7-5-2000

Jellema, Mary Oral History Interview: Retired Faculty and Administrators of Hope College

Melissa LaBarge

Joint Archives of Holland
Oral History Project- summer 2000
Retired Hope Professors
Interviewee: Professor Mary Jellema
Interviewer: Melissa LaBarge
5 July 2000

ML: Where were you born, where did you grow up?

MJ: If you take 16th street about ten miles out, you come to a little town called Drenthe. That's where I grew up. I grew up in a neat place right in town that was six acres. And my father was a schoolteacher, and my aunt was a schoolteacher. I went to a little two-room country school right there in Drenthe from K through eighth, and then went to Zeeland Public. It was a very free and open life. I had a hard time learning to read. I think today I would have been diagnosed as having a slight dyslexia, with letters confused or something like that. But once I learned to read I was an avid reader for the rest of my life. One incident that I remember very clearly, having to do with reading and children's books, is that my father, as an elementary school teacher-- also in country schools-- would have a book budget and there would be a book fair. I can remember once he asked me to go along and help pick out books because he knew that I knew what books were in the library in the school that he taught at. And that was just one of the greatest treats in my childhood life-- is going to a bookfair and just walking around picking out all the books that I wanted to read of course. And he was very sweet, and when we got home with this cardboard box full of books, he let me read them all first before he took them to school. So I'd read one and then he could take it to school. So it was a wonderful thing. Because, being stuck in a little town like that back in the 1940's, you just didn't get to town very often. You certainly

never got to a bookstore to buy books, and this was before paperbacks were really available very much. And so, you know, you read what you had in the house or in the church library or in the school library. Occasionally, I remember my parents taking us to the Zeeland library or Holland library- but that was very seldom. So, being stuck out in the country like that, the more I had to read the better. I appreciated that. And I grew up, went to Zeeland High School and then went on to Calvin College. My church background is Christian Reformed and I am one of six children. I'm number four down the line, and the older three had also either gone or were going to Calvin. So you didn't even think about going anywhere else at that time. Although most of the students that were in my class at Zeeland Public went to Hope, but I thought it was sort of neat to do something different so that's what I did.

ML: Now did you live at Calvin when you went there?

MJ: Yes, yeah I lived at Calvin.

ML: What did you major in while you were there?

MJ: Well, before I started Calvin I looked at the college catalogue. And again, this was before times when you went and visited colleges and where they took you tours and all this kind of thing. So what I knew about Calvin is what I got from my brothers and my sister. I went through all the pre-professional lists of courses that were required. And the one that appealed to me most was pre-law. So I thought 'okay'- I had no idea what I wanted to be, except in high school I really loved sciences and math a lot. I think English and courses like that were just so easy that they didn't turn me on much. I had to work at science and math and so I

enjoyed those. So I toyed with the idea of being an engineer because one of my brothers was going into engineering- that sounded good. My other brother and sister were both going into social work and that did not sound good to me. The thought of listening to people's problems all day and then trying to be nice to them instead of saying 'you know, like get a grip' or something. It didn't appeal to me. But I didn't really think about teaching that seriously either. I just wanted to go and be a student- an eternal student I thought would be really nice. So anyway, I ended up majoring in English and then I kept taking a lot of history courses, and so I ended up with a major in history. And I took a lot of philosophy courses and I ended up with a major in philosophy. So I might have gone on to law school if I had been encouraged at all. Now that's a weakness on my part, but I had a very strange encounter with a very nice political science professor when I was a freshman. He called me in to talk to me, and he said to me 'well I hope that you don't get into the same kinds of problems that the girl who was pre-law a few years ago got into'. I, of course, didn't know what he was talking about. Well it turned out that she had got pregnant. Now, does this sound a little weird to you as a woman of the Nineties and the Thousands? [laughter] I was very polite, of course, and said 'well, I didn't think I'd have any problems'. But afterward, I started thinking about that and thinking, 'well, this is an outrageous thing to say to a student- I hope you don't get knocked up like that other chick did'. So that turned me off a little bit, and I got no encouragement from people in political science or in history to go on in either of those areas. Whereas, the people in the English department were very, very encouraging. So I ended up going to

graduate school in English and got a masters at Ohio State. I did not go on for a PHD, I do not have a doctor's degree. I had a boyfriend by that time, and we decided we'd get married instead. And I just don't think I had the willpower to go on for a PHD at that time. And by that time, I'd been teaching- because when I was in graduate school I had a teaching assistantship, and I enjoyed that. So that kind of settled my direction.

ML: Now you taught English in a high school or a college?

MJ: I taught in college with the teaching assistantship. But after we got married, my husband enrolled in a Master of Fine Arts program at University of Oregon. I got a job teaching in high school. And I had also, in the meantime, taken education courses. So I had a high school teaching certificate. So I did that for three years when he was in graduate school. I enjoyed that- I taught in a small mountain school in Oregon with all loggers' kids. And they were all from Appalachia, all "hillbillies". And I really enjoyed them a lot. They were not academically stimulated. But I had a lot of fun- I was the whole English department, and I taught home-EC which I knew nothing, really, about. And I was the librarian and I taught reading, which I had no real training in either. But it was one of those things, you know, the faculty was about six, seven of us. And I had to direct to the plays because the English teacher always did that. So it was a lot of fun but it was very, very busy. I just respect high school and elementary school teachers a lot because I know how hard they work- especially elementary schoolteachers. I just think they are saints- they should be put on pedestals- they should be paid

what full professors are paid- and they should be granted any wish they have. I do, I really think they just do amazing jobs- very hard work.

ML: I wish teachers would hear that more often.

MJ: I've always said 'anyone could teach college, but it's a real challenge to teach a class of first graders'- to read, that's incredible! It's an astonishing accomplishment.

