

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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Arkansas Memories Project

Monsignor John O'Donnell
Interviewed by Scott Lunsford
April 12, 2017
Fayetteville, Arkansas

Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio files, video highlight clips, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at <http://pryorcenter.uark.edu>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
 - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing:
 - annotations for clarification and identification: and
 - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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Scott Lunsford interviewed Monsignor John O'Donnell on April 12, 2017, in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: Monsignor John O'Donnell, I'm Scott Lunsford, and we're with the Pryor Center. We're visiting you here today. And—um—today's date is April the twelfth, 2017. And we're going to—um—have an—a day to spend with you to talk about your life. And if—uh—we're gonna record this, and eventually we'll put it on our website, and we'll give you all the raw footage.

John O'Donnell: Mh-hmm.

SL: And we'll transcribe this, and we'll provide audio of this so people'll be able to—to download the audio and the transcript. And if researchers or documentarians want the high-end, high-resolution video segments, we can provide that to 'em. So if you're comfortable with all that, you just need to say it's okay, and—and we'll keep goin'.

JO: It's fine. It's okay.

SL: Excellent. Excellent.

JO: Good.

SL: Excellent decision. [*JO laughs*] Um—well, you know, we always start with when and where you were born.

JO: I was born in Pennsylvania in 1928.

SL: [Nineteen] twenty-eight? And—um—so what town was that that you were born in?

JO: Wyndmoor. *W-Y-N-D-M-O-O-R*. Very—um—Anglo-Saxon place. Um—small, little town, township. You know.

[00:01:30] SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Now is John McDonald—or John O'Donnell your—your full name?

JO: Yes.

SL: No middle name, no . . .

JO: Yeah, I have a middle name. Francis.

SL: John Francis O'Donnell.

JO: Francis O'Donnell. Right.

[00:01:43] SL: Okay. And what—what were your parent's names?

JO: My mother was Bridgett. Her maiden name was McCormick.

And my father was Henry. Henry O'Donnell.

SL: So . . .

JO: And . . .

SL: Both Irish descent?

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: Oh yeah.

JO: Let it not be mentioned among you. [*Laughter*]

[00:02:07] SL: That's fun. So do you know how they met?

JO: Well [*clears throat*], I d—actually, I do not, but—um—the—they were—um—met each other in the United States before—uh—my father was from Donegal. No, I beg your pardon. My mother was from Donegal. My father was from Tyrone. And—uh—both up in the north of Ireland. And—um—actually, how they met was—um—they were domestics.

SL: Hm.

JO: My father was a chauffeur, and my mother was—I think she was a—just one of the many maids that worked on this estate. Huge place.

SL: The . . .

JO: In Pennsylvania.

[Recording stopped]

[00:03:12] SL: So I was asking you if you knew what the estate was that they—they worked at.

JO: Yes, it was Blair, *B-L-A-I-R*. Multi-millionaire. And—um—with, you know, big estate with the—um—whole bevy of servants—um—you know, chambermaids, all kinds of things at that place.

SL: Pennsylvania is—um—in some places looks a lot like Arkansas.

JO: Oh, sure. Yeah.

SL: Rolling hills and . . .

JO: Um—yeah. As we say up north, right.

[00:03:58] SL: So did your grandparents eh—make it over to the United States?

JO: M . . .

SL: Or were they . . .

JO: My grandmother on my mother's side made it over. My father's side, nobody made it over.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: Just he.

SL: Were—do you remember your grandmother?

JO: Just peripherally. She's very old and wore a shawl. If you have any idea about what Irish peasants look like.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: You know, with the shawl and the bent and humility and all that. That's what she was like.

[00:04:39] SL: So—um—and do you know her name? Do you member her name?

JO: No, I don't.

SL: We can—we can figure that out.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Um—and the grandparents, were they farmers in Northern

Ireland? Or were—do you—do you know?

JO: They—they were farmers.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: Except my mother lived up in Donegal, which is a big seacoast town.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: And her—her daddy worked on the ships.

SL: On the shipyard.

JO: And then at don—Donegal, yeah. So.

[00:05:17] SL: Big adventure for them to—uh—send their—see their children cross the Atlantic and . . .

JO: Oh, boy.

SL: . . . come to the United States.

JO: Incredible.

SL: Do . . .

JO: That was a big trip in hard times.

SL: When did they come to the United States?

JO: They came—let's see—me—I think it was around fif—it was before the First World War.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: Which was 1917, [19]18 . . .

SL: Right.

JO: . . . around there.

SL: So shortly after the turn of the century, probably.

JO: Right. Exactly.

[00:05:54] SL: And du—did you hear any stories about that trip
across the ocean?

JO: No, they were very—um—well, I was gonna say taciturn. They
were very quiet about talkin' about Ireland.

SL: Hmm.

JO: 'Cause they would talk about it, and then they'd start crying.
You know, and so we got very—very few stories about the trip or
about anything.

[00:06:26] SL: Um—so you think they were crying because they
missed it or . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . because it was so hard in Ireland? Or both, maybe.

JO: Th—th—th—they were crying because they were leaving . . .

SL: Oh.

JO: . . . their parents and their brothers and sisters, and it was a sad
time.

[00:06:45] SL: So do you know how they ended up in Pennsylvania?

JO: Well, they had contacts here. Um—you know—uh—one brother
would come over, and he'd work and send the money over to

Ireland for the other brother to come, or his mom, or his sister or what.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: And that's the way they built up the—the—uh—Irish heritage over there. Um—just—um—one takes care of another. You just didn't go to America—uh—by yourself. You went and saved up enough money for your parents to come over or your uncle or whoever.

[00:07:33] SL: Really, literally paying it forward.

JO: Oh yeah. Yeah.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: Exactly.

SL: Um—so did you know any uncles or aunts?

JO: Yeah, I did. They—they all—um—migrated to—uh—a section of Philadelphia called Chestnut Hill. [*Voices in background*] And they all ended up as chambermaids, chauffeurs, gardeners, butlers, whatever. And—um—it was good work in those days. They loved it.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Wonderful.

[00:08:17] SL: So now how long were you in Pennsylvania?

JO: Till I was eighteen years old.

SL: Ah, so you have lots of memories about Pennsylvania.

JO: Oh, sure.

SL: So w—do you—did you grow up on the estate?

JO: No, we had—[clears throat] excuse me. We had a b—our own home down around the corner from the estate.

SL: Uh-huh

JO: And—um—well, that was that.

SL: Well, do you remem—what kind of home was it? I mean, when—what—was it a Craftsman-style home or one story or . . .

JO: No, it was—beg your pardon—two stories—beg your pardon, three stories because we had an attic. And—um—it had a cellar. It was kind of a big house for immigrants, you know.

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: And—um—with a big cellar, and then a little cellar where we used to haul in the potatoes and things like that.

[00:09:31] SL: So you kept them in a bin in the cellar.

JO: Yeah, we did.

SL: And . . .

JO: And then—uh—we also had a bin for the coal. Uh—anthracite coal. We had a furnace, and we had to feed it with coal, you know.

SL: And that fed radiators.

JO: Right. Indeed.

SL: Heated the . . .

JO: Yes.

SL: . . . water and circulated through the radiators.

JO: Mh-hmm.

SL: Which is a great source of heat.

JO: Oh, sure was.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

[00:09:56] SL: Uh—wh—did—um—any of your relatives or anyone else live in the home with y'all? Your . . .

JO: No . . .

SL: . . . grandmother, maybe?

JO: . . . it was just—uh—my mother, my father, and eight kids. Four boys and four girls. Good for fights and things like that.

[*Laughter*]

SL: Well—uh—I—I don't know if I wanna put you through the agony of all the—the sibling's names, but . . .

JO: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . I'm sure you remember them.

JO: Oh, sure.

[00:10:35] SL: And—and where in the pecking order did—did you

fall?

JO: I . . .

SL: Were you the firstborn or . . .

JO: No, no. I was toward the end. I have—uh—three sisters younger than I. And—um—I was the youngest boy. Um—that's about all I know about that.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Wh—do you—some of the names o—of the children?

JO: Oh, sure.

SL: Okay.

JO: First was Mary. She became a nun. [*Clears throat*] Excuse me. Um—then there was Patricia. Then there was Henry. And then there was James. And then there was John, myself. And then there was two girls after me. So.

SL: That's a big brood.

JO: Big brood. Yes, it was. [*SL laughs*] But—um—that meant more hands to the—to the work. We had a big garden in the back, and—um—my father would dig—dig that whole garden by himself until we got to be six or seven, eight—eight [*laughs*] years old. Then we had to get out and dig the garden 'cause it was a big garden. And we, you know, planted corn and rhubarb

and lima beans, string beans, tomatoes. Picked—picked there—there were . . .

[00:12:15] SL: So there—there wasn't a horse and plow then.

JO: No, no. We didn't have a horse and plow. We had—well, we had chickens. [*Laughter*] Big old chickens. Which—chicken every Sunday. Sure.

SL: That was something to look forward to.

JO: Oh yeah. He'd go out and—Sunday morning my father and—kill a chicken. [*Laughs*] And that was Sunday dinner.

[00:12:44] SL: So—um—what were some of the chores you were responsible for?

JO: Well, different things at different times. Um—we all were responsible for rakin' the leaves, cutting the grass, trimming the—digging the garden. Weed eating the garden. Um—things of that—you know, just taking care of the place.

SL: Did you—were you responsible for making your own bed every morning?

JO: Yes, I was.

