process of what happened. We had several very talented people who came in. I think the overwhelming concern at that time was to get a sister of Mercy as the president. Sister Jane, I knew, and I worked with her on a couple of other things through the Board of Trustees. She was talented, but her experience was not with higher education. If I remember right, she managed a hospital down in Atlanta. That's kind of my recollection of that. From that perspective, purely looking at qualifications, she was probably not the most qualified. But like I said, I think the overriding concern was to have a sister of Mercy. I don't think she did a bad job here; I'm not sure she did as good a job as some of the other candidates might have. But it's what happened, and I understand fully why the sisters of Mercy wanted to do that. It's really hard for a religious institution to transition to a non-religious as president. The same thing happened up at Holy Cross. They have a lay person as president now; the previous two presidents were both Jesuits.

Both were brought in because the faculty did not yet want to have a lay person as president. So, it's not just something special that happened only at Salve. I think it's happened at many Catholic institutions.

**Renee Dube:** Are there any interesting students or colleagues in the math department that you've worked with?

**Dr. Stout:** There have been both, I had a lot of interesting times working with a couple of our seniors when we were doing the capstone. You know that was fun, doing a couple of independent studies with them on special topics that we wouldn't normally cover in a class. I didn't collaborate a whole lot with faculty. We've always interacted as colleagues, but we didn't have any research things we did together. I did, on the other hand, spend, it must have been eight or nine or ten years working with a professor in the Chemistry Department. Sandor Kadar was in the department and he and I picked up on a grant from the Department of Education. They were called Eisenhower Grants at that time. Dealing with how to perhaps to better do science education in high schools. I don't know if we still do a workshop science class here at Salve, we did for a long time and that might still be an option that's available. But we took that and used that as sort of a backbone for what we were doing with teachers. But then we integrated into that mathematics as well. So, we did that for probably eight or ten years - writing proposals for grants, and getting them accepted, and working on the grants. That was interesting. The university is much more supportive of that now and much more proactive in getting those grants. The first one that we got... So, imagine it's Friday and the proposal is due up in Providence at three o'clock Monday afternoon. This was when we found out about the proposal. We had two and a half days to write the proposal, get it approved over at Ochre Court and get it up to Providence. We did, and we won that first proposal. So, it was interesting. We did that and kept building on that by choosing different schools to work with. I did that for probably ten years. We

were working on a three-year proposal that we'd won when Dr. Kadar left. His role couldn't really be filled by someone else here at Salve though we tried that for a year. I just said this isn't working and we got back in touch with the Eisenhower Grant people, and we said we cannot finish this grant. But our time together was interesting. I found out that he and I did use similar areas in mathematics, but we looked at them totally differently. You know what a quadratic function is? I think of it as a function that has a graph that's a parabola. I think of what the coefficients tell me about the shape of the graph. He thought of quadratics as being descriptors of motion. So, he thought of one coordinate being place, a second coordinate giving the velocity and the third coordinate giving the acceleration. Wow, that's just so different; we think about it totally different. Anyway, it was an interesting collaboration, we had a lot of good times together.

**Renee Dube:** Alright, there were two nuns, Sr. Mary Maurice Boyle, and Sr. Madeleine Gregoire, who worked in the math department, did you have any interactions with them?

**Dr. Stout:** Yeah, I did. Sister Madeleine and I, I would have said, were more than colleagues, more than acquaintances, friends, not close though. But she and I often disagreed on educational philosophy. I've always thought that you shouldn't coddle students and she was more supportive than I was, if you will. Sister Maurice Boyle and I were not friends. We had a lot of contention together. So, she was listed as having a PhD in physics. At the time we had one, two, three, four, five PhDs in mathematics in the department, and she was made chair of the department. She and I never got along in that. She thought that mathematics majors could take the applied calculus sequence and that was all that they needed to go on and be a math major. She was flat out wrong on that; just no two ways about it. No, you can't study just applied calculus if you want to be a math major. We paid a heavy price on that. We had years, probably six or eight or ten years, after she left where it was very difficult to get math majors here because counselors knew that

you couldn't have applied calculus as part of the core for your mathematics major. So, yeah, I don't really have fond memories of Sister Maurice Boyle.

**Renee Dube:** Can you tell me about Dr. Chris Kiernan who was an academic dean. Did you have any experiences with him?

**Dr. Stout:** As I mentioned, he was one of the people that I met down in Washington. He was probably one of those folks who was instrumental in getting me here. He knew I was a local boy and he thought that would be good. I would have said that he always had the best interests of Salve students at heart. That's what he was most noted for. Yeah, I think I'll leave it at that.

**Renee Dube:** I know we touched on this a little bit but in general, how has Salve changed since you began working here? In what ways for the better and in any ways for the worse?

**Dr. Stout:** We talked about it a little bit, I think from a financial perspective, Salve is much stronger than it was than when I started here. During Covid, there were lots of small colleges and universities that did not survive that. As we went into it I had very small concerns, if any, that Salve would have any problems with that. We were much stronger financially than many of the small colleges. I touched on differences in the educational perspective. Part of how the university has stayed stronger is by not running classes that only have a few students in them. We've had disagreements over that. The math department teaches general education courses that typically have thirty students in them. We've always felt like if we have average enrollments over all our classes of twenty-two or twenty-three that should be fine. The administration has leaned more heavily on [saying] each course must stand on its own. So, the fact that you have thirty to thirty-five [students] in one section does not mean that we can run one course that has five students in it. So, that's been a problem. While I understand their perspective, I think they also need to understand that maybe doing a history course as an independent study is easy because you can expect people to read. And you can direct their investigations into particular areas with

questions. In math that's just so much harder. You can't expect students to simply read the mathematics. I got to be able to do that maybe after my third year of graduate school. Prior to that I could back to math I'd already learned and reread it for better understanding. But I needed several years of grad school to be able read mathematics that was new material to me and be able to teach that to myself; that's hard. That always has caused some contention. I would have said the other thing is more an atmosphere thing. When I started here in the 80s, and sort of through the 90s, and probably through the early 2000s, faculty all got along fine. There was never any real contention, no big disagreements on anything much that was happening at the university and what was being done. I would have said that changed twelve or fifteen years ago. I should explain that politically and educationally I would probably be characterized as a conservative. Educationally I'm a conservative in the sense that I really value the liberal arts and sciences. That's what Holy Cross is. I'd have to go back and check their website; I think they offer an accounting major. That would be the only major that would lead you to what you'd think of as a career. Everything else is just you can major in mathematics, or chemistry, or physics, or biology, or history, or philosophy, or whatever it is. But liberal arts and sciences that leads to no particular career. And I think that's important. There is a philosophy that Catholic colleges and universities teach the whole person, not just that part of the person that earns a living. Salve has their Mercy concerns, and they try to get students to become concerned about those same kinds of things. The Jesuits have that same kind of philosophy. I cannot honestly tell you what specific concerns that they are more interested in than others. They believe in service to others. That's important but they also believe in the importance of the liberal arts and there are lots of reasons for that. Having people with well-rounded personalities who move up into positions of importance, I think, that's important. But one of the things that also happens is being able to discuss controversial issues. The kind of things that are happening today where someone says

something, and they are called out on social media and there's an uproar. There was no social media when I was younger so that couldn't happen. But I think that everyone was kind of brought up to have a slightly thick skin. You know the old saying, sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me. I think lots of people thought that way. One of the things that has happened not only in society generally, but certainly here, is that it's much more difficult to disagree with people and still have conversations and not have things get overblown. There have been times in faculty meetings where one faculty member is claiming that everyone else is racist. Are you kidding me? There is no room for that, there shouldn't be at any university. That kind of change in what goes on has been disheartening. The whole idea of a university is to have open inquiry. Everyone should talk respectfully. You can disagree. I have a brother and he and I are on opposite sides politically so there are some things we just don't bring up. You say no, we just aren't going to fight about that. We love each other and that kind of ability to speak with others whom you disagree with and still hold them in esteem to be able to listen with an open mind and an open heart, to speak to them with charity, to not have things devolve into name calling. You say we'll disagree about that; I'll think about what you said, let's talk about it again in a week. That's what I think the liberal arts foster when they are taught correctly. Because faculty that bring up issues that can cause controversy, there can be strong disagreements about what goes on and what happens. [Can a faculty member introduce pro-life arguments, or make present arguments that the United States is not an inherently racist country or that whites are not inherently oppressors in a course they are teaching without backlash? I don't think they could at this time.] But that's the point. The idea that certain can't even be presented in an academic setting, that's probably the biggest change that I've seen here. But it's not special to Salve; broadly speaking, it's happening thorough the country. You know a

conservative voice on a college campus is like a voice shouting in the wilderness. There just aren't many.

**Renee Dube:** Is there anything else you would like to touch upon before we close?

**Dr. Stout:** I think that covers it.

**Renee Dube:** Well, thank you so much for your time, I very much enjoyed it and thank you for taking part in the Salve Regina Memory Project.

**Dr. Stout:** Thank you for inviting me.