ML: Okay, you're out in the mountains, in Oregon, teaching high school. How did you get from there to Hope College?

MJ: My husband was hired at Hope in 1964. He came in the fall of 1964 and obviously I came along. Our first child was born in 1964 and then two and a half years later we had a second child. However, even before the second one was born, I got calls from Calvin- from Grandvalley- from GRCC. Because everybody always needs freshman English teachers. And I knew people in all three places. So I taught several years at Calvin part-time, freshman English. And they set up a schedule that was very convenient for me, so I just taught on Tuesdays and Thursdays. So I just had to get a babysitter for Tuesday and Thursday afternoon. That worked out really well. And I taught a couple of years at Junior College, I never taught at Grandvalley. So it was that kind of thing that I just did part time when my kids were small. And in '68, Hope asked me if I wanted to teach and so that's when I started at Hope.

ML: Have you been part-time ever since?

MJ: I was part-time until my kids were about in high school. I think in the early Eighties, I just added enough courses to be full time. That's as I recall it- I'd have

to go back and check the records to get that absolutely sure, but that's my memory of it. I started teaching Children's Lit in 1975. The woman who had been teaching it shared an office or was next door to my husband. And she said to him two years before she retired, her name was Anne Bratt, and she said, 'I'm gonna retire in two years and if you think Mary would be at all interested in teaching children's literature, tell her she just ought to go ahead and prepare for that'. So I did that. I'd always read a lot to my children and things like that, but I had not read secondary sources or things like that- books about children's literature. So it was neat just to find out what the library had and make up reading lists and things like that- get to know the journals. And then I was hired for that position in 1975. I always said to other people in the department, 'if you ever want to teach it go ahead,' but nobody ever did. So it just was one of these things that was my baby all the time. Well, a person would have to do a fair amount of reading to prepare for that so I suppose that's why people who had their own specialties chose not to go into that. Now there's a couple of people, Richard Mezeske in the education department and I know Jesse Montano is interested- at least is thinking about it- so I don't know if he ever will. So at least there's a few people, and we've got four people coming for the fall, new ones, and I don't know if some of those…

ML: English professors?

MJ: Yeah, so I don't know if any of those would be interested, also, in teaching it. At Hope, in the English department at least, we have the policy that no one owns a course. Okay, so although John Cox, for example, is our Shakespeare expert- Peter Schackel teaches it, Linda Dove teaches it, and there may be others who

also teach it. So, it's not as if it's my course and nobody else can touch it. Except it sort of turned out to be that way with Children's Lit for me.

ML: Has the Children's Literature course changed- have you changed it throughout the years?

MJ: Oh yeah, I have indeed. I think when I began that course, boy I'd have to look that up, my memory is that it was a two-hour course. So it was a rapid fly-over of a lot of different things. The whole history of it and the different kinds of children's literature. You know, there's poetry and there's folktales and there's fiction and fantasy and, you know, all these kinds of picture books and lots of different things- pop-up books and whatnot. So, I tried to make it comprehensive because it's the only course in Children's Literature that Hope offers, and I thought it would be good to make it as comprehensive as possible. Calvin, in contrast, has a couple of Children's Lit course and about three or four people that teach it. So, one wouldn't have to do it as comprehensively as I felt I had to do it. I used an anthology for many years- a very good anthology, but finally got sick of that because they did not revise it and catch up. I tried to keep fresh in teaching it by assigning four or five paperbacks each semester, and I always picked different ones. So I enjoyed that a lot because that was a real education for me. And I usually tried to pick different kinds- one that was for early readers and one that was for middle readers and some fantasy, some realistic fiction- so there was a variety, again, in that respect. I enjoyed that a lot. But then it became a three-hour course and now it's a four-hour course. And I changed it a lot when it became a four-hour course. I really changed it from giving four or five tests in

the course to a lot more writing. And your roommates, I'm sure, talked about having to write yet another paper. But I just enjoyed reading the papers that I had assigned a lot more than I enjoyed reading tests where you've got people, you know, pretty much writing about the same kinds of things. The papers that I assigned for the last ten years or so when it was a four-hour course, I really enjoyed. I did a lot of short papers- just called focus papers where a person would read a text and then write a short focused response. The text could be short, like a picture book text, or a book of poems or anything like that. Each person had to pick his or her own focus to write on. And I gave 'em lots of different options and possibilities. But that meant, with a class of thirty people, I very seldom had more than one person writing about the same angle on it. So that was a lot of fun to read. Some people really enjoyed writing them too. I got some very positive feedback. Some people just got sick of them, which I can understand too. But it was a pleasure to read those papers, some of those were really terrific I thought. So yeah, the course changed a lot at that point from more tests to more self-directed kinds of things. And they each had to do a longer paper on a children's classic, which gave them a chance to pick a book that maybe they'd either read before, like Alice in Wonderland or something like that, or pick a book they'd never read before- I didn't care. So it was fun.

ML: What was Hope like when you came? Physically and the atmosphere?

MJ: Well, there's been a lot more buildings put up since the time I've started. Oh dear, Maas Center was not there. In fact, there used to be a house there that the Knicks were in- the Knick house I think was where Maas Center is now. You'd

have to check with a Knick on that- an old Knick. I was really afraid when they took that down that they were gonna take down that magnificent Oak tree that's next to the driveway, and thank goodness they saved that- that's such a gorgeous tree. And, of course, Van Raalte burned. And there was Carnegie Gymnasium, which was where the heating unit in the back of Dewitt is now. Lubbers was always there- Vorhees was always there. The library, of course, is new. I can remember when Peale was built. And, of course, Dow- I can remember the houses that used to be there. They were all student ghetto houses and so forth. So, there was a lot of changes in terms of physical. And DeWitt got put up. I don't remember what was there. I remember, people used to play intramural ball there, just pick-up games. So yeah, there's been a ton of changes physically. And there used to be all houses where the library is. I can remember that some nice old, large homes got taken down to build the library.

ML: Where people from the community lived?

MJ: Yes. Other changes… it's such a long time. When I started teaching and when I went to college, professors called students by their last name. So you were Ms. LaBarge, not Melissa. Or Mrs., but that was rare because there were very few non-traditional students. And Mr. Whatever. And that was true in graduate school too. And I know I kept that up for a long time when I was teaching at Hope and finally it seemed to me that I noticed that everybody else that I knew was calling students by their first name. A lot got changed in the late Sixties and early Seventies, lots of things happened there. I think that's when grade inflation started. I can remember when I started teaching, 75 was a passing grade.

Anything below 75 was failing. Now it's 60, it seems to me. So that's grade inflation right there- the difference between 60 and 75 is fifteen points, you know. So a lot of people who are getting A's now would have got B's then, without a doubt. And a lot of people who are getting B's would have got C's automatically. So C was indeed a common, an average grade when I was in school and when I was first teaching. That's been hard to adjust to, for me at least. It still bothers me. You know, I see somebody who just cranks it over the edge into an A category- into the nineties, and I think 'you know, you're not really an A student. You're a B student, a high B maybe, but you're a B student'. But I don't, I go along with the mob. So that, to me, is a big change. The way people dress, which I am all in favor of. I'd much rather have tight grades and loose dress than the other way around [laughter]. Well I just think it's wonderful, especially for women. I can remember as a student at Calvin, you never wore pants to school. It just wasn't done, you probably would have been called into the Dean of women. There were then a Dean of women and a Dean of men. And I can remember my roommates were scandalized when I wore knee socks to school. They thought that was, you know, really slobby. Okay, you're supposed to wear girdles and hose and things like that- this is before panty hose all right. You asked for differences… you're getting it. Now when I see, especially young women, come into class in sweats- their hair wet from being in gym- I just think that is terrific, that is so great! And the whole gym program, the whole PE program is such a wonderful thing, I think, because it was virtually nothing when I went to Calvin. I can't remember ever doing… I think, I can remember doing

archery once or something like that. You maybe had to take two semesters of PE and, of course, this was also before the time when anyone jogged or ran. If you were seen running down the street or down the sidewalk people assumed you had committed a crime. I can remember jogging became popular when we were in Oregon. A guy by the name of Bill Bowerman was a track coach there, I think. And he is the one that really started the whole, what seemed to be a fad at that time, of jogging. And when I see people jogging, I just think it's terrific- especially women. I just think 'oh, this is the way it should be'. And I take great vicarious pleasure in seeing good runners just sort of floating along.

ML: Vicarious?

MJ: [laughs] Yes, I'm never gonna jog. I'll bicycle, I'll do a whole lot of other things, but I'm not gonna do that and I'm sad about that- that that wasn't an option when I was your age. Another difference is that back in the olden days we used to have Saturday classes, Melissa. So you had Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday- especially Saturday morning- they stopped at noon. But I remember frequently having Saturday classes. And that was the one time, especially in the winter, when we felt bold enough to get away with dressing inappropriately so we'd wear- we always had long wool coats you know, gosh this sounds like a museum to me- and then we always wore just our pj's under that. You couldn't get away with that in the spring or fall, you know. So anyway, those were some changes.

ML: With the Dean of Women and the Dean of Men, now has that become no longer necessary?

MJ: It's now Dean of Students, you know, Richard Frost- supposedly takes care of everybody. But what you have today is counseling services. We never had a counseling service. I remember being counseled… oh we had sign-out sheets so if we lived off-campus, which I did when I was in college, we had to have a sign-out sheet for every place we went and what time we left and what time we came back. Once a month, these got turned in to the Dean of Women. And she would go over those and if she saw any problems there, she'd call you in. Well, I'm a person who loves dance and ballet and in Drenthe, let's face it, we didn't have much of that. So when I got to Grand Rapids and there was a ballet coming, I made sure that I went to see that because I just thought it was the most wonderful thing in the world. So, of course, I put that on my sheet. So she called me in. 'Did I think that that was an appropriate place for a Christian young woman to go?' I said, 'sounded okay to me'. So I got a little lecture about why hadn't I signed up for the Mission club and things like that. So anyway, that was our counseling service. A big change in teaching, it seems to me, is the movement from lecture to hands on kind of things. So that classes are taught much more interactively now and student-centered than they certainly were when I was a student and when I first started teaching. You just assumed back in the old days that students would be quiet and take notes on everything you said and then you'd test them on that- it's as simple as that. Instead of this whole discussion component to a grade. I think this is much healthier, within reason. I think sometimes students appear to have to be entertained more than I think it's necessary.

ML: Can you see that getting more and more?

MJ: I do, yeah that the attention span just seems to be shorter and shorter. I don't know if that's true. And it depends on the students obviously. There are fine students who are as good as any good students I ever had in the past. So people say 'well, are students a lot worse nowadays than they used to be?' And I don't know, I don't think so- I don't really think so. The bright ones are always bright and curious. And I think curiosity is a crucial factor in any education. If you're curious about something you're gonna be interested in learning about it. A person who's easily bored, well they have my sympathy I guess. So that's a big switch it seems to me. And I think teaching has become more demanding because of that- because you have to think much more of how students learn. The whole idea, that you people in education certainly learn about which I think is great, of Multiple Intelligences is, I think, a very valid kind of thing. Certainly people do learn differently. I guess, what I've always viewed as a top-notch student is a person who learns abstractly. A person who can outline, a person who's organized and things like that. And I think it's been difficult for me, and perhaps for some other college teachers too, to adapt to the other kinds of learning and to make sure that you incorporate some of those into a course, as well as just the talky stuff.

ML: How do the academic departments at Hope interrelate and how much should they interrelate?

MJ: Well I don't know. I think within the division there's a lot of overlap and there's a lot of interaction. For example, in the humanities division- where you've got history and the arts and religion and communications and things like that- people

get together and do things occasionally. I know that people like George Ralph in the Theater Department and John Tammi in the Theater Department have worked very closely with some people in English, like Jack Ridl. When my husband was alive, he and George Ralph used to do things in the theater together. So there's been overlap in that way. There's been some- I can't pin any down specifically- but it seems to me there's been some in art too, where you have poetry and art overlapping and things like that. I don't know if there's been many in the sciences. I know Steve Bouma-Prediger from the religion department- seems to me he's done something with people in the sciences, some overlap of religion and science. And there may be other examples of that too. I think there's a great openness to that- I just don't know how much of that is actually done, you'd have to check records for that. I don't think I have ever worked with anyone, but I must say I am always very happy in children's literature when I had people from dance, people with art majors or who knew a lot about art or music because they brought an extra something to the course: in terms of talking about movement, talking about color, talking about rhythm and those kinds of things. So it seems to me that there is a great deal of overlap there. And with special projects that students did- some of them would do some lovely things. Getting the whole class up to move creatively in terms of a text. Or somebody spinning off into an art project that was related to texts that children would have. So I see it as a very rich kind of thing. You had a question on your list about liberal arts, and it just seems to me that that's the wonderfulness about the liberal arts is that you have that interaction among the different disciplines- where one feeds into another and

questions another and stimulates another, and so you have this fairly really rich background. I can remember as a student in college, maybe when I was a freshman or a sophomore, suddenly having the epiphany, almost, of the interrelatedness of all knowledge. And I just always hope that at some point the students that are in my classes would have that same kind of vision to see 'oh, you know, golly- to do really fine art for children's picture books takes mathematical skill'. So there's this overlap and where you see the richness of all the different branches of learning- can cooperate and enrich each student's life that way. I just think that's a wonderful part of a college education that a person, I think, who would go to a trade school would miss- having a rather narrow focus.

ML: That's very interesting because one of the things that have come up a lot is that Hope is a liberal arts college and what you were just describing is exactly what should be happening. Do you think that is happening enough there?

MJ: I don't know, I think it depends on the person. I don't think you can force a person into that vision. You can suggest it, you can suggest where there's overlap. And I know that, for example, Don Cronkite in the sciences does that because he's a Renaissance man. And I know that there are people in other departments that suggest the overlap of knowledge because they have that vision. And I think that's what appeals to a lot of people who come to teach at a place like Hope- is that kind of overlap and having colleagues that you really feel you can share things with and create things together and that sort of thing. So yeah, I think some students do and some probably don't. They go out of there as blind as maybe when they came in. I don't know, I think it would be difficult though.

With students, that enlarged vision, some it happens earlier- some it happens later- some, I suppose, get that vision every day in high school. I think it's very hard not to get a sense of that by taking the core. I think the core is very healthy so I think it's a good one. I just wish that people had to stay here five years as some of you education people end up doing. I stayed five years at Calvin just because I wanted to pick up another language. I had taken Latin in high school and I took French. I was very weak in French, but I was fascinated by it and I enjoyed it and I'm glad I took it, but I wanted to take German too. So I stayed an extra year and took German and took some more English courses, took some more History courses. I just love taking courses, I'm terrible. I could just have stayed in college and taken everything because I just enjoy all the different areas. I never got into the arts- I never did any of that and a lot of me would like to go back and take some of those courses. I don't know if you interviewed Nancy Nicodemus, but I'm charmed by her decision to take art courses in her retirement. I think that's wonderful. So I'm very interested in that and I might follow her footsteps sometime if it works out that way.

ML: In the catalogue it says Hope is a "liberal arts college in the historic tradition of the Christian faith". What does that mean for Hope?

MJ: Well that's a red button issue, you know. That's where you have to talk carefully. Let's see, what would be the best way to say that. I think the Reformed Church has a rich tradition that Hope College should be committed to pass on to its students. It doesn't mean that you can't be ecumenical and see how the Reformed Church tradition, how the whole Reformed tradition, is interwoven with Roman

Catholics, Roman Catholic faith- which is different. There are some differences there for sure. I see no problem with teaching about other religions- the Jewish faith, which is, of course, the foundation for the Christian faith- Muslim, other faiths, I think that's fine. But I think it has to be done from a Reformed perspective. I'm old-fashioned in that way and I know there's a lot of people that would disagree with me here. But it just seems to me that Hope should acknowledge what and who it is and not be apologetic and try to be all things to all people. And I think that's been a problem- that they've tried to talk out of five different sides of their mouth at the same time, instead of saying 'hey, we're a Reformed Church- that's our background, that's our heritage, that's what the school is. Now if you would prefer a different kind of setting, then you should go elsewhere'. Instead of luring people on with any sorts of misconceptions. That's what I'd be afraid of. I don't know if that has been done. I would certainly not accuse anyone of doing anything like that. I think Hope is a very attractive place and I think Hope's campus has been greatly enriched. And my classes, speaking just for myself, have been enriched by the presence of a lot of Catholic students. I am happy to have Catholic students in my classes. Students of other faiths- I've had Muslims in my class, that's fine- happy to have them because I think it enriches the whole class setting. And they are enriching their background by getting a Reformed perspective, as much as that's got. I don't know what else to say about that. It's a difficult issue to talk about. And, of course, another red button issue is the whole chapel program. And I don't know if I want to go on record talking about that. All I want to say about it, I think, and I think that's part

of some of the difficulties at Hope is that we've had chaplains at Hope College as long as I can remember, and they've been very fine people. And they never presented a controversy. They knew the staff, we knew them. On the other hand, there weren't very many people that went to chapel. With the present chaplain staff, you barely ever see the chaplain or staff people at academic events, but look at the crowds that come to chapel. So I don't know- that leaves me speechless.

ML: Do you see Hope heading a certain way in the future?

MJ: Listening to my colleagues, I see that there have been some real problems in class with students rebelling against having to read a text that they don't see as being overtly Christian- that's just an example. I have never had that response from students. Maybe it's because of what I teach. I also don't think I'd be cowed by that. I think I'd be able to explain to them why they should know everything, not just what is written from a Christian perspective. Books that I've taught in my freshman English course in the last ten years when I've done the 'Focus Africa' thing have been primarily Muslim in their background. I have learned a lot from that. I think my students have learned a lot from it. I've never had a student complain about that. 'Why do we have to read about Muslims or about Islam instead of about a Christian background?' So I don't know, maybe they were just meek or thought they wouldn't get anywhere by complaining. I hope it gets settled though. And I think, one of your questions is about Bultman, I think President Bultman has very good intentions. I think he understands the problem. I think that he may be working behind the scenes a lot more than some people give him credit for and I rejoice that this past year we did not have, in the spring

semester, a blow-up of any kind, with a lot of protesters and things like that- which we've had for the past two years previous. So, I think that maybe there's an understanding that's coming through with both sides on this issue. I hope that's so. I know I have colleagues who have said 'well, well, Bultman didn't do very much this year. We thought he was gonna solve this problem'. And all I could say was 'how do you expect to solve this in one year?' I just think that it's gonna take a little while to kind of move expectations.

ML: You've hit on the president- has morale changed with the different presidents?

MJ: Well that depends on who you talk to. And I have not been in the center of things as some people have so it's a little bit hard for me to talk about that. I just get feedback from colleagues and things like that so it's hardly really fair to give those impressions if they're not my first-hand ones. If you talk to somebody who's been on the PIC Committee or the Status Committee or something like that…

ML: What's PIC?

MJ: PIC [Professional Interests Committee] is a governance committee that makes very important decisions with faculty input and how the college is run. Obviously there you have interaction between the faculty and the administration. So, you get much more interaction there with the President and the other administrators- the provost and the deans and things like that. And I've never been on those committees so I just do not have the handle to talk. It seems to me, just a very general comment, that some people have been very pleased with every president and some have been disillusioned. Some think they've come on strong and then

they sort of fritter away their mandate somehow. I don't think that's typical and it varies. I do think that most people think that our present provost is an excellent, excellent administrator. And he is a person that I have had contact with, as well as my dean and things like that. And my chairperson. I have nothing but praise for the chairpeople in the English department that I have worked under. The deans, I have found very, very approachable. This is the deans in the humanities now. And the provost- I have had excellent relations with all of these people in the hierarchy that I have to answer to. So I have no complaints about that.

ML: One thing that came up that I found really intriguing was the technology and how things have changed. How has technology changed things and has it made more work or less work?

MJ: That's a difficult question. I go back to when there were mimeograph machines and those hectograph machines and things like that and I'll tell ya, that was a lot of work. But then you know what, you gave stuff to secretaries to do. Secretaries did them. Now people do all their own stuff, for the most part. I could turn in things to the English department secretary and say 'you know, I need so many copies of this', but that's easy. She just ships it off to the copy center. She doesn't have to load ink into a cartridge and crank things around and get it working. Some of those old machines were a terror and were miserable to work with and messy and whatnot. On the other hand, I have said choice words in trying to get my computer to do what I want it to do too. I'm not a technologically adept person and so… yeah, in some ways it's made life a lot easier. In other ways it's a big pain in the neck. So I don't know, I think almost

all technology is a mixed bag, and what you gain one end you lose at another end. I guess I've become more philosophical in my old age, or I realize that there's nothing that I can do that's gonna change anything. What bothers me, this is just a personal quirk I'm sure, is getting updates on machinery- on computers you know. You get one computer figured out and then, oh goody, you get a new machine. I think 'oh no! Help! You mean I've got to learn some different commands now'. But I think things are getting easier to run. They're becoming more user friendly for computer dummies like me. And I'm sure that people who are really adept in them have no problem whatsoever. And I'm just thankful for colleagues who are smart and for secretaries who are willing, very patiently, to try to help me get through problems and for the help-line and all stuff like that.

ML: They have a technology help-line?

MJ: Oh sure, CIT. Call Pauline and say 'Pauline I need help!'

ML: Have you had any memorable experiences that are coming to your mind right now over your years at Hope College?

MJ: Well, I'm just not sure.

ML: That's a hard question because it makes you pick something out from years and years. Some people have one or two… I can ask more questions and then come back to that one.

MJ: Sure, ask other questions.

ML: When you lived in Drenthe were you familiar with the Holland community?

MJ: Aah, pretty much, yes I had relatives living here.

ML: What was that like when you moved back here?

MJ: Well actually, my husband and I were both a little wary of moving back because of the churchiness, and we just didn't want to be pinned in. We were afraid that neighbors would be looking over your yard all the time to see if you were drinking beer or if you were mowing the lawn, or if you had shorts on on Sunday or something like that. And that just appalled us- the thought of that happening. What happened, however, was that none of that happened. None of that at all, so maybe it had to do with the neighborhood that we bought a house in, which was out on Columbia Avenue. We didn't have any problem with the kinds of things that we were, sort of- in our own narrow way- worried about. So we found neighbors very accepting and that sort of thing. We didn't mind actually coming back although we loved Oregon very much. Both of our sets of parents were getting elderly and my husband was the only son in his family so he was happy to come to Hope. And we liked Lake Michigan and just the area around here so that was fun. It's interesting, I don't know if you know, the procedure that we put candidates for new positions at Hope through. You must have some idea of that, not?

ML: Somewhat.

MJ: Where they have to teach a class, at least this is true in the English department, they have to teach a class, they have to give a lecture or read a paper or whatever, you know, whatever they choose to do. And be taken out for dinner with all the people in the department plus students- meet with students and so forth. They're really grilled for two to three days. That's a huge change. I know that when my husband came, he simply talked to the chairperson of the department- period.

That was it, as far as I know- that's as far as I can remember. He simply talked to Clarence de Graaf and 'yeah, that sounded good' and so he signed up. It was as easy as that. And, of course, teaching part-time I've never had any problem with that either because they need somebody to teach freshman English, 'okay, you've taught freshman English?' 'Yeah.' 'You've got a Master's degree. Okay, so go to it'. And if you have any problems or if you have any questions, they're open to help you, but they just assume that you know what you're doing- and go ahead and do it. So that actually hasn't changed a whole lot although I think in the English department, for part-timers, we do urge them to come to social events that we have. And we have get-togethers for freshman English teachers- a couple a year- where we talk about, let's say, something like using technology in the classroom or doing research or research papers or things like that- anything that we want to talk about. And we always urge them to come to those kinds of things. That's healthy, I think.

ML: Has Hope become more or less diverse? And we can talk about the student body and the professors.

MJ: I think it's become more diverse, in some ways. When I started teaching at Hope, there were a lot more students from other parts of the United States. Lots of people from the East Coast especially, from the Reformed churches there. And that was a very nice thing. It was very good for them, it was very good for the people from Michigan. There were a lot more people, even, from the West Coast. Now we have a few from both- very few- most of them are from Michigan. Which is okay, but it's not as much fun. You know, you just don't get those nice

East Coast accents that you would have. That was true at Calvin too when I was there. I had a lot of roommates from the East Coast, and they're still friends today. I think that changed when states started giving discounts for scholarships, or whatever, to students from their state. You know, you're a Michigan person so it's cheaper for you to go to a state school, right? Isn't it cheaper for you to go to U of M or to Michigan State or Grand Valley than it would be for somebody from Indiana or California?

ML: Oh, yeah.

MJ: Well that kept a lot of people from the East Coast on the East Coast instead of coming to the Midwest.

ML: Do you know when this shift happened?

MJ: No, I honestly don't. I'd say fifteen years ago, maybe- mid Eighties. But don't pin me down on that- that's just my guess. So I think that's too bad. In terms of foreign students, I think we have a large variety now and we keep pulling more in, I think. But we did have African students all the time that I've been at Hope. There were always African students there and part of that was missions and also refugee situations. We had some Ethiopian students, I can remember, oh maybe twenty years ago- who had escaped and come to this country and then ended up at Hope. Let's see, I think there's obviously more black students now on campus than there have been. But it seems pathetic to me that there's not more Hispanics, there's not more Asians, there's not more Blacks. Just from Holland. So I wish there were more because I like having them in class. And non-traditional students' too- they have increased a lot over the last twenty years. There's more

non-traditional students. And, I'll tell you, it just changes the whole tone of a class when you've got a non-traditional student in it because they work so hard. And they set a tone that just makes the rest of students look like wimps, you know. They are just such eager beavers. But, having other students in class- a variety, whether it's color or race or ethnicity or religion or whatever- I just think adds to it. It's just wonderful. It keeps the teacher on her toes because you've gotta think more diversely. You've gotta see things from different perspectives, and I think that's very, very healthy. So is there more or less… I don't know. I guess, probably, more in terms of other races and ethnic backgrounds and that sort of thing, but not geography- not U.S. geography. And faculty- yeah, there certainly is a difference. I mean, my goodness, for one thing there's more women, slowly. And more ethnic background- I think in the English department, we have really worked very hard. We had an intern from Howard University this past year, Teresa Gilliam- black woman, sharp- just a wonderful colleague. I just enjoyed having her on board so much. It just added a lot, in terms of getting us to read different things- just the stuff that she was reading opened our eyes to other things. So that was very good. And we have Susan Atefat Peckham, who is from Iran and lived in Europe, her father's in the UN, some job in the UN. She speaks five, six different languages- very cosmopolitan woman. And Jesse Montano has a Hispanic background. And there are probably others that I can't even think of. So I think all that's been really very good. I'm trying to think of the people we've hired for next year. I don't think there's a big shift in ethnicity, although I think, and of course- I'm raking up my sentences here but… We had Catholics in the

English department forever, and I've really enjoyed that. Bill Reynolds and Steve Hemenway. It's just added a very nice kind of diversity to the faculty, it seems to me. I think, at least one or two of the people that are coming on are Catholic, but it doesn't even matter to me though. I just think it's neat they're there.

ML: When you came, do you even have a guess what percentage of the faculty was women?

MJ: No, I don't have a guess. We probably had more than a lot in English. More than in some other departments, but that's always probably the case. Some departments are simply more, I think a little bit more resistant. Or, maybe there's just not availability. I think English probably, you know, there simply are more women available. So I think in the English department, we've had a smattering of women all the time. I mean, Nancy Nicodemus has been around forever and Jane Bach- both of those have been around as long as I have- Kathleen Verduin has been around for a long time.

ML: Do professors, in general, find their friendships within the Holland community or within the Hope community, or a combination of both?

MJ: It depends. You know, I can imagine if someone goes to Kiwanis Club or something like that- that person would have a larger array of people from the community. Or, a person who attends a local church. So I know a lot of community people because of the church I go to. And things like that. But yeah, faculty too. But it's not limited to one or the other. Old college friends, things like that so I think it's a variety. At least it seems that way to me in terms of the colleagues that I have in my own experience.

ML: What led to your decision to retire?

MJ: I was 65.

ML: That will do it.

MJ: You don't have to retire at 65 at Hope- I just figured it was a good time to do it. I also have been feeling that in the last couple of years, I am out of sync with some of the students. I think students are much more… well let's put it this way- I never watch television. I never watch television, and I don't know their music anymore. So, I'm just not as much of a visual person as they are. And I have students writing freshman papers. I always say, 'if you're going to use examples from television programs or movies- that's fine. Just tell me enough so that it means something to me because I don't watch them'. I go to movies, but I don't go to the movies they go to. I'm generalizing here. So, and the things I hold important- I just don't know that they do anymore: like organization in a paper- 'who cares, you know. Grammatical stuff- poof! The right word- who cares? Why be so puffy about that?' That's what I read in reactions, okay. They don't say that to me- that's kind of the way I feel. Like I'm an old fuddy-duddy and it's time to get out and let some of the young people take over.

ML: What are you planning on doing after you retire?

MJ: Well, I've been telling everybody 'nothing'. I don't have any grand schemes. I've got a lot of projects that need doing, just in getting my life in order. [laughs] Closets, for instance- putting bookcases together. I have a lot of those kinds of things; cleaning my house. I hate house cleaning- one thing that I just dislike. I loved having a school schedule because you could always put things off. Now, I

finally have to face the world of keeping up my place. I've got about thirty years of reading to catch up with. I have a lot of books I want to read, and I love to read. There's a lot of leisure stuff I enjoy doing. My extended family has a cottage up in the Traverse City area on Lake Michigan, and I would love to spend more time there- especially spring and fall… especially fall. And, you know, we go back to school already- you guys, now, go back to school in August as we've done for years. And that's okay- when I'm teaching, then I don't even think twice about that. But I know how gorgeous it is up in Leelanau County during September and even into October- so I'd like to take advantage of that. I love to canoe, I like to bike. I like to hike, I love to travel so I'm traveling next week. I'm going to Colorado for a family reunion, and I'm traveling with my sister, who lives in New Hampshire- my family is spread across the country from San Diago to New Hampshire, all from Drenthe mind you. We got out of there.

ML: Is there anybody left?

MJ: No, we all left. We all went to Calvin. We all had professional lives and I think four of the six of us are retired now. I've got a younger sister who teaches at Ohio State, and she's the baby of the family- she's got a few more years to go. So we get together in Colorado at a YMCA camp for a week every couple of years. And I do a lot with my siblings. A couple of years ago we white water rafted through Grand Canyon. And I adore things like that. So I'm happy to be retired to do more things like that before I'm too creaky and ancient to hang on to the raft, you know. My sister and I, when we travel, we camp and I'm an enthusiastic tenter. So we're going on to Yellowstone after that and head back here. And I

love to go to Stratford- I usually go to Stratford once a summer and see a bunch of plays. I love theater very much- theater and dance both. So I'm going to a play at Hope tonight.

ML: Which one is playing tonight?

MJ: Joseph. I saw Tartuffe and 3 Viewings last week. 3 Viewings is terrific, yes, it's excellent. Tartuffe is fine also. I'm also gonna see that in Stratford. I wanted to see it both places- I love doing that- seeing two different versions. How one theater does it and how another theater does it. So I'm looking forward to that, seeing it again. And I've got a trip planned for the fall in late September and October. I'm going to Spain, Morocco and Portugal. So that's what I've got on my plate so far. So I love to do that kind of thing. And I'm going with my older sister on that, she's retired, and so we travel together quite often. I'd like to do some elder hostels- I don't know if you've heard of those. These are special educational and/or service oriented, usually week long… institutes, that's a word I could use, that you sign up for both in the United States and in other countries. So you can go, let's say- I know of a couple who went to a college in North Carolina in the summer and lived on campus in a dorm, had their meals there just like students- and then had four or five professors from that school lecture to them on the history of North Carolina, its role in the revolution or in the Civil War or whatever, or things about the local geography or things like that. So people can do that and they're not terribly expensive. So you go there for a week, and then if you want, you can hang around and go travel around in that area. I've known a lot of people who have done that. They also have service projects, and I've got an

older brother who's retired who has done a number of those. He went to Belize- you know the country Belize in Central America- to count Howler monkeys for a week. And, he also went to Costa Rica to help with a Sea Turtle project, where you count the eggs that the Sea Turtles lay and all this kind of stuff.

ML: Was he an accountant?

MJ: No, he was an engineer. And he went on a research boat off the coast of Monterey in California, where they had people like him- senior citizens- counting dolphins and sea creatures of one kind or another. Doesn't that sound cool? And they've got those all over the world. You can go on archeological digs, and you can go to St. Petersburg for an art hostel and things like that. So that sounds really wonderful to me.

ML: What are you going to miss most about Hope?

MJ: I'm going to miss the whole classroom scene. I love school, and I'm going to miss that. I'm going to miss the school schedule. You know, there's something very pleasing about making out a syllabus before school starts and then following it through to see how it worked. And then you sort of tinker with that for the next semester and you go through this whole pattern. I'm gonna miss that. Neat planning kinds of things. I'm going to miss the students because every class has some terrific students in it. And some may not be academically startling, but they're simply very interesting people and it's just very nice to get to know them. So I'll miss that a lot. And just being with young people, I'll miss. And I'll miss my colleagues very much- except, of course, they're still there and I can see them. But it's different when you're retired. I know that because I've observed retired

professors in my own department. And you can come up to the English department, but everybody's busy. And you can't just sit around to talk. Not that we did that much of it, but, for example, my office was always next to Barb Mezeske. I don't know if you know her, but she's just a really neat person, and we'd become very good friends. Sometimes we wouldn't talk for a whole week because we both were busy- maybe students coming in or whatever. But then, you know, on an afternoon maybe- late in the afternoon- I'd have a question or she'd have a question or whatever, we'd share something and we'd sit and talk for awhile. So, you know, I'll miss that kind of thing. And I suppose, you know, you can still keep in touch. So that's what I'll miss a lot. I won't miss, to put the other spin on it, I think I won't miss reading all those papers- I don't know if I will or not. I never hated papers, it was just that they were so relentless. Teaching English, especially the writing course, was just a non-stop kind of thing. And it just seemed as if there was never a weekend off. So from the beginning of the semester until the end… when the first paper came in, it was, forget it. Weekends, you felt you always had that pressure even if you weren't actually grading them, you knew that you had to do whatever you were doing fast because you had to get back to those. So I will not miss that kind of pressure, I think.

ML: I can't even imagine teaching writing specifically- just the mass quantity.

MJ: Yeah. And, I won't miss putting grades on things. I always hated that part. I hate grading things. I like editing, all right. But write comments on papers, suggestions and things like that that I wanted people to try- that, I enjoyed a lot. You know, 'this paragraph has great ideas. You've got one good example here,

but why don't you use a little contrast', or, 'begin the paragraph- try a different beginning here. This is not bad, but I'll bet you could do better', you know, that kind of thing. But it was always kind of fun. So I'll miss that.

ML: Now, are there any memorable experiences that are popping to your mind?

MJ: Well, there are some comic ones. I always teach at noon. Always, for some reason- not because of choice, it just worked out that way. And that was fine with me. But I can remember teaching freshman English on a hot September day- you know how hot it can get in September sometimes. Teaching 113 and I always seemed to get a lot of football players in my class- I don't know why. Maybe I was a pushover or something. The coach said, 'aah, take Jellema- she's a soft touch'. But I had this guy, a really nice kid, sitting in the front row in room 110- long rows across. And the kid fell asleep- I mean, it was hard to stay awake. The kid fell asleep and you know how your head nods? His head just sank farther and farther down. And he was in the front row so everybody around knew it, okay. And, of course, his head was practically in my lap. So I didn't do anything. I didn't wake him up or anything right then, but we were talking about a story, maybe, or something like that, and then finally I said 'and Kurt what do you think of that?' He just jerked up like that! And all this laughing- he was very, very embarrassed about that because he was obviously exhausted, and it was hot and he probably had had lunch just before that. And it was just a deadly combination. But I always say that, you know, 'oh, this is a bad class to get into because it's a bad time and you're either hungry or you're full'. So anyway. A memorable moment- yeah, I suppose something could be more profound than that. But I've

really talked about some moments in a little bit larger sense. The whole "moment" in, say, going from a lecture-based expectation to a more student involved expectation. This happened over time so it doesn't really fit your definition of "moment". But, I think, something like that is really an important shift as far as a teacher goes. You really had to reshape the way you thought- the way you thought out the plans for a semester. And what you were trying to achieve. Right now, the college is involved in a sort of multi-year attempt to require that teachers have very clearly specified objectives in their courses. Now, you probably take that for granted because you've, maybe, grown up with that. But that certainly was not a characteristic- an essential characteristic- it was sort of assumed that you would have objectives. I mean, right- you're standing up there. But it was never thought necessary to share those, necessarily, with the students. And Hope's faculty is also working on assessment- in terms of making that more understandable for students as well as for teachers- more deliberate, the way you assess things. And, of course, that gets to become an issue when you consider, sort of, fact based courses in contrast to freshman English. So, you're teaching a math course and you can specify your assessment techniques. I mean, that dang problem is either right or wrong. You either follow the steps to go from the formula to the solution, or you didn't- or you came up with a new way, hooray. But to assess a student's understanding of a Shakespeare sonnet is very difficult. So you're dealing with creative insights and dealing with imagination and that sort of thing, which is very difficult to set up in any kind of specific point system or anything like that. We've been kind of battling with the people who are

working on assessment to try to get this to be more of a interpretive kind of thing, instead of a numbers kind of thing. I don't know, those are some moments that I think have been interesting. Another thing I did that you might be interested in- something that affected me as a teacher and as a person a great deal- is one summer fifteen years ago, I went to China to teach for a summer. I worked with a team of teachers- it was through an outfit in California- English Language Institute in China. And they run summer schools at schools throughout China. And now they've gone into Mongolia and to Vietnam and Laos and places like that. So this organization sent out teams of ten teachers who range from people your age, Melissa [21] to retired teachers, okay. And they had a professor in charge. I was in charge of ten teachers. A friend of mine, who I have known ever since we were in college together, she and I both signed up to do that. I had just turned fifty. When you turn fifty, it's sort of neat thing because you figure you can cut through a lot of expectations, all right, because hey- you don't have to be so worried about what other people think of you anymore. And if you don't do it now, you might not get a chance to do it. So, get in there and do what you want to do. So, we both went- we sort of called it "running away from home". So, we both left our husbands and children behind and went to China. That was a fantastic experience- working with that team of teachers which ranged from young to old and working with all the Chinese. The Chinese that we were working with were all teachers of English in like their equivalent of high school and junior high. So these were adults, and they knew English grammar and they could write in English, but they had problems understanding it and speaking it.

So we had to encourage communication. Listening skills as well as speaking skills. And I just found that a very, very broadening kind of experience and I don't think I've ever worked so hard in my life.