SL: Good.

JO: We did—sometimes over many fights. [*Laughs*] "It's her turn."
"No, it's your turn." "No." [*Laughs*]

SL: Right. Right. Right. Right. Uh—we always—uh—fought over

who washed and who dried.

JO: Yeah. [*Laughs*] That's right. "I washed last night." "No, you didn't, either."

SL: I can hear it.

JO: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:13:50] SL: So—um—with a big house like that did—you probably still shared bedrooms.

JO: Oh, sure.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: We only—we only had—uh—let's see. One, two, three. We only had three bedrooms. And the boys all slept in one, and the girls in another. That's the way we made things work. [*Laughs*]

[00:14:16] SL: Yeah. Well—um—were you—as far as the family meals go—um—were you expected to be at the table at a certain time each day or . . .

JO: No, we weren't that—quite organized. Because the—like when we were in high school, we got part-time jobs on the estate, you know . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: . . . part time, and—uh—we just couldn't get everybody together one time to have supper, so people'd come trailin' in all the time.

SL: Kind—catch as catch can, I guess.

JO: Yes, that's it. Right.

SL: Yeah. [*JO laughs*] And—um—was your—um—um—was your mother responsible for all the meals, or did you all have . . .

JO: Oh yeah. She was.

SL: She was.

JO: She did it all. She did the ironing, the sewing, dressmaking, cooking, housecleaning. She did everything.

SL: As well as being a chambermaid.

JO: As well as being a chambermaid. Lotta work. [*Laughs*]

SL: Busy, busy folk.

JO: Oh, yes.

SL: Uh—good role models, your mom and dad.

JO: Oh yes, indeed. Really did.

[00:15:43] SL: Were there—um—ah—was it a dirt road to your house?

JO: Yes, it was until I was—uh—I remember when they put the ma—macadam on the—they paved the dirt road and had—what was I? Let's see. I would sit on the curb and watch the big steam roller, you know, go—pound all that tar and stuff down and [*laughs*] . . .

SL: Right. It's biz—it's big doin's and . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . it's . . .

JO: And—um . . .

SL: . . . probably the heaviest equipment you may have ever saw.

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: Was the steamroller.

JO: Sure.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Mh-hmm.

[00:16:27] SL: So—um—what about—uh—water and electricity? Did you have running water in the house?

JO: We had running water in the house.

SL: That's pretty modern.

JO: Yes. And outside. And boy, we'd have to—I say bandage. Wrap the pipes . . .

SL: In the winter.

JO: . . . in the wintertime so they wouldn't freeze. And—um—take out all the plants outside.

[00:17:01] SL: Right. Right. What about—and did the house have electricity?

JO: Yes, it did.

SL: You guys were—were pretty modern. I guess—uh—probably an icebox for a refrigerator, or was it . . .

JO: Icebox. Yes.

SL: It was an icebox. So you remember the ice deliveries?

JO: Very well. The ice could—uh—we had the pan in the refrigerator, icebox. [*Laughs*] And—um—obviously we put a—I think it was twelve pounds of ice. We'd go down to the ice house. Put it in there, in the refrigerator. And in a couple of days it'd start leaking. We'd say, "Hey, Mom! The refrigerator's leaking. It's all over the floor." [*Laughs*] We just . . .

SL: It was a mess. You know, it's . . .

JO: It was a mess.

SL: It's so interesting. I—I—I don't ever sleep very well the first night when I'm on the road.

JO: Mh-hmm.

SL: And of all things, I dreamed about my refrigerator, my parent's refrigerator and it being on the blink. I [*JO laughs*—last night. I just couldn't get that out of my head. [00:18:15] So—um—wh—what about—uh—dairy products. Were those also delivered to the house or . . .

JO: They were.

SL: 'Cause you didn't mention any cows, so you didn't . . .

JO: We—no, we didn't keep any cows . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: . . . or cattle.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: Or horses. Just chickens. And an occasional turkey or duck or something . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: . . . that we caught somewhere. And—um—we had a dog. We always had a dog. Had to have a dog. And—um—then the milk was delivered every morning. And the milk bottles, glass . . .

SL: Glass bottles. Yes.

JO: And glass bottles and—um—how—we had names for everybody. Al the Milkman. Larry the Mailman. [*Laughs*] And then—um—a guy would come up from downtown the re—we call him the Rag Man. And he did—with a horse and buggy collecting trash and junk.

SL: Yes.

[00:19:29] JO: And he'd—you'd hear him, and we'd all run, say "Here comes"—we called him [*clears throat*] 'scuse me. We called him Joe the Dago. [*Laughs*]

SL: [*Laughs*] Oh. Well. You know.

JO: He was—that's the way it was in those days. And—um—we had a lot of fun with Joe. Selling stuff and bar—bartering with him.

[*Laughs*]

SL: He—you had some stuff to—your family had stuff to get rid of.

JO: Oh, sure.

SL: He had stuff that maybe you'd . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . like to have.

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: Yeah. Um . . .

JO: Oh, boy. [*Laughs*]

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:08] SL: So how—did you have—was your house sitting on,
like, half an acre or an acre of land?

JO: About half an acre.

SL: About a half an acre. That does make for a big garden in back.

JO: Sure does.

SL: Yep.

JO: So. What else did we have? [*Clears throat*] 'Scuse me.

[00:20:35] SL: Well, I'm guessing you probably didn't have a barn,
but you had a, probably, a chicken coop?

JO: We had a chicken coop, big garage. We—my father had a car,
which belonged to the Blairs. But he could use it, and so we had

a garage, and a car all the time.

[00:21:07] SL: Do you member what kind of car it was?

JO: It was—the first one I member is a—well, there were two.

Willie's Knight. *K-N-I-G-H-T*. And a Stearns, [*knock, door opens*] *S-T-E-A-R-N-S*, Stearns Knight.

[Recording stopped]

[00:21:25] SL: Well, we're talkin' about the house in Pennsylvania and the amenities and the way things were back then. Were there any musical instruments in the home?

JO: Yes. My sister played the piano. We had a grand piano. My brother Henry played the guitar and sang. In fact, he started a little band called Cowtown Hillbillies. [*Laughter*] That was one Wyndmoor. They called—the people who didn't live there said, "Is you from Cowtown?" "Yeah, I'm from Cowtown. Right." But [*laughs*] they looked at . . .

SL: That sounds like my kinda band.

JO: That's—he—yeah. [*Laughs*] And . . .

SL: So . . .

JO: Let's see. My big sister Patricia played the violin. And played the guitar. Mary played the piano. And I didn't play anything. I played around with the drums. But I can't say I really played them. I was in the band for two years.

SL: In the school band?

JO: Yeah.

[00:22:51] SL: Well, you really had the makings of quite the ensemble there just within the family.

JO: Oh, right, we could have. Yeah.

SL: Were there—you know, down here with that much—that many instruments in one location, sometimes the furniture'd be pushed back and people would dance. They'd have dances.

JO: Well, we did that. We danced in the kitchen. They'd do—my father and mother and then the Irish friends would come in on their day off. And they'd have a céilí. A céilí was just an Irish dance. And they'd put on the phonograph machine and get in the kitchen, and just have at it, you know. [*Laughs*] Good time.

[00:23:42] SL: I bet you loved seeing that.

JO: Oh yeah. It was great. My older brother—two brother—two older brothers and my one older sister Patricia were great at the Irish dancing. They loved it. I never got—I was more jitterbug [*laughs*] and that sort of stu . . .

SL: That sounds like big-band stuff.

JO: Big band stuff. Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey all the great guys. [*Laughs*]

[00:24:12] SL: So that's good that you had a phonograph that . . .

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . you had records to play, 78s, I would guess.

JO: Yes, they were.

SL: Heavy, thick.

JO: Yep.

SL: Also, that makes me believe that you also had a radio.

JO: Yes.

[00:24:28] SL: And did—were there family gatherings around the radio for particular programs, or was it just . . .

JO: Yeah, the—we weren't—were wouldn't be allowed to listen to—my father'd say, "Turn off that damn radio! There's—these are shootin' and killin' and everything! And I don't want you listen to that." [*Laughs*] It was . . .

SL: Ah.

JO: It was like murder mysteries, you member. It was . . .

SL: Yeah, sounds like *The Shadow*.

JO: *Shadow*, yeah. They'd all gather round, then we'd turn it down real low so he wouldn't hear it. [*SL laughs*] And we'd listen to it. *Shadow* and all those great little stories.

SL: Yeah.

JO: *The Lone Ranger*. *Tom Mix*. Good stuff.

SL: Those were great productions.

JO: Oh yeah.

[00:24:28] SL: What's great about those radio shows—what—they gave you enough audio information for you to paint the pictures yourself.

JO: Yeah. Right.

SL: On what it looked like.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And so it was all very personal.

JO: Oh, sure.

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

JO: Yes, indeed. [*Laughs*]

[00:24:28] SL: Well, how—so was your closest neighbor just a quarter acre down the road or . . .

JO: That'a about right.

SL: And were there other families with . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: Your all's range of children was such that I'm sure everyone had friends.

JO: Sure.

SL: Their age. And what kinds of things did you do with the neighbor kids?

JO: Well, let's see, played—[*clears throat*] 'scuse me. American

Legion ball, baseball. Then we met the football team for the town. And we had the American Legion baseball. And that's about it.

[00:24:28] SL: Where was the nearest creek or running water where you lived? Did you do anything with water?

JO: Yes. Well, there were a couple of—one they call the Wissahickon. That's an Indian name and goes back to when the Indians were around Philly and Pennsylvania. And we'd go, you know, fishin'. Drop the line in. We'd go wadin'. [*Laughs*] Make a homemade boat s—push it out into the water.

SL: What'd you make it out of?

JO: [*Laughs*] Let's see. We made it out—plywood and stuff. It was fun. And then you sorta—we would say, "Call the guy with the boat." [*Laughs*] Fun, fun, fun time.

[00:27:46] SL: So what about your schooling? When did you start going to school?

JO: We started, you know, when we were six years old, six or seven, I guess. First grade. We went to the parochial school, which—the Catholic school, which was a four-room schoolhouse and two grades in a room. And taught by the nuns. And then from there, we went—not everybody, but our family—some people in the middle of town went to North Catholic, which was the biggest

boy's high school in the world. We had, I think, 4,000 students there in high school. Northeast Catholic High School.

[00:28:56] SL: Now how far away was that from where you lived?

JO: That was way downtown. Took us an hour to go to school every day.

SL: And . . .

JO: We'd walk out and get the bus, leave that bus and get another bus, leave that bus, take a trolley over to school. Lotta . . .

SL: That's a lot.

JO: Lotta traveling. [*Laughs*]

SL: So and what town was that?

JO: That we grew up in?

SL: Well, that you went to school . . .

JO: Oh, that was Northeast Philly.

SL: Northeast Philadelphia.

JO: It was a tough place. Lotta bullies livin' around there. Polish and Irish but—lots of folks.

[00:29:48] SL: So maybe we should talk about that, the different . . .

JO: Ethnic groups or . . .

SL: Ethnic groups and how they related. And we're talking, now, 1935 or so, [19]34, [19]36, [19]35. So had you run into any of

the different ethnicity . . .

JO: Not . . .

SL: . . . before you started s . . .

JO: In Wyndmoor. Wyndmoor was a—what we grew up in was just about 100 percent Anglo-Saxon. No Black people. One Italian family. One German family. And that was about it. The rest were all Anglo-Saxons. And so that's where we were with that.

SL: No problems.

JO: No problems.

SL: Everyone knew . . .

JO: No.

SL: . . . everyone, and . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . so they—you kinda just got along with everybody.

JO: Yeah. Oh, sure.

SL: No problem.

JO: Yeah.

[00:30:59] SL: But when you went—started going to North Philly, you started to see some of the dichotomy of . . .

JO: Oh boy, did we ever. You know, we never—it was a huge high school, and I never imagined there was such a school where there was so many tough people. [*Laughs*] Boy, some of those

guys, the Polish boys and the Italians, man, they'd fight you in a second. [*Laughs*] You know. That's just the way school was in those days.

SL: So do you think the Irish community was more of a target than any others, or was it all . . .

JO: No, it was all just . . .

SL: . . . freefall.

JO: . . . just free—free for . . .

SL: Free for all.

JO: . . . all.

SL: Yeah.

JO: That's right. Sorta was.

[00:31:54] SL: So did you find yourself in the middle of some of that sometimes?

JO: Oh, sure. Yeah. Things would get very provincial. And the boys, the guys who lived in the city, you know, were very tough guys. And they'd fight you in a minute. And you just had to keep your nose clean and [*laughs*] mind your own business and you wouldn't get in a fight. Least I wouldn't. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well, it's always better not.

JO: Better not.

SL: To fight.

JO: Right.

SL: But I would assume that there were times when it was just no way out.

JO: No way out, right. Indeed. [*Laughs*]

[00:32:43] SL: Well, how did your mother and father deal with you coming home from a fight or—I mean, was there—you know, nowadays there really—I don't know. I feel like there—people are more aware of those kinds of problems and more proactive . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . to prevent those types of problems, but that really wasn't happening back then. It was just to be expected that there'd be differences, and they'd be settled physically? Is that . . .

JO: Well, yeah. I would say that.

[00:33:26] SL: So this was a Catholic school.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And so there would be—would you have mass every day at school or . . .

JO: No.

SL: No.

JO: Once a week.

SL: Once a week.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And nuns were the teachers.

JO: No.

SL: No.

JO: Priests.

SL: Priests were the teachers.

JO: And they were pretty tough. Phew. They were Oblates de St. Francis de Sales. And had a school up in Altoona, Pennsylvania, and that one at North Catholic, and one down in Wilmington. Those schools they ran.

[00:33:26] SL: So I'm just—I guess what I'm tryin' to get around to. I just wonder if the school and church—if somehow or another, the affiliation with the church sometime, somehow helped mitigate those differences, or if all these folks were at their masses on Sundays, that they let things go and out of respect of the church. The role the church would play in putting these folks together and laying the arms down and listening to a higher calling.

JO: Right.

SL: I guess is what I'm—I'm just wondering how—if the church ever really helped mitigate all that violence between the different groups.

JO: Well, I must say not very much. The church didn't do much mitigation. In fact, if—you know, the Irish would fight the Italians, who would fight the Germans. [*Laughs*] We had all kinds of ethnic people in there, except out of 4,000 students, we only had one Black. That was it. We never knew what Blacks were because they lived in another part of the city. Wasn't a big deal for us but . . .

[00:33:26] SL: So there must have been formal gangs or affiliations or groups within those ethnic . . .

JO: Sure.

SL: . . . groups that formed. And they . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . mostly for, what, territorial and defensive positions?

JO: Yes, we had sandlot football. We didn't have—we weren't rich enough out there to win more. And then other little communities all had a football teams, and we'd play Sunday afternoon. And the neighbors would come and stand along the sideline watching the game. But wasn't any great deal to it, you know. You just had the game and sometimes end up in a big brawl. [*Laughs*] You know, if the Irish were playing the Italians or whatever.

[00:33:26] SL: So when did you first—when were you indoctrinated

into organized sports? Was that first grade, or did that not happen till . . .

JO: No, it didn't . . .

SL: . . . junior high school or . . .

JO: . . . didn't happen till, yeah, senior high.

SL: Senior high.

JO: And what—the organi—the first organized sport I played was American Legion ball. And that was all. We had a ragtag football team, but it never amounted to anything. But the American Legion baseball, that was pretty big stuff up there then.

[00:33:26] SL: What position did you play?

JO: Left field.

SL: Left field.

JO: Yep.

SL: So I'm tryin' to think. You were always a left-field outfielder?

JO: Yeah.

SL: And how was your batting average?

JO: Not very good. [*Laughter*] That's why I played left field.

SL: Right.

JO: They'd say, "O'Donnell, he'll go out and chase the guts out there."

SL: Right. Right. Right. Right. I played some left field in my day, too.

JO: Oh, sure 'nuff.

SL: Yeah. I remember one game that bat—I was out there, and that bat cracked, and I could see the ball goin' up, and I just lost it in the lights. And I just held my glove out, and it landed in my glove.

JO: You're kiddin'.

SL: I'm not kidding. It was the most miraculous thing that had happened to me.

JO: Oh, mercy me. [*Laughter*]

SL: In that moment. Yeah. Just poomp, there it was. It was . . .

JO: Oh, thank you, Jesus.

[00:39:03] SL: And I wa—do—frankly, I was always afraid of the ball. I was not much of a batter myself. Well, so but you kept that up all through high school, then.

JO: Yeah, sure did.

SL: And you enjoyed that.

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: You've mentioned it three or four times now, so . . .

JO: It was great. Yeah.

SL: You must have had a fairly decent team.

JO: Yeah, we did. Sure did. We played—well, for different people. By that I mean Legion posts, you know, like we were a part of the Arthur V. Savage, who was a guy from our district, our town. Got killed in the First World War. And they named a Legion post after him. Arthur Savage, Post 100. That's the way it was.

[00:40:05] SL: What about—did you have the same coach the entire time that you played?

JO: Oh, no.

SL: No? They . . .

JO: We had a series of coaches, you know. Because—well, several reasons. Those—it was volunteer work for those guys that coached us. And they did—lookin' back on it, they did a great job. And we had some great fathers in town. See, my dad never—didn't know what sports was all about. I think he knew soccer was all. But he never went to any kind of a game, anything like that. So we grew up, my brothers and I, and—if there was any ball playin', we had to go find it ourselves, and we'd join up . . .

SL: Learn to play that way.

JO: . . . and—yeah.

[00:40:05] SL: So but your dad knew something about soccer.

Was . . .

JO: Oh, sure.

SL: Did y'all . . .

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . mess with soccer at all or . . .

JO: Just a little bit. Not very much.

SL: There wasn't really an American . . .

JO: No, it didn't . . .

SL: . . . game, it hadn't . . .

JO: No, but the . . .

SL: . . . crossed the seas just yet.

JO: But it was popular there because we had the Germans, the Italians, sections that all had soccer teams, you know, back—they still have soccer teams up there for young kids. And it just . . .

SL: It's a great sport.

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Sure.

[00:42:01] SL: What about scouting? Were scouts active? Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts at all in Pennsylvania back then?

JO: Oh yeah, they were. [*Clears throat*] 'Scuse me. They—well, frankly, the—scouting was for richer kids, upper echelon.

SL: Okay.

JO: Of guys like—we couldn't afford it. You know, to get the uniform and epaulets and all that . . .

SL: Right.

JO: . . . stuff and—so we did our own stuff. We went out and built our own fires and had our own club in the woods and [*laughs*] that's what we did. But the Scouts were for the richer kids.

[00:43:06] SL: So you were in the parochial school until what grade?

JO: Well, till I was—senior high school.

SL: Until senior high.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Well, so did you have a favorite subject early on?

JO: Yeah, I liked history. Pret—that's about all as far as . . .

SL: World history, European history?

JO: Yeah.

SL: Or just American—all of it.

JO: All of it.

SL: You liked it all.

JO: Yeah.

SL: That's good. That's good.

JO: Especially around Philly, you know, it's a—we weren't too far

from Valley Forge and Gettysburg, and we were inundated with that.

SL: With the Civil War stuff.

JO: Yeah. Sure was. There wasn't a . . .

SL: Well, we can talk about that a little bit later, too. I read a few things that you said that . . .

JO: Yeah.

[00:43:06] SL: But the—what about a favorite teacher? Did you have a favorite teacher before senior high?

JO: Yeah. Well, at—I had a favorite nun in the parochial school, which would've put me in sixth, seventh, or eighth grade. She used to play ball. In fact, she taught us how to play ball, baseball. And she was a neat, neat person.

SL: What was her name?

JO: Marie Theresa. Sister Marie Theresa. And she'd get out there in the wintertime, you know, and throw snowballs and have snow ball fights. And in the summertime, she'd be playin' ball with us, you know. *[Laughs]* It was great stuff.

SL: She embraced life.

JO: Yeah. *[Laughs]*

[00:45:08] SL: Yeah. Yeah. Were you a good student?

JO: No, average.

SL: Just average?

JO: Just average.

SL: Well, that's better than bad.

JO: I guess so. [*SL laughs*] Yeah. I never got booted out, or I never got left back, as we used to say. I don't know if they still leave kids back or not, but [*laughs*] . . .

[00:45:36] SL: So was—what about corporal punishment? Was it . . .

JO: Oh boy. That was right there. Whew. Especially with the—well, I was gonna say especially with the priests. 'Cause they were dealin' with tough kids. Man, I would—my eyes were opened when I went down into town and went to North Catholic and saw what was—Italians and Polish and Irish and then they'd mix it up real fast. Real fast, you know. [*Laughs*] And but I do—I never would traffic with 'em because they were tough. Whew. Tough guys. But we had fun.

[00:46:32] SL: So let's see. I didn't real—I guess I realized that you were born in 1928, so you probably do remember some of the stuff going on with World War II.

JO: Oh, sure. World War II?

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: Oh yeah. Lots of stuff.

[00:46:51] SL: So you were—let's see in—you were twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old when that was startin' to brew up and . . .

JO: Sure.

SL: . . . United States was getting involved. Do you—was there a theatre in your small town, a movie theater?

JO: No, in the next town there was a theater.

SL: And what—which town was that?

JO: Chestnut Hill.

SL: Chestnut Hill.

JO: And we were in Wyndmoor. And just a little theater, you know, a little movie house. That's all.

[00:47:23] SL: And did you get to go there often or . . .

JO: Well, the parents wouldn't—my father didn't like movies. He thought they were a temptation to [*laughs*—so we didn't get to go much. Then after while, he kinda became a little more lenient.

SL: So did y'all study teaching, Bible teachings in the home growing up?

JO: No. We didn't do any Bible study. . .

SL: And . . .

JO: . . . growing up.

SL: Was your father the one that always said grace?

JO: Yeah . . .

SL: Or did y'all take turns saying grace at the table?

JO: My father always said grace.

[00:48:15] SL: Now when it came to dinner with—were you—was everyone expected to be at the table for the dinner for the evening meal?

JO: Well, sure. Yeah.

SL: So it was a little bit more formal than the rest of the day.

JO: Oh, yes it was. Yeah. And many, many discussions and not a few fights at the dinner table. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well, what were some of the things that were discussed?

JO: [*Laughs*] Like—discussed—fact, I have vivid memories of Second World War. I was nuts about that. In fact, I had signed up to join the marines when I got—when the war ended. So then I came to seminary. But it was great stuff.

SL: So that you'd talk about the headlines that involved the war.

JO: Oh, sure.

SL: Who was invading who, who won . . .

JO: Yeah, we . . .

SL: . . . this, who lost that.

JO: We'd listen to the adults, what they were talking about. You know. The—when they were—when the Germans were bombin'

England, bombing them out of their mind, actually—but the Brits survived that. They just tossed it off. Then I meant—and I remember that vividly. You know, those bombing of Britain. Phew.

SL: V-2 rockets, right?

JO: Yeah. It was tough on the Brits. We had air raid sirens and warnings and practice and all that, you know. I was a messenger boy. They got us together. We were just young teenagers, then, and they put brown coveralls on us with a triangle and a lightning flash in the triangle, and it was—we were messengers because the—in the event that we were bombed and you couldn't get any electricity, we would—they'd say, "Hey, boy, come here and take this down the next fortification," or whatever.

[00:51:13] SL: So invasion prep.

JO: Oh, sure, yeah. It was pretty serious business then.

SL: There was a lot of it at stake.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Then. You know, it's interesting how—you would think with today's communication and almost . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . instant news that there'd be more concern about all the hot

spots in the world and—but back then it was radio . . .

JO: Well, yeah.

SL: . . . and newspapers. And that was pretty much it except for the reels, the trailers before a movie or something. They'd have updates.

JO: Right.

SL: But that really activated and . . .

JO: Oh, sure did.

SL: The population.

JO: Amen. Sure did. Wow.

[00:52:18] SL: So did you know anyone that went to World War II?

JO: Oh, sure. Small town, you knew everybody. And then we had the Gold Star Mothers whose sons were killed. And then the others whose sons were wounded. Put a little flag in your window and a wounded vet lives here and all that.

SL: So the whole town mourned when someone was lost, too, I bet.

JO: Yes, indeed.

SL: That didn't keep people from signing up and volunteering, though.

JO: Oh, no. Sure did not.

SL: So you were—it was a mixed blessing for you that you missed the war in some ways. But you really wanted to serve, didn't

you?

JO: Yeah, I was disappointed, you know. Strange. [*Laughs*]

[00:53:28] SL: What about your social life growing up? Were there groups that you belonged to or—you know, scouting wasn't available, really.

JO: No.

SL: And sports became available . . .

JO: Right.

SL: . . . a little later on. But were there Catholic children groups, young people groups that you belonged to?

JO: Not in our little town because the pastor was older guy, and he didn't mess with the kids. And so we just did our own stuff.

SL: You think that was kind of the way it was back then across the board, or di—there was more organization for kids in the bigger population areas?

JO: Oh, in the bigger population areas, yeah. There was more for kids 'cause they had the money, and they had the personnel to do it, so no question about that.

[00:54:44] SL: Well, you know, your older siblings and your mom and dad survived the Depression.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Did they ever talk about the Depression?

JO: No, they didn't. They would talk in whispers if there was some tragedy to happen to some family. And they'd be talking there—if they saw you, they'd drop it down a quarter or two, and [laughs] you couldn't hear what they were sayin' 'cause they didn't want you to know about it.

SL: They were really protective.

JO: Yeah. They'd say, "Shoo."

[00:55:32] SL: So really, when you got to high school, you had a real comeuppance, didn't you? I mean . . .

JO: Oh, sure.

SL: It was—this is the world outside . . .

JO: It's the way . . .

SL: . . . of my home.

JO: Right.

SL: So . . .

JO: It was the world.

SL: So that must've been frightening.

JO: Well . . .

SL: Or had you kind of expected it? Had you kinda heard that's what you were headed into? Did you . . .

JO: No . . .

SL: I mean, there were older kids that had been there, right?

JO: Yeah. But that—they—the older kids like my two older brothers, they would never say anything about anybody, about anything. They both ended up in the army, of course. Henry was wounded over at the Hürtgen Forest, Belgium. But Jimmy, he escaped it. He didn't get hurt. He was in the artillery, and he made it okay.

[00:56:49] SL: And so they didn't really ever talk about their war experiences . . .

JO: No.

SL: . . . when they came back?

JO: Never did.

SL: That's not uncommon.

JO: No. Never did.

[00:57:10] SL: So you did sign up for the marines, but it didn't—you didn't—did you . . .

JO: If . . .

SL: . . . go into the marines?

JO: No.

SL: Wha . . .

JO: Just it was—things came to a screaming halt. You know, the draft was cut off like that, and enlistments went down, and guys were—and they started the GI Bill.

SL: Right.

JO: So there were all different things.

[00:57:43] SL: Well, the GI Bill was a game changer, wasn't it? So
did your older brothers take advantage of the GI Bill?

JO: Well, they didn't.

SL: Ah.

JO: I think my father was never, shall we say, academically astute
or—he thought it was—college was—and up until that time,
college was for rich boys, rich girls. You know. So there was no
question. It was not—even with the GI Bill, they never did
attend college. Course they regretted it later on, you know.

SL: They were what?

JO: They regretted it . . .

SL: Oh, well . . .

JO: . . . later on. Ev . . .

SL: . . . yeah. Well, sure.

JO: They could've gone to school for nothing and got paid for it.

[Laughs]

SL: But your father was suspicious of that or . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . just didn't see the value i . . .

JO: He didn't see the value in it, anyway.

SL: Right.

JO: He thought they were just playing games or just fiddling their wi—life away. He wanted you to get out and work.

[00:59:26] SL: So let's maybe talk about your mother a little more.
So how . . .

JC: Scott, real quick. We did roll over one hour just now.

SL: Oh, we're at one hour? Do you wanna take a break?

JO: Oh, whatever. I'm fine.

SL: I kinda like for us to stand about every hour so we don't get all stove up.

JO: Good idea.

SL: Okay. All right. Well, let's . . .

JO: This could . . .

SL: . . . pause.

[Recording stopped]

[00:59:54] SL: Okay, well, we just—you just sat right here right through the break. We got up and moved around.

JO: Mh-hmm. That's good.

SL: You're hangin' in there [*JO laughs*] pretty good. I—you know, if you get tired or worn out, you just tell me. I mean, I'm watching you, and if you look like you're—if I'm wearin' you out, why, we'll . . .

JO: No, I'm in good shape.

SL: . . . take a break. Okay.

JO: Except for I apologize for the hoarseness in my throat and my voice or whatever. Shouldn't be that way, but that's the way it happens to be today.

SL: Yeah, well, we'll keep you hydrated. That may help. [01:00:33]
Okay, well, so now, we were—we've been talking about—a little bit about the war . . .

JO: Yep.

SL: . . . and your brothers and their . . .

JO: School.

SL: And how they really never really talked about their war experiences.

JO: Oh, never.

SL: And how your father, who I'm getting the impression is kind of the dominant . . .

JO: Very much so.

SL: . . . person in the family . . .

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: He really wasn't high on having an education.

JO: No.

SL: Even when it was free . . .

JO: Right.

SL: . . . and paid to go.

JO: Amen.

SL: Your—so your—do you think that your brothers deferred to your father out of . . .

JO: I've . . .

SL: . . . respect and . . .

JO: I think they did. Because they were—well, they were certainly a smart enough, intelligent enough, and—but I think with a little, just the slightest encouragement, they would've gone to school. But it never occurred, so . . .

[01:01:51] SL: So what did they do after the war? Did they . . .

JO: Well . . .

SL: Was your entire family involved with the Blair family or . . .

JO: No.

SL: No?

JO: After the war—you member we had gas rationing, rationing, whatever. And so when—toward the end of the war, you couldn't get gas unless you were essential, you know. And mu—pop could get gas because he was transportation, taxicab kind of thing. But Henry, brother Henry never loved driving at all. He didn't. That was not his bag. And Jimmy, the younger, he's between Henry and myself. Jimmy didn't have any inkling about

going to school, and if it—at this time, the—gas was rationed, rationed, somewhat. And you had to have a little stamp to get gas, and so there was no gas around. But then as things loosened up and the Blairs died, Mr. and Mrs. Blair, and my—so my father started a—well, taxi business. They called it also a livery business. That's leftover from when they had a horse and buggy days.

SL: Right.

[01:04:04] JO: So they leased our—he got a car, since the Blairs took their car back when they died, of course. And he, my father, got this car, and he got a Pennsylvania utility license to carry people. So I kind of grew up—I was sixteen years old then. And I was drivin' a cab for all intents and purposes. We were—we did personal business, like the rich people, the men, the chauffeurs, had all left for war work. You know, they said, "Bye bye, I'm goin' to war." A lot of 'em went to California, hither and yon. So my father then, as I said, started a taxi business, and he would have customers, the old ladies, the old women, dowagers, they would be—need somebody to drive them because their chauffeur had quit, you know, he'd gone. They wouldn't hire 'em back again. So a lot of men who had been chauffeurs now were working in the steel mill or wherever.

And so my father was able to do quite well, you know, in this taxi business. It was more like chauffeuring. Like meeting trains. The madam would come in or the maids come in on a local train, and we'd meet the train and bring the maids out to the estates and that kind of thing. So that went on until my—well, my father got too old for it, so Henry didn't wanna do it. Jimmy didn't wanna do it. And so we got out of the taxi business. And everybody—Henry went off and opened up a stationery store, and Jimmy worked for a couple of families on the estates. And that was about it after the war. That's about what they did.

[01:07:11] SL: And so after the Blairs passed, that not only your father quit being a chauffeur . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . but he had the driving . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . and the logistical sense to . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . start a taxi service. And what did your mom do?

JO: Well she never worked outside the house. She was busy with eight kids, so she stayed at home.

SL: So once y'all—once your parents started having children, she

didn't really work for the Blairs anymore.

JO: Oh, no.

SL: I see.

JO: No.

SL: Okay.

JO: Took care of the kids.

SL: Well, that's time and a half.

JO: Yeah. [*Laughter*] Yeah.

SL: At least. Very few hours for sleep. I understand that.

JO: Amen.

[01:08:08] SL: Well, so what was the range? What are the ranges oldest to youngest over—is it twenty years or . . .

JO: Let's see. Mary was the oldest. Alice was the youngest. And Mary would have been, gosh, twenty years older than Alice.

SL: Yeah.

JO: You know. And there was a big delineation there because, you know, obviously, Mary's not gonna have time to fool around with Alice and . . .

SL: Right.

JO: . . . vice versa. So.

SL: Right. So by the time Alice had left the home, your mom had spent thirty-five . . .

JO: Right.

SL: . . . forty years raising children.

JO: That's—amen. Right. That's it.

SL: And by all accounts, she did a great job.

JO: Yeah. Oh yeah. She did. She's a great lady.

[01:09:20] SL: Well, what was your favorite meal that she would
fix?

JO: That she would cook?

SL: Mh-hmm.

JO: I think it was chicken. We ate chicken [*laughs*] every Sunday.

SL: That was the big . . .

JO: That was . . .

SL: . . . that was the big meal.

JO: . . . the big Sunday meal.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Then we'd eat scrapple. You know what scrapple is?

SL: I have had scrapple.

JO: You have.

SL: I'm not sure I know what it is. But . . .

JO: Nobody does. [*Laughter*]

SL: But . . .

JO: It's . . .

SL: . . . I have ordered scrapple when in Pennsylvania.

JO: Yeah. It's the only place you'll get it. That's made up of everything they didn't know what to do with. [*Laughs*]

SL: Right. Right. Right.

JO: Scrapple.

SL: My son—one of my sons went to Lehigh . . .

JO: Oh yeah. Yeah.

SL: . . . in Allentown.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And he married a girl that was from outside of Pittsburgh. She went to Becknell.

JO: Oh, boy.

SL: But they met in Washington, DC, so we have a Pennsylvania . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . connection . . .

JO: That's right.

SL: . . . kinda takes us in and out of Pennsylvania from time to time. [*JO laughs*] Great trout fishing in Pennsylvania.

JO: Oh, boy. Oh yeah. Great.

[01:10:42] SL: Yeah. So did you ever learn to fish other than cane pole or . . .

JO: No.

SL: . . . a casting rod. It never really got ahold of you.

JO: Never got ahold of me, and . . .

SL: Okay.

JO: Then going down to Atlantic City or wherever, I just never got there. 'Cause it cost money in those days.

[01:11:08] SL: Yeah, now I—you know, it's interesting. You know, I've interviewed a lot of folks that were without . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . and did without.

JO: Yeah.

SL: But you know, they say almost in every instance, they say during the Depression . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . it really didn't make that much difference in their lives because they were kinda self sustaining . . .

JO: Right.

SL: . . . anyway. It was the folks in the city that got hit the hardest during the Depression. But I do keep hearing from you this difference in society of poor folks and rich folks.

JO: Rich folk. Yeah.

SL: It was like—I'm not hearing any kind of middle ground or if y'all ever lifted yourselves up above the poverty level or above the

poor level. Di—so did the family ever have any kind of financial windfall, or did it ever improve, or did you always feel like you guys were the poor people in the community?

JO: Well, yes and no. My parents were—I would—I don't know. I was gonna say inferiority complex kind of thing. And because I member growing up and around town and we—Mom'd say, "Where've you been?" "Oh, I was up at Carson's." "Stay away from Carsons. They're not your kind." You know, and your kind meant they were rich, had money. And we didn't. So . . .

[01:13:13] SL: And they were not Irish, right?

JO: They were not Irish, weren't Catholic. And "Stay away from them, they're not your kind." [*Laughs*] That was a big deal.

SL: Yeah. Well, there was a stigma.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Between the ethnic groups.

JO: There was. Yeah. Exactly.

SL: And it seems like the Irish really got the brunt of most of it.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Is that the way you felt or the way you were kind of the perceptions you were given?

JO: Sure.

SL: And what you realized as you grew up.

JO: Yeah.

SL: That in fact, y'all were treated differently. Is that . . .

JO: Right. And that's—I don't know the pecking order of that. The—everybody to his own ethnic [*laughs*] values and place in society. The way it was. I don't know. And I think that's pretty much the way it was with everybody in town in the little village town in which we lived. Everybody kept to themselves, you know. You did what you did, and nobody made any mar—remarks about it. And . . .

[01:15:01] SL: Do you think in some ways—I know it's not the same, but in some ways, do you feel like there's a sh—semi-shared experience that Irish descendants had and were having as the—in the North as the African Americans were having in the South. Do you think there was this pushing down.

JO: Right.

SL: Kind of a lack of respect or put in their place.

JO: Yes.

SL: Sort of demeanor toward your family.

JO: Yeah, they used to have in—funny, Boston is a big Irish town now. But in the early days, they would have signs in the window. "Help wanted. Irish need not apply." And that's just—pew.

SL: I've heard that before.

JO: Right. The Irish weren't in good standing. [*Laughs*]

[01:16:14] SL: So I—how do you think that came about? I mean, have you ever studied that historically how the Irish got put in that kind of perspective from other groups?

JO: No, I haven't and certainly haven't studied it, but just tryin' to think what I've run across as it were. Because there were some Irish that kinda made it. And the rest of the Irish would all be jealous, you know. [*Laughs*] It was kinda—you would think the Irish would applaud somebody getting along in life or making money or getting status. But no, they were—I guess jealousy or whatever.

SL: They were out of place.

JO: Yeah, they were out of place. Right. Interesting.

[01:17:37] SL: It is. And so really, I guess the—in its own way, the church, the Catholic Church was a sanctuary . . .

JO: Yes, it was.

SL: . . . for your family.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And your father and mother strongly had faith in that.

JO: Amen. Right.

SL: And so you were—you and your entire family were under that

influence before you could remember.

JO: Right.

SL: It was there.

JO: Exactly.

SL: About you. So when you didn't serve in the marines, is that when you decided to enter the ministry?

[01:18:30] JO: Yeah, I'd been declaring with both of 'em, you know, go to seminary, go to the marines, or somewhere. And I leaned really toward the military. And you know, and as—I guess maybe part of that is from, you know, Pearl Harbor and all those kinds of things. And I was nuts about getting the war news, you know. What ship was—who was going down? And I guess—I don't know if a lot of people did that or not or a lot of young people, maybe, I don't know. But I sure was into it. And I felt like that's what I had to do. To an—arrange or for me or something.

SL: Well, Pearl Harbor was definitely a battle cry.

JO: Oh, boy.

SL: There were actually American sailors that drowned and were blown apart, and the carnage was very real on American soil.

JO: Right.

SL: For the first time, really.

JO: Yes, indeed. Indeed.

SL: So it was a lightning rod for a response. And there was great honor.

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: In putting your life ahead of yourself for that cause. [01:20:21]

So they wouldn't take you because—were you—was there an exemption that they didn't want you, or just because the war was over, your desire to serve was lessened? Is that?

JO: Yeah, that's it.

SL: That's it?

JO: And they really—the draft stopped, you know, 'cause they had thousands of guys on the—in uniform. More than they could handle.

SL: I see.

JO: So they said, "Go home." So my two brothers came home.

[Laughs]

SL: All in one piece.

JO: All in one piece, yeah.

[01:20:21] SL: So it wasn't so much that you had a calling to enter the seminary, was it? It was more of a choice becau—a practical choice.

JO: Yeah.

SL: For you. So . . .

JO: It's interesting that we would say that he has a calling. We don't say that with regard to navy, marines, army. Oh, he's got a calling to the marines. He does. What?

SL: Well, you don't think of hearing a marine voice . . .

JO: Hmm. No . . .

SL: . . . telling you this is what I want you to do.

JO: Well, that's right.

SL: This i . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: And so there is a quite a difference. I would guess that you could hear a calling for the marines.

JO: Yeah.

[01:22:10] SL: But that would be extraordinary, I would think, that if . . .

JO: Well, sure.

SL: Yeah. It wouldn't make much sense.

JO: No.

SL: To me, but I guess—I mean, it's not really for me to say. But so you felt good about your decision to go into the seminary, then.

JO: Yeah, I did. I—between me and the door over there, between us, I didn't think I would like the seminary. I didn't think I'd

last. I thought I'd be kicked out for disobedience or [*laughs*] belligerence, whatever. You know. But I spent eight years there, and nothing happened, so [*laughter*] . . .

SL: You made it through.

JO: Finally, I got ordained. [*Laughs*] They said, "Well, Don, you're still here."

[01:23:18] SL: Well, it seems like I read something you said one time that your parents didn't think that you would last.

JO: No. They didn't.

SL: Well, were you kinda mischievous growin' up? Were you in and out of trouble?

JO: Well, yeah.

SL: Well, yeah. [*Laughter*]

JO: Well, sure.

SL: Well, sure.

JO: It was. But—it was—you know, the guys that I ran around with—we weren't bad, but you know, we—of a summer night go out and bust street lights. We'd go way up there and see who could knock 'em out with a stone. [*Laughs*]

SL: Sure.

JO: And it was part of our venue. And the cops knew it. They were onto us, you know. We didn't thi—we thought we were foolin'

somebody. Cop—I remember a cop stopped me one day. And this is, you know, you have to think it's, again, it's a small town, and a small township. And he said, "Oh, O'Donnell, come here." I went over, and he said, "Listen, buddy. We're on to you. If you break any more street lights, we're [*laughs*] gonna put you away." I said, "Yes, sir."

SL: You probably stopped with the street lights.

JO: I stopped for that night. I didn't break any street lights that night, no. [*Laughs*]

[01:25:13] SL: You know, I member in one interview I had with Irish descent person. In his home growing up, alcohol was a problem. Was . . .

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: Was alcohol prevalent in the Irish community growing . . .

JO: Oh, sure. Sure was. Except that people like—my people were—well, I would call 'em Puritans. See, my—if—my—for all intents and purposes, my mother and father didn't drink unless we had company, so many Irish come in, you know. But at the same time, they didn't want us to know. So we'd be out, I'd be out messin' around, playing around, playing ball, whatever, and Mom and Dad always sat in the kitchen and talked and read the paper, and he smoked a pipe and all that. And I'd come busting

in the house of an evening. They weren't expecting me to be there at the moment. And as soon as I walked in the house, he put that drink down there like that. He didn't want me to see him drinkin'.

SL: Irish whiskey.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. Well, that—well, I can understand that to some degree, but you know, this whispering and the concealing . . .

JO: Yes.

SL: . . . the drinking, this had to have an effect on your view of the world that . . .

JO: Well, sure.

[01:27:16] SL: And really, they're trying to set an example that they believed . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . was the correct example, but they have their own weaknesses, they just didn't want their children to see that.

JO: Right. No. Sure didn't. [*Laughs*] But . . .

SL: But so . . .

JO: They were teetotalers, really. They'd be talkin' about somebody, the old biddies, old Irish gals that never married or whatever. And you hear them say, "Well, do you know, he takes a little

drink once in a while." [*Laughs*] He takes a wee drink once in a while. But it'll do him no harm.

SL: Right. Right.

JO: Yeah. Geez. Funny. Gracious.

[01:28:28] SL: Yeah, there—I just thought of another interview where a man not quite as old as you was talking about a town drunk . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . that was Irish.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And that they—he was loved.

JO: Yeah.

SL: But you know, come by the evening, he was just pretty worthless and . . .

JO: Well, yeah.

SL: But they—he and his brother gave him a pair of socks one Christmas. And it was like an epiphany for him. He, within a few months, he was no longer drinking and had become very . . .

JO: Oh.

SL: . . . integrated into the community and doing all these good deeds. It was like just this one gift . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . released him in some way.

JO: Amazing.

SL: It is amazing. But it just kinda—it's—this is just circumstantial or serendipitous that these stories are . . .

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: . . . coming to me now . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . but I guess you were probably aware of alcohol as being a problem in the community, certainly whenever you . . .

JO: Well, sure.

SL: . . . started going to the large school.

JO: Yeah. Indeed. Let's see, could we take a break?

SL: We can take break.

JO: I'm gonna go to the head.

SL: Okay. All right. Let's take a break.

[Recording stopped]

[01:30:11] SL: Had a little break. We're comin' back now. We're—we've been talking about the church a little bit. We talked about the—some of the stigma of Irish folks, and how they've been oppressed.

JO: Yes.

SL: Throughout history. So I think we had left off—we'd talked about you not going into the marines . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . and deciding to go into seminary.

JO: Yes.

SL: So what—where was the seminary that you went to?

JO: St. John's, Little Rock.

SL: Little Rock?

JO: Right here in C City, Little Rock, Arkansas.

[01:31:01] SL: So why St. John's in Little Rock?

JO: Well, it's a long, long story which we will not go into, but
[laughs] . . .

SL: Well, we can—give me the breakdown on it.

JO: They had a big, big seminary in Philadelphia. St. Charles Borrowmeo. I mean, huge buildings. Everything very impressive. I didn't particularly wanna go there. So somebody said, "Well, why don't you look into Little Rock?" And I didn't even know there was a seminary in Little Rock, so I did, and Monsignor O'Connell is the rector at the time. So they invited me to come down to Little Rock and be interviewed, et cetera, et cetera. So that's how I ended up in the seminary in Little Rock.

[01:32:03] SL: What year?

JO: It was 1946.

SL: Okay. All right.

JO: And so I spent eight years there. Four years of philosophy, four years of theology. And before I was ordained. And this was after the war, right after the war, and so we had a lot of GIs in the class. And some real cowboys. [*Laughs*] Who were tough—would come and—in the foxhole, they told Jesus, "I'll be a priest if you just get me outta here." [*Laughs*]

SL: Ah. There you go. The deal was made under pressure.

[*Laughter*] Well, you know, do you think that you avoided Philadelphia because you had so many negative, oppressive experiences and all the fighting and . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . and the school just was not your favorite place to be.

JO: No. But and I'm—I looked at myself as a country boy coming from Wyndmoor, P-A. So Arkansas agreed with me. Some of the Yankees came down weren't too keen about it. And some of them quit, and some went other places. But anyway, I hung in there. Eight years, and then I was ordained, so that's how I ended up in Arkansas.

[01:34:03] SL: So let's see. Is it four years of philosophy first?

JO: Yeah.

SL: And so all—you studied all the different philosophies. Is that right or just the . . .

JO: Well, the big thing then was existentialism during those days. We studied that. And but domestic philosophy, St. Thomas Aquinas. He wrote Twelve Arguments or something. Of a philosophy. That's who we studied mostly, and that's—that was the philosophy. We pursued the other philosophers, too. This is when existentialism was coming in.

SL: Right.

JO: You know, and so we studied existentialism just as tip your hat to it, you know, so . . .

[01:35:24] SL: And then the theology side of it. Was that just the scriptures that they . . .

JO: Ye—well, and also church history. The councils, you know. And so we studied Sartre, and well, of course, Thomas Aquinas. So we studied all the big philosophers. And some who were not so big yet, but they did become big, some new philosophers. Not quite existential, but they have to be scholastic, as we say, scholastic philosophy.

SL: So did you count yourself still as an average student?

JO: Yes.

SL: Or did this ignite your mind?

JO: Oh, it ignited my mind. I was, you know—couldn't believe that I would love philosophy. Studied several philosophers. And that was a great challenge, but it was a joy, you know, to get into all that stuff and Heidegger, the German philosophers, and other mercantile philosophers. And we just a little—like a smorgasbord. A little of this, a little of that, and be exposed to all of 'em. So you could wend your own way through your own philosophy. It was very interesting, you know. I liked it.

[01:37:45] SL: And so sounds like to me that it was much more personal for you. I mean, that it spoke to you.

JO: Sure did. Yes.

SL: In ways that the other schooling had not.

JO: Right. Exactly.

SL: And I'm assuming the atmosphere relegated that kind of . . .

JO: It did.

SL: . . . path.

JO: It did. Correct.

SL: So you were constantly viewing yourself in the framework of the studies that were . . .

JO: Yes.

SL: . . . before you.

JO: Indeed. Pretty fascinating.

SL: Was there anything—what were the difficulties in being in seminary? Was there—were there challenges for you that you just knocked 'em down as they came or [*laughter*] . . .

JO: Well, they sa—we had lots of rules, you know. And obedience was a big thing. You had to be obedient. And I mean, silly things. Like having your shoes shined. [*Laughs*] Certain keeping up in your academic work, obviously. And other than that, not bad at all.

[01:39:30] SL: I'll say two things. One, I would assume that philosophy and it relating to you personally would sometimes maybe be in conflict of the obedience required.

JO: Yes.

SL: And the second thing I would say. I want you to know that I shined my shoes yesterday.

JO: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

SL: So I would have shiny shoes for this interview.

JO: Well, aren't you good. [*SL laughs*] You get an A. Department. Yay-us. We shine our shoes. Whew. [*Laughs*]

SL: Well, there's something about that that . . .

JO: Well, there is something about it, but I don't know what it is about it. [*Laughter*]

SL: Well, it's two sided.

JO: Yeah. Yes, sir.

SL: There's the shine and how it affects others . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . but there's also the shine and how it affects you.

JO: Yes.

SL: Personally, so I guess it depends on who's enjoying it more.

JO: Who's enjoying it more. Which one?

SL: Yeah.

JO: Yeah. That's exactly right. [*Laughs*]

[01:40:50] SL: Well, so, then, all in all, you felt good in Little Rock.

JO: Sure.

SL: And did you continue to correspond with the family?

JO: Oh, sure, yeah.

SL: And did any of your family ever come visit you, or were you allowed to go home and visit at home or how did that work?

JO: We did go home for summer and Christmas. We'd take—well, a summer would've been half of June, all of July, half of August.

SL: That's pretty good.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Curriculum wasn't so bad.

SL: What was that?

JO: Curriculum.

SL: Oh, curriculum.

JO: Wasn't too bad.

[01:41:51] SL: So were you the only sibling that chose the church?

I mean . . .

JO: Well, my . . .

SL: . . . chose the seminary?

JO: Oh yeah, except my oldest sister, the nun. She's still living.

She's ninety-six, seven, around there somewhere. And she's been a nun for a thousand years. [*Laughs*]

SL: Was she—were you close to her growing up?

JO: No.

SL: No? Not at all.

JO: The age difference was too—see, when I was, oh, I was in parochial school with going to the neighborhood school, and she was going to high school, so she'd be gone all day and come back at night. And . . .

SL: That's right.

JO: So we never meshed, really.

SL: Well, I have to believe that your mom and dad were very proud of you in your choice, even though they didn't—couldn't believe that you were going to make it through it. [*JO laughs*] But

surely they noticed—I mean, did you feel yourself changing as you were going through seminary?

JO: Oh, sure.

SL: And do you think that they sensed and they saw that change whenever you would visit?

JO: I presume because I got more—what shall we say? Quiet.

[*Laughs*] More thoughtful. I'd be reading more when I went home for vacation and all. It was, "Hmm. You're readin' again?"

[*Laughs*]

[01:43:46] SL: You know, I didn't ask you that about your growing up. Did your—I would expect if anyone were to help you with your studies, it may have been your mom. Did anyone ever help you with school work?

JO: The older—my brother Henry and sister Patricia. They were the oldies, and they would help me.

SL: That's good.

JO: So the others were too young or too scattered or whatever.

[01:44:18] SL: So you were ordained in what year?

JO: [Nineteen] fifty-four.

SL: [Nineteen] fifty-four. And so what did you do when you were ordained? Did they send you someplace, or did you stay in Little Rock?

JO: No, they—my first assignment was St. John's in Hot Springs for one year. Then they . . .

SL: As an associate?

JO: Yeah.

SL: Pastor?

JO: Then they—after that year was over, they sent me to Catholic High in Little Rock, and taught there for—well, I had two sessions. They sent me there, and then they sent me to Holy Souls as a pastoral assistant for a couple of years, and then they put me back in high school.

[01:45:20] SL: So you were in the Little Rock area if not in Little Rock . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . in 1957.

JO: Yeah.

SL: So how did all of that affect—were you at Little Rock Catholic . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . high school at that time? So you must have noticed or been aware of the difference in the north and the south.

JO: Oh, my.

SL: And the role that the Civil War played in the South as opposed to what it did in Pennsylvania.

JO: Right.

[01:46:01] SL: So how did all that affect you? How did the crisis in 1957 play in your world and . . .

JO: Well, it played in my world because it—I and a couple of other priests, one, two, three, four of whom are now not priests anymore. They resigned. But we formed a coterie because Bishop Fletcher wasn't doing anything about it. You know, he's—his philosophy was it's not our problem. Little Rock Central. And we said, "What do you mean, it's not our problem?" So we had many go arounds with the bishop. [Laughs] And watching and all that stuff. So we were just tryin' to get the—find a voice [*siren in background*] in the Catholic Church somewhere for common sense, civility or whatever you wanna call it, you know. But in fact, the superintendent of schools, Catholic schools at that time, was Father Kordsmeier. The priest—the press asked for an interview. And they said, "What do you think of Little Rock Central crisis, what's goin' on over there?" And he said, "It's none of our business. It's not our problem." I thought, "God." And there were about four or five of us who were out marchin' and [*laughs*] doin' all that kind of business. So it was a very, very, very, very deep learning period. See the church not doing anything. And certainly the

Baptists didn't do anything. They were all segregationists. Episcopalians—'cept for the—some of the fathers of the Episcopal Church spoke out, you know, against segregation and that kind of thing. But for the most part, the church—I should say churches, did nothing that time. Till the Bishop of—Episcopal Bishop of Little Rock, of Arkansas, he stepped forward, and he called for a meeting of all the priests. And of course, not many priests went. [*Laughs*] I went and a couple other guys. And he said, "Look. This is the biggest thing gonna happen in Arkansas. We say we love our brother and everything, and what are we gonna do about this? We're supposed to be leaders in the community." So out of that little nucleus rose at least a yoke of resistance to Orval Faubus and to what was going on in that place at that time.

[01:50:18] SL: So essentially the bishops just had the church turn its back.

JO: Yeah.

SL: As if nothing was happening.

JO: Yeah. That's right. Nothing happening.

SL: And you and your group—and I wanna ask about the ones that resigned latter, but you didn't agree with that, and do you think that some of the bishop's concern was the notoriety that would

happen the—seems like I member something about your picture being in the paper and how that wasn't really acceptable that all of a sudden you were somebody and not . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . a priest. You were . . .

JO: Right.

SL: . . . you were, you know, you were drawing attention to . . .

JO: Exactly.

SL: . . . yourself. So but from what I've read between the lines, that really wasn't all of it, but that was really, honestly a part of it that the notoriety would make everyone uncomfortable.

JO: Sure. [*Man in background shouts hello*]

SL: But that kind of—I think that's kind of a weak argument. I would think that the notoriety and the expression of what faith is and in—what intent is would be a central core. [01:52:03] What about the parishioners? What about the populace and the congregation? How do you think they were reading all this?

JO: They were reading it was none of our business.

SL: So they followed the bishop's . . .

JO: As Catholics. We have our own school system, da-da-da-da. Everybody says . . .

SL: And it was segregated? Was the Catholic—was Little Rock

High—Little Rock . . .

JO: Yeah, it was.

SL: Segregated? [*Voice in background*] So it—you were in the middle of [*JO laughs*] segregated . . .

JO: Between a rock and a hard place.

SL: Yeah.

[01:52:37] JO: We—like we had Black parishes. We still do that, too. We had Black parishes where the Blacks would go to their church, and the whites would go to their church. And Bishop Fletcher never could see the dichotomy of that. He just didn't get it. You know, we're supposed to be universal church, and we're not admitting Blacks to the school system. And so perso—because of that we were persona non grata of all of the—it was myself and three other guys who've since left the priesthood. But there been also some who—for instance—I forget the guy's name. He was at the First Christian Church, which is right in Pulaski Heights there. Super guy. He was the pastor. And he got up and over a couple of weeks, said, "We're gonna integrate our church, and justice demands this," etc. Well, man, they pushed him outta there like nothin'. He was a very, very, kind of quiet guy. And they bounced him. He ended up in Texas somewhere. But there were few and far between. Clergy that

did anything in terms of integration.

[01:55:01] SL: Do you think the resignation of those in that beginning nucleus resigned or just hastened their resignation from the church, that they . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . that it stained their faith in the church itself.

JO: It did. Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Sure did.

SL: But you chose to stay on.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And continue.

JO: Right.

[01:55:24] SL: And suf—did you suffer consequences because of this?

JO: Well, yeah. I was persona non grata with most—with the bishop and most of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. They said, you know, "He's—what's he tryin' to do? You know, what's he tryin' to prove? We have our own schools. The Blacks can go to any white church they want." But anyway.

SL: What was the line that . . .

Sarah Moore: Lunch is here, you guys.

SL: Someone . . .

Josh Colvert: Lunch is here, Scott.

SL: . . . encouraged—hmm?

JC: Lunch is here.

SL: Okay. What was the line that someone instructed you—it was something about go and serve, be a martyr, bleed. Wha—do you member that? I . . .

JO: No.

SL: I'll have to—I'll look it up and bring it back to us, but there was someone that you quoted as directing you . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . toward the seminary and it—that rings kind of a bell for you?

JO: Mh-hmm.

SL: I'll get the exact quote when we . . .

JO: Okay.

SL: . . . when we come back.

JO: Thank you.

SL: Now if you—I'm not really done with this. I wanna get back to this, but our food is here now.

JO: Oh.

SL: So we should eat while it's warm.

JO: Yes.

SL: And take a break.

[Recording stopped]

[01:57:11] SL: All right. Well, we just had barbecue lunch from
Corky's. And we're refueled.

JO: Very good.

SL: We're ready to go.

JO: Very good.

SL: When we were talking at lunch, we mentioned that we had some
other audio happening around us. I don't know if you
remember. The tornado siren went off . . .

JO: Very well.

SL: And then there was someone out here that was talking very
loudly outside the door. And it was right when we were talking
about the crisis in Little Rock in 1957. And so if you don't mind,
I wanna cover that material again.

JO: Sure.

SL: Because we think that this is a really—this is a big part of
Arkansas history and . . .

JO: Amen.

SL: . . . it's all kinds of tangents off of it that are really good. And
this is one tangent we don't have that . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . that we want to preserve forever. So you had been ordained. You had been to two or three different parishes but—and then ended up back in Little Rock at the time of the desegregation issue that hit Little Rock High School under the Faubus administration. And they had sent in the National Guard to protect the students. And we have all kinds of interviews from people that participated in that part of it. But we don't have anything from the church community. It's the first time we've heard from the—from your perspective. And your perspective was different than what the church's perspective was. Is that the jest of it?

JO: Yes.

[01:59:00] SL: And so how did this come about? What—how did you kind of come at odds with what the church felt the intentions should be?

JO: Well, the church preaches justice and equality, those kinds of things. That's what the church preaches. But they were not doing that. They weren't even preaching it in Little Rock, so several of us thought, "Well, somebody needs to say something no matter what it is. Something positive about the condition of Little Rock and the fear and the phobias and all of that business that were prevalent at that time." So we got together, and we

just thought, "Well, we have to do something." [02:00:15] I must say that leadership was under the hat of—I'm tryin' to think of his name. Episcopalian. He was sort of in the forefront, and I'm sorry, I've forgotten his name. But then there was also the pastor at Pulaski Heights Christian Church. He lost his parish over that. They ran him off. He went to Texas. Then the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese, then he called a meeting of all the priests. Well, excuse me, of all the clergy. And obviously most of the clergy did not come. And but those of us who did were, you know, the bishop said the same thing that we have to do something if we're supposed to be Christian, and we have to practice some Christianity here. So that was it. And . . .

SL: Well, now the bishop said that?

JO: The Episcopal bishop.

SL: The ebis—the Episcopal bishop did.

[Recording stopped]

[02:02:03] JO: Go ahead. We—where were we?

SL: Are we rolling?

JC: Yes.

SL: Okay. Well, we were talkin' about the [19]57 crisis, and . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . and the stance that the Episcopal priest took. We couldn't

think of his name . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . at that moment, but I—you may have given us his name . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . a little earlier, and if not, we can fill that in.

JO: Okay.

[02:02:26] SL: But the—and then there was a—was it a Church of
Christ pastor that. . .

JO: No, no.

SL: No. It was . . .

JO: It . . .

SL: First Christian?

JO: First Christian.

SL: Church. And he got—he stood up at—and got moved to Texas.

JO: He got moved. He got booted. I forget—what was his name? I
forget his name for the moment. But anyway, it was—stood tall.
Then they ran him off, and he went to Texas. I think he's dead
now. But he was a courageous guy.

[02:03:15] SL: So but the bishop that was in charge of the diocese
in Little Rock and was in charge of all the priests in that—in this
area, he didn't wanna have anything to do with it, is that . . .

JO: No. No. He said it was none of our business and we shouldn't

be out marching and demonstrating, he called it, and what else.

That was his part of the scenario.

SL: And there were three other or three or four other Catholic priests that were . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . standing with you.

JO: ?Jim Durain?. Walter Clancy. Joe Biltz. I think that's all.

Anyway, we—that's all we had, and we did what we could, you know. We were cohortin' in with some lay people. Protestant, Catholic, whatever, whoever, Jewish people. So we had some Jewish ladies in there and that came, and was a sign of support. They were very good. Other than that [*clears throat*]—'scuse me. Tryin' to think of somebody else that's outstanding. Don't know for the moment.

[02:05:16] SL: Well, the three other Catholic priests that were with you on this stance, they ended up resigning from the church, is that . . .

JO: Yes. They—yeah. They resigned and quit the priesthood, as a matter of fact, they all—the three of them—four of them got married. That sealed the deal.

SL: Well . . .

JO: You know. Maybe there was four of us. There was Clancy,

Bauman, Biltz, ?Durain?.

SL: That's four.

JO: Four. O'Donnell. I think that's about it for Catholic clergy.

SL: Well, it—I'm sure it—they felt the same way you did about what Christ would like.

JO: Right.

SL: What his role would be.

JO: Yeah.

[02:06:30] SL: And when the church turned their back on the injustice and the lack of civility . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . and the love-thy-neighbor part of it, that really broke their spirit . . .

JO: Right.

SL: . . . for the church, didn't it?

JO: Sure did. And but they had, same time, not many, but some very loyal, courageous lay people supporting them, you know, encouraging them. And that meant a lot, you know. And they were among the ones we're talkin' about now.

[02:07:22] SL: So were you penalized in any way other than maybe your standing among superiors? Were you—they didn't ship you off somewhere, did they?

JO: No. They could have, and I didn't know it, you know. [*Laughs*]
They just told me to go. Go away and be quiet. So I don't know
if they did—they had me marked for that or not, but anyway, I
got some repercussions from some lay people. And certainly
from the bishop. He said, "Golly, Doctor." Said, "Golly, Doctor.
It's none of our business." You know. [*Laughs*] Yeah, Bishop.
I understand.

SL: That's too bad.

JO: Yeah.

SL: 'Cause that would—that was—that would've been a great
moment for the Church.

JO: Yeah, would have been. But didn't do it.

[02:08:40] SL: So bef—I can't—you'll have to help me with this.
Was the march across the Selma bridge before or after the
[19]57 Crisis?

JO: After.

SL: And were you familiar with the priest over there, or any of that
movement or . . .

JO: No, I was not. I didn't get to Selma until that—I guess Sunday
after—I think it was the Sunday after the anniversary of the
original march. I think a bunch of us went over to Selma.
That's about all.

SL: Well, were there Catholic priests that marched with Martin Luther across that bridge?

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: So they got gassed.

JO: Yeah.

[02:09:44] SL: We—there was someone actually from Fayetteville that was there in the capacity of being an FBI agent. [*JO laughs*] And he said that [*voices in background*] for the police, when they did the gassing . . .

JO: The gassing and the dogs and all.

SL: The dogs and the horses.

JO: Right.

SL: There were some on horseback and . . .

JO: And . . .

SL: . . . everybody was affected by it.

JO: Yeah.

SL: I—and of course, that's a powerful movie that currently out. I don't know if you've seen that, but it's . . .

JO: I have not.

SL: . . . it's well done. It's strange mix of history and contemporary.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Elements. Well, so a year after Selma, you went over to

participate in some kind of anniversarial setting. Did you get to speak with any of the victims or any of the folks that marched?

JO: No, because it—this was the Sunday after the Sunday of the march that year. Whatever.

SL: Ah, I see.

JO: And we were like the remnant or something, but . . .

[02:11:05] SL: Right. Well, so have you—I wanna talk a little bit more about the seminary.

JO: Okay.

SL: There's a point in mass where the priest sings. The mystery of faith. So did you used to sing the mystery of faith? When performing mass?

JO: I did not. What . . .

LS: Well, there's a—and I've heard it in English, and I've heard it in Latin. Did you study any Latin at all when you . . .

JO: Oh, sure.

SL: Well, that in and of itself must've been horrifying to try to learn Latin. