

Oral History Interview with Michael Larsen
Conducted by Bridget Brownlow on January 26, 2011
Transcribed by Alison Froese-Stoddard

BB: Ok, today is the 26th of January, and it's Bridget Brownlow here interviewing Dr. Michael Larsen. And... thank you very much.

ML: Glad to be here.

BB: Maybe we'll start... If you could give me your full name, and date of birth and place of birth.

ML: Michael Joseph Larsen, January 31, 1944.

BB: Your birthday is coming up.

ML: My birthday is coming up. New York City.

BB: New York City, great. And if we could start with just a quick overview of your educational background.

ML: Well, high school... do you want high school, or college...?

BB: Sure!

ML: Well, I went to high school at St. Dominic's High School in Long Island, and through that connection I learned about Saint Mary's, so I came here in 1961, and stayed for an Arts degree, graduating in 1966. And after that I did a two year Masters at Dalhousie in English, and then got funding to do a PhD. in English at the University of Toronto.

BB: So you were off to U of T in 1968?

ML: '68, right. So I was off at U of T from '68 to '70, and then taught in the New York high school for a year. And we were here, Jeannie and I, were visiting her mother when I got a job offer, temporary 9 month sessional, to teach English at Saint Mary's.

BB: Wow.

ML: So we went, pretty much just expecting the 9 month sessional to be it, so.... That was in 1971.

BB: And you're still here!

ML: I'm retiring this year, but yeah. That was 40 years ago, now.

BB: 1971. So you started the 9 month sessional in 1971.

ML: Right. Owen Carrigan was starting his presidency... my contract was probably on the first ones he signed.

BB: Was it? Really.

ML: Yes, I think so.

BB: So your contract was signed by the first lay president.

ML: Well, Edmund Morris was the first acting president for a while, I think in the late '60s.

BB: That's right. I'm going to come back to that, I'm glad you reminded me of that because I want to come back to it and ask you some questions about Edmund. Ok, maybe we can go back to 1961. Can you describe for me, sort of, your arrival at Saint Mary's and what it was like, and what it felt like?

ML: Well, I'll tell you, arriving at the airport, coming down and wondering where the city was! Because I hadn't travelled much, but I had flown into Boston and New York, and so the idea that I had was that you'd see lots of buildings, high rises and this and that, I kept looking for that, and wondered... Where are they hiding it? I didn't realize it would be quite a trek coming in. But on the bus ride in, there were three or four other guys who were heading to Saint Mary's who had come... because I had come New York to Boston, Boston to Halifax. So there were a bunch of guys that got on in Boston and were heading here. And we met when they dropped us off at the old Nova Scotian Hotel. And we took a cab up the street to Saint Mary's. Came right up Inglis Street.

BB: Wow.

ML: And I can tell you, one of the first things that you noticed, then, was the side of the building hadn't been finished, so the stonework hadn't really been completed?

BB: Of McNally?

ML: Of McNally. So – McNally was the only building – So they had these steel rods extending out from the side of the building that would be used to hold on the granite, you know, the siding when they finished it. But yeah, I guess they were waiting for the money to finish it. But these steel rods, had of course rusted, and the rust ran down these concrete slab sides, and looking out, I wondered, where in heck am I?

BB: That's right, where have I come to?

ML: But then we went around to the front of the building, and of course, it was much more attractive, and it looks much nicer. But I'll tell you, when you looked at it from the side... And the first guy who met us was the president of the student council, who was from Quebec. He had a very thick French accent. Then next guy I met was from

Newfoundland, and he had a very thick Newfoundland accent. And then I met a kid from Trinidad. So...

BB: So, very international!

ML: I thought, I'm going to be in between languages here, because I had a pretty thick New York accent back then too! So anyway, it was quite an introduction!

BB: Yes. What would have been the student population then, generally, if you can remember?

ML: About 500.

BB: About 500 students.

ML: A couple hundred in the residences, and the others were what we called day hops, I guess?

BB: Dayhops. I've heard that before.

ML: The local students. And they had a lounge in the.. well, there was only the McNally building, so there was a lounge there, not far from the theatre/auditorium is, and that's where the residence students would meet a lot of the local kids, in the lounge, so you got to know some of these students that way.

BB: Ok. And who was the president of the university, at the time when you arrived?

ML: Bob Fischer. And he was the president for the whole time in my undergraduate years.

BB: Father Fischer. And what was he like?

ML: He was a man that you didn't see much of, except for formal occasions. He was very taciturn, dignified, a very competent administrator as I understand. And as I say, he was somebody who was in the background. He didn't attend many of the sporting events that I recall. But he had a kind of presence, when he showed up, you kind of knew that something kind of major was going to happen. Yeah. So no doubt, he was a competent man, a competent president, but no, he didn't have much of a presence among the students. Of course, the one with all the presence with the students was Father Hennessey.

BB: Right.

ML: As the Dean of Men...

BB: That was his title, right? The Dean of Men?

ML: We were the men, I guess!

BB: That's right, yeah! Ok. And what are some of your... I've heard different stories from different individuals at Saint Mary's about their recollections of Father Hennessey. I'm wondering if there are any special ones you'd like to share.

ML: Father Hennessey was an incredibly attentive, caring individual in terms of the young men that were here. I think he felt... He certainly seemed to feel that they were a kind of personal responsibility of his, a responsibility that he enjoyed, but with enormous seriousness. I think he felt responsible for our bodies, our minds, and our souls, and he was just tireless in his efforts. And we were orangutans! By and large. I can remember, and this happened to numerous people at numerous times, you'd be sneaking into the residence after, way after lights out. And if the doors were locked, there were windows, remember I told you there were these iron spikes? We used to climb the iron spikes to get into the windows.

BB: Clever.

ML: You'd get in, and you think you'd be safe, creeping down the hall, and suddenly you'd see this glow of a cigarette off in the distance. And it was Hennessey. And he'd say, "See me in my office at 6:30," or whatever. Some ungodly hour in the morning! I don't think he slept! And that long cigarette holder, and the ash glowing at the end of it... I found him one time, I thought I had made it safely back, and made it into my room, only to see the glow IN MY ROOM. He was sitting on my bed, waiting for me! It was hard to fool him. He seemed to be awake and everywhere, all the time. But he was enormously supportive, in times when one got into trouble with various authorities, he was always there to intervene and... (laughs) I won't get into details, but...

BB: He'd make it ok.

ML: Yeah, so he was a wonderful guy.

BB: He really left a wonderful legacy, didn't he.

ML: Students loved him. I can imagine that the parents did too.

BB: Yes, that's right.

ML: Honestly. And Father O'Donnell had a – not as intense – his support was more on the academic side, but if he found out, particularly if you had an interest in something, he would do whatever he could to help develop and foster that. If it was languages, or public speaking – he was very big on. And he had this non-credit thing that I think we were all supposed to go to, and it was to develop public speaking skills, so usually they'd all be freshmen, because we thought these were required. But he would throw out these topics, you'd be walking up to the podium, and he'd hand you a topic which you had about four strides to sort out your thought process, what will I say about this topic. I

remember the first one I had to do. Because it must have struck so much terror, but I was walking up, now remember, I was 17 years old, and I talked with a funny accent, and looking at all these... The topic was Sleep. (laughs) And you had about a five minute window..

BB: Oh my gracious.

ML: You really did learn after a while how to tapdance.

BB: Yeah you had to think very quickly!

ML: But he was a very good guy. I liked Father O'Donnell a lot. They used to call him 'Buck'.

BB: Buck. I've heard that, "Buck" O'Donnell.

ML: You know where it came from ? Do you know the story?

BB: No, I'd love to know that.

ML: In residence, we had to, when we woke up in the morning we had to make your bed. And it had to be hospital corners, and you know, military style.

BB: Really, it was that strict.

ML: Well, we were, I shouldn't say, but that was the expectation that you had to do it, and there was a bed check, usually by the proctor, or O'Donnell. And if you didn't do it, it cost you a buck. Or if you were late. It would cost you a buck.

BB: That's quite significant, too!

ML: That was serious money!

BB: Yeah, that's right, I'm thinking, yeah, of course. A buck would have been a lot.

ML: A buck would have been a lot.

BB: 'Buck' O'Donnell!

ML: Late for class, and didn't have a good reason, that would cost you a buck!

BB: Really! Well, good for him. That's hilarious.

ML: Yup, so they had their ways of..

BB: Now, part of why I'm inquiring about the beds and that, is that I'm hearing in the oral histories a pattern is the significant shift that took place in the later 60s, in terms of

student protest, and a number of people have spoken of the American influence on our campus here, so maybe you could speak to that?

ML: Sure.

BB: Did you see that coming, or..

ML: Yeah, I think to some extent the early '60s, the mental culture of Saint Mary's with the Jesuits, and students, and.. The early '60s started out with a time of optimism, creativity, I mean there was Vatican II which was suggesting new roles for women, reconciliation with other churches including Protestant denominations and so on, reaching out... John the 23rd had this sort of image, the genial, father figure all-encompassing sort of radiant soul, open and so on.. A real sense of optimism, some major differences, racial, gender, sexuality, various forms of sexuality could be reconciled. One of the big movers and shakers intellectually that was in church at that time was Hans Kung, the German theologian who is now still writing, but outside the church. So there was a lot of... And in that wave, some of the Jesuits were moving, I mean, they were pretty smart guys, a lot of them – some of them – developed relationships with women, and some moved out and got married. I think there was some thought of this becoming part of the... you know, a new Catholicism that was more tolerant and all-embracing. And then of course, there was... I think you have to see it, to some extent, that part of it. And some of the things subsequently as a kind of reaction against that, is that the more conservative elements got panicky about this, a little panicky, and some reaction set in because, like I say, some Jesuits were leaving. But I can remember how intellectually exciting that time was..

BB: In terms of... intellectually exciting in general, or the classroom, or...

ML: Oh, outside, inside, it was all... to give you an example, one of the guys we knew really well, a student who was killed in a car accident. And a couple of Jesuits got together and had a kind of ceremony for Jack, the kid who was killed, because he was basically an orphan, he came from Newfoundland. There wasn't any family. And they gave a , they put together this thing, it was very intimate for those of us who knew him but it was very moving, and I don't think Jack was a particularly religious guy in any way, but the way they talked about it, and his importance, and his relationship to others, and so on... I can tell you, back in the early '60s, and I still remember it. You know, so there was that sort of thing going on. And then, one of the things that always struck me was, I graduated in '66, and one of the ironies in life was that Vanier, who was Governor General was brought here, and he gave the commencement address. And he's this major figure, this saintly ultra-Conservative Catholic, and you know, this iconic figure... The Vanier Cup – the same Vanier.

BB: And the residence?

ML: Vanier, yeah. And one of the great ironies in life was that I got the Governor General's medal that year.

BB: Did you?

ML: So this American gets to meet Vanier. But I think, he was quite an elderly man in his, and his wife was alive then too, but I think that they were brought, in retrospect, because they were such important, iconic figures, but also because I think they represented this kind of older vision of the role of the church, and the very doctrinal, very doctrinaire, very very pious and accepting of these eternal truths, that Conservatives feel have really been written down in indelible ink forever. I think to some extent, that represented an attempt by some to bring Saint Mary's more back toward its more conservative tradition and so on. Because I think even in the years I was gone, either at Dal, or Toronto or New York, the sense I have is that during those transition years there was a real desire among the board members and some of the other movers and shakers of the time, to see Saint Mary's change in some ways, I guess, to move toward a co-ed kind of thing. But I think there was a real desire to hold on to certain things that were perceived to be core values, despite the fact that the university was going public, it was going co-educational and so on. And I think that it probably made those years, late '60s, early 70s, with the influx of so many new faculty and so many different ideas, so many different viewpoints. And such a sense of the importance of academic freedom, to be able to explore and to publish and to speak your mind, and the truth as you've discovered it... It was setting up a time for real conflict, which was why I think that the early '70s were pretty volatile. There wasn't... that's my take on it, anyway. I don't think you can understand that without seeing what happened in the early and mid '60s, and this sort of liberalization that was going on, and I think there was a reaction against that, just as this whole new dimension was about to occur. The university going public, going fully co-educational, and the introduction of all kinds of lay faculty from all kinds of disciplines, and various parts of the globe. And that was a pretty heavy.. And I think, the attempt was, by the board, was to get someone young and dynamic, and as a president, you know, bringing in Owen Carrigan, a guy from St. FX. Strong, six kids, good Catholic, you know, very clear in his own mind about certain things... That set up an interesting dynamic! When I remember some of those early faculty members who had very different ideas about what could and should go on in the classroom, what kind of materials should be taught, the kind of approaches to it and so on.

BB: Someone mentioned to me earlier that they saw Edmund Morris as a very logical conduit in terms of after Labelle had gone, you've got Morris – again, a good Catholic man, easy to pass on the torch to him, or I think that's a bit of what you're saying with Carrigan, that he demonstrated these values.

ML: He was younger then, and he also had a PhD., and he had published at least one book, you know, and maybe more. So I think there were certain expectations that perhaps, board members had, but this – it was a very volatile time, you know. People staking out areas of new intellectual territory, the new approaches to teaching... One of the most interesting – it probably seems like one of the most ridiculous in retrospect, and you've probably never even heard of this before, but a machine called the Gestetner Machine.

BB: No. I've never even heard of that. How do you spell it?

ML: I don't know - Gestetner Machine... But it was a way of reproducing, you'd type up something on a paper that had a backing with a certain type of ink, then you would use that, it would turn around a turntable thing, or a cylinder thing. Each page would go under the cylinder would reproduce the typing that was on the page. So you could make copies of a variety of things for your class. The interesting thing about that is that you weren't tied to a textbook totally, so I can remember people going to English class, and you might have a textbook, but – this is when I was teaching – but they made you read supplemental poems that... I can remember one colleague of mine, faculty member who was teaching, Philip Larkin, great Poet Laureate, now dead, from England. And one of his poems was a meditation about churchgoing, and was basically about the demise of faith, and so on. And when it got out to the Board that this was being taught in class, I mean – that was the subject of a Board Meeting.

BB: And this is in '72?

ML: This would have been in the '70s, early '70s.

BB: Well, that certainly puts things in perspective.

ML: Yeah. So there was that... Who are these people that are teaching, and WHAT are they teaching, and has this been cleared in some places? We are a Catholic university, we have these values, and you know... So the people who were left leaning politically, or you know, had pretty – at what that time was perceived to be a radical social agenda, or they had ideas that weren't suited to the predominant orthodoxy in terms of, say, sexual relations, or.. That caused a bit of strain.

BB: I can imagine. Now, that's a fabulous insight, because reading the documentation, and the Journals, and the Times, from that period of time, particularly around the secularization of the university, there's very little said. So the impression one gets, unless you're engaged in an oral history interview, is that it all was just done, and finished, and there was no subsequent 'holding on' of those...

ML: Oh no, there was. Well, from my perspective there was a real 'holding on.'

BB: That makes sense.

ML: And as I said, one of the things that freed up people was that something as simple as the Gestetner, you weren't always... you know, here's an article you can read, you could use a poem, you could use a short story, you could... use my own thoughts on something. But yeah, there was this one Larkin poem where he's contemplating this... it's in the '60s, and he's looking at this young man and his girlfriend, he says in the poem, "I guess he's fucking her. And she's fucking him." Something ...It's a very interesting, it's a... Oh my god. Let me tell you... (laughs)

BB: Well, it's radical.

ML: I guess.

BB: I guess there would have been...

ML: And you know the reaction to *Catcher in the Rye* is, still! Because it has the F bomb, and well, you can remember that this was the 70's, and some people were not happy. And this was not... I can remember the Board debates, now this was later on, but some alumni members of the board just getting absolute meltdowns, because when the residences allowed condom machines...

BB: Right! Yeah. That would have be...

ML: Huge. Huge reaction.

BB: These are all the small details that you don't think about, but that would have been very upsetting to the Board. Some board members.

ML: And I can, even many years later, I can remember being involved in fundraising and being told by some people that you know, as long as that goes on, you'll never get a nickel from me.

BB: Right. And even from my own experience here, somewhat off topic, but related, the current battles on campus regarding pro-life and pro-choice, I know that there have been funders at the university that have said, on either side, the same thing. You'll never see another cent if this continues, or doesn't continue. Whichever side they happened to be on. But that's certainly linked, even today, with Catholic teachings on that.

ML: Yeah.

BB: Wow. That is fascinating. Can I jump back to your time up to '66, I understand from reading your previous oral history that there were two women that you identified as the first, really the first official real female students. Can you tell me about that?

ML: The first full-time students. Yes. Because there had been women here in the Education program through Continuing Ed. for a long time.

BB: In the evenings.

ML: Yeah. But the big change was when, oh, I'm not sure, I think it was Aileen O'Leary who first approached the university about coming here to do a program that wasn't available at The Mount, in political science. But Aileen, who I knew before, I knew pretty well, was a very smart student. She was at The Mount. And there were few people who had the interest in political life, she did. In fact, she's been in politics all her life.

BB: Is she a senator?

ML: I don't think she's a senator, unless in Ontario, but she's a member of Conservative for her riding...

BB: The constituency there. Her constituency.

ML: In Oshawa. Anyway, she's a long time MP.

BB: Does she still go by O'Leary?

ML: I think Carroll.

BB: Right. I knew there were two names.

ML: She'd be very interesting to talk to. Her son, Daniel came here.

BB: Did he?

ML: And uh, Kevin Carroll is her husband, and he graduated from here. You know, Carroll, the Plymouth dealer?

BB: Carroll's Chrysler? Yeah.

ML: That's his brother.

BB: Oh, is it, ok.

ML: So she came, and Jocelyn Crosby.

BB: So Aileen, she came and sought permission from.. the President at the time, or...

ML: Yeah, and I think the Archbishop had to sign off on that as well.

BB: Ok, Hayes and Fischer would have had to sign off, or...

ML: That was my understanding.

BB: And would they... I mean, what would be your guess for an all-male institution, why would they, why did they let her in?

ML: Well, I think she had a strong case. It was a program related issue, Saint Mary's was teaching women, it's not like women hadn't had any role here, there were some in Continuing Education. I think it was also the... To be honest, I don't think it was Harvey, I don't think that we should forget about the impact of John the 23rd. Really. That whole furor about opening up and reaching out, and there was a fair amount of momentum about breaking out of the old paradigm.

BB: The nuns were changing their habits..

ML: Yeah, sure. New roles being envisaged for women, and some people resisted, but some people were quite sympathetic to it.

BB: Right.

ML: And my sense as a student here then, it was.. it was just no problem. There was quite a bit of support. Probably there were some people who thought it wasn't a good idea, but I don't remember anybody. I mean, in residence, a lot of us were from the US, and we were used to going to Catholic schools, so it wasn't a big deal. And didn't expect that there was going to be any huge problem with that. Some people were worried about the washrooms, ... I'm just...

BB: Figure those things out.

ML: Yeah. (laughs) Put a sign out. This is not going to be a huge issue.

BB: So was there a sign that

ML: And Jocelyn, she was -

BB: Oh yes, Jocelyn, go back to that.

ML: Jocelyn was extremely nice. She was very bright. I believe she came, I think her interest was Engineering, but she was also very, very brilliant in Literature. And so, you know, within 10 minutes of talking to either one of them, you know, you're interested in these people, and I don't think students, or at least I never heard of any students having any, any problems.

BB: Would they have, to your recollection, draw any attention to themselves, or did they just show up and go to class?

ML: They just showed up and went to class. Yeah. And did presentations in class, and you know, went to the lounges and Chad, had coffee, and just sort of integrated into... I mean, Aileen was very involved in political societies, because she was just fascinated by political life and was exceptionally good at it.

BB: Ok. So there were those two, and they were here during your time, from '61 to '66.. Do you remember much discussion by '66 about co-education? It wasn't on the radar then?

ML: Insofar as it was, our expectation as a student was that this will evolve, and happen, and why not?

BB: Ok.

ML: Because I don't think, in '66, that we were aware, I know we weren't, that things were quickly moving into the public domain.

BB: That's right. Because by '67 it starts to, lots of documentation that it was a huge topic. Both in the Journals and... But that doesn't happen in my research until '67. Yeah. Interesting. But as a student body, you just expected that you'd be moving in that direction anyway.

ML: Yeah.

BB: Interesting. Ok.

ML: And I don't recall many, I don't think any of the guys I knew were particularly interested in it remaining...

B: They weren't, eh?

ML: No, and some of us took our cue from Bob Hennessey who felt quite happy with some of these developments.

BB: Was he? Do you know that he...

ML: I mean, I have.. if he didn't, he certainly kept it well hidden.

BB: Yeah, ok. There's going to be a few people who I talked to who didn't like the idea of women coming to campus, but the majority, as you said, from what I've read as well, absolutely supported it.

ML: I mean, I went to a Catholic high school, it just was not an issue. You know, we were just used to it, and didn't see the problem. There was.. I mean, there must have been some question, certainly it was out there for a long time, what about the relationship to Mount Saint Vincent. You know, and what could happen there, given that they were both Catholic institutions. My understanding was that the presidents in the latter years, like when Father Labelle was president, and Sister Wallace, Catherine Wallace, both very brilliant people, very strong-willed, but on different... And Father Labelle, brilliant as he was, was a pretty eccentric guy..

BB: Was he? I wondered about his personality.

ML: I think he left the Jesuits for a while toward the end and had a relationship with some woman, and I understood that he was killed in a car accident.

BB: Was he?

ML: Yeah, in the latter '60s and so on. Yeah, so... that's what I think, sort of recollect.

BB: I did an interview last week with someone at the university who said he started here in '68 and he said that his recollection was that at that time, there was so much criticism coming from the student body, that the Jesuits wouldn't have been used to, about various things, whether it was co-education or what not, that Labelle didn't handle that well. Yeah, he was really disturbed by it.

ML: Not surprised. Well, I think he might have been going through his own personal crisis as well.

BB: Sure. Interesting.

ML: And a lot of Jesuits in '68, '69, well, not a lot, but there was a number who did leave, who got married, and went on to other things. And I think part of that was the, sort of, all the buildup, and expectations that many felt positive about the early '60s, and the reaction that set in, and the sort of closing down of those... I think it put a lot of strain on some of the Jesuits.

BB: It could help me understand a bit better what you mean by closing down... the heightened expectations and then it didn't work out the way they thought it would?

ML: Well, I think in terms of intellectually, and the way the church would evolve, loosen its doctrinal positions, the ordination of women for example, ... marriage.... Some of those guys were not made for the celibate life. And I think some saw that as a possibility within the church, and then that disappeared.

BB: Right. It still isn't happening. Right. Interesting, so they felt that... yeah. I've heard of numerous ones that left, so, from that period of time. Hmmm.

Now, sort of back to The Mount, The Mount has featured quite prominently in my research. Because of the series of failed negotiations, as you pointed out with... And the Sisters of Charity at one point had purchased land here, and the deal was squashed, but that was interesting to me too, to see that there was a lot of panic at The Mount, the co-educational step here, and,

ML: Yeah. You know who might be interesting to talk to, although he came a little later, is Ken Ozmond. Because he knew some of the players, you know, at the presidential level, so he may be able to throw some light, shed some light on some of that.

BB: Now, I've spoken to women who were among the first larger group of coeds that arrived, and they said it was if they were still really on an all-male campus, that could have been because numbers were so low, I guess. So by the time you came back to teach here, what was it like then? You know, how many women would have been around, and...

ML: Yeah, it was not a huge number, you know it would have been predominantly 80% male. And so I can perceive by sheer numbers, that that might have been a problem. It was also the early '70s, it was a kind of 'let it all hang out', male, young guys, who were teaching that was probably a little edgy. And this was really going over well with the guys, but it may have been pretty offensive to some of the women, too, who didn't really appreciate some of the edginess. You know, all these young hotshot PhDs, or soon to be minted PhDs who were young, full of vim and vigour. And as I said, it was an iconoclastic dimension to, I mean, it was the emergence of a real protest era. The reaction to Vietnam, and that spilled over for many years into the '70s.

BB: I've heard Canadians describe that, that they really noticed the American influence.

ML: And Canada had its own reasons for being, you know, anti-establishment that was harder edged, and cynical and skeptical. And you know, in the early '70s, and the run up of the oil crisis, and inflation, there was a... Plus the sheer numbers of people being hired, to take all these people with no common history, and no connection here, throw them all in this mix, and sometimes it was volatile as hell. I'm telling you people had fistfights at department meetings..

BB: I could have had a lot of work back then (laughs)

ML: You had a lot of work back then! Because we were growing pretty quickly too, you know.

BB: That's right. A lot of painful things happen.

ML: And a lot of people from all over, and varying viewpoints and plus, like I said, the culture was I think, kind of edgy, and antagonistic, skeptical, and somewhat cynical.

BB: Very exciting time, though. To hear you describe it,

ML: But of course, the aftermath of the Vietnam War certainly had a lot, I mean, Richard Nixon, You got to remember Richard Nixon!

BB: There's a lot in the student newspaper and the Journal about happenings with Vietnam, with Nixon, that features very prominently in almost every issue during those years.

ML: You ever talk to George Nahrebecky? Because he was a student during those years. When Owen Carrigan first came, for example.

BB: Was his father also a professor?

ML: Yes. His father was a..

BB: Because I've been confused, when I've gone through that, which Nahrebecky is that?

ML: George, he'd be worth talking to. Particularly for those years. He was a... I mentioned that Journal article that featured Owen Carrigan in it? One of the early articles in the Journal about Owen, maybe it was the first one when he first came here, I think George wrote it. But the picture had Owen coming out the front door of McNally, and he was opening his shirt, and you see the superman thing, and it was just about looking like he was going to fly off into... And yeah, I think it kind of depends on how you interpret that, I think. For some of the older Board members, and others of the community, they saw Owen as superman who could take the school back to traditional values. I don't think that was the role as Owen saw it. One of the things he wanted was to see the University grow, he wanted to hire a lot of new faculty, he wanted to pressure the faculty that were here to get their doctorates finished, and you know, he was young. He was about 36 or 37.

BB: Wow. Big job for...

ML: It was an enormous... There were lots of conflicting expectations that were placed on him. It must have been very interesting for him, and – Are you going to talk to Owen?

BB: I am. I want to.

ML: He's fascinating. I like Owen.

BB: I've never met him, actually.

ML: No?

BB: But I would love to talk to him.

ML: He'd be very interesting to talk to. He really shaped the issue between the Board, and new faculty coming in, and varied expectations, and you know, like I say, one of the things he was concerned with was that if you came here with a Doctorate almost done, you finished that or moved on! Because he wanted the University, he wanted to enhance the reputation of this university, vis-à-vis Dal, vis-à-vis some of the other schools. It was the 'jock' school, and I think he really wanted to move it quite a bit to the next level. So there were those, and like I said, some people wanted a kind of older, '50s institution, and I think he was trying to negotiate among a whole bunch of expectations in a sense to help the university grow, and professionalize it.

BB: Would you see any link between that and him possibly carrying on the mandate of the Jesuits in trying to enhance the academic reputation of Saint Mary's, so if you look back at the Irish Christian Brothers, and here come the Jesuits who tidy things up...

ML: Absolutely. If you're talking about academic reputation. Interestingly along with it, Owen loved sports. He was a basketball player himself. I would say he seldom missed a basketball, football, hockey... I mean, he supported student activities completely. And his wife did as well. She came to huge numbers of games.

BB: Wow. So that side of the University was also something they, he was very involved in.

ML: Very involved with students, involved with their well-being, and their activities, not only in class but the extra-curricular activities. He put in lots of time. He had six kids himself, so...

BB: Ok. Well, we covered a lot of material, this is just wonderful. Is there anything that I can just touch base with you later if you should think of something else? Or is there anything else that you can think of that might be relevant, especially to those two areas, the introduction of women, the official big introduction of women, and secularization?

ML: The secularization was, from my perspective, was far more of a strain on the older world here; the older Board members, the.... To give you an idea, in the '50s and early '60s, I bet one of the biggest supporters would have been women from various churches around the town, who would hold Teas to raise money for the University, to buy this silver tea service that they'd use... I mean, ladies auxiliaries were really an interesting and important part of helping support this institution in the 50s and early '60s, and probably the '40s, and god knows how far back. But they were connected through the churches, they felt they needed to make a connection to the university, and the Jesuits and so on. I think when this university was moving towards a secular identity that that was a strain on a lot of those older people who had this long term connection when the university, really by law, had to adapt to certain types of things like, you couldn't enforce certain rules just because they happened to be rules of the Catholic church. You know, Catholic schools had women in them for a long time, I don't think that was a big deal.

BB: Not that big of a deal.

ML: It wasn't an easy transition, but I do think that moving away from that world, I guess you'd say, and the warm embrace of that old Orthodoxy, into the much more contested, open, free-wheeling world of modernity. It was a tough go.

BB: That's a fabulous insight, I'm very grateful that you shared that, because one would never garner that from looking at the student perspective at the time, you would never necessarily think about that the students, from what I've read, you know, they were just

keen to get the girls here, and other types of changes. But there's nothing really about how difficult a struggle it would have been behind the scenes for those who had the university and the tradition for so long. That's really interesting.

ML: It is. And as I say, uncommon for these various ladies groups and to have church socials to fundraise for this or that. You know the story, no doubt, about Norman Stanbury, when they were finishing McNally, they ran out of money?

BB: I knew they ran out of money, right.

ML: He opened a line of credit for the rest of it. A personal line of credit in order for it to be completed. I mean that's...

BB: Wow, that's incredible commitment.

ML: That's how much it meant to the people who supported it. And what they must have seen happening quite quickly was it being coopted into...

BB: Fast forward to condom machines on the campus and all that! What was it all for? That's fascinating.

ML: Are we simply becoming Dalhousie? That's not to say...

BB: That's right, just another university.

ML: It has this tradition, but it's now something new. And that was a tough go for some people. It was absolutely necessary, by the way! I'm not saying that... But as I say, it was a challenge.

BB: Even when I look at my own time here, I look at the Archbishop as no longer..

ML: Chair of the Board.

BB: Chair of the Board, and what else have I seen change? Our first non-Jesuit chaplain has arrived this year, so yeah. Interesting how there would be some that say we clung too long to some of the values, but,

ML: I don't find that anybody is dealing with issues about who's teaching what in the classroom, and we used to get that in the early '70s. You know, real comments about this or that article, in the student newspaper, or you know, the notion that we have to stop that. You know, just that kind of approach is gone. It's very much a public institution. You exist within the rules of law, and the guidelines that everybody else as a society, but otherwise, this is a world of free inquiry, and freedom of speech and all the rest of that.

BB: Isn't it amazing that you've seen all this happen through your time here.

ML: Well, particularly through those early years of my time here

BB: You look far too young, by the way to have been here in 1961.

ML: Oh...

BB: You do, though. I remember when I read your bio earlier, I thought, no, he couldn't have been here in '61! That's way too early. But what you've seen, the shifts... It's just amazing.

ML: It was wonderful. Wonderful transformation. Really, everybody connected to Saint Mary's has lots to be proud of. Even the old reactionary types who were holding on to.. I mean. Over the piece, a lot of people contributed enormously to this.

BB: I've also been fascinated by individuals I've interviewed from the '60s who were non-Catholics. And I was a bit surprised at that because I wouldn't have thought there would have been many. And how connected they were to Hennessey, and you know, how they would participate in all kinds of different Catholic traditions, and... I'm sure that wasn't the norm, but that did exist.

Did you know about the term, that they called The Mount, "Hungry Hill"?

ML: Yeah.

BB: Ok, I just learned that.

ML: Unreal.

BB: (laughs) Well, you've given me a fabulous amount of insight and ...

ML: I did? I'm glad.

BB: Oh, it was just fabulous. And really now, you've set me in a whole different course by some of the things you've raised, and behind the scenes things, like talking about the Board, and traditions and whatnot that I hadn't thought of before, so that will be very rich. Delightful! Yeah, so thank you very much, and I conclude it and I'll get you a copy of ...

~~end of tape~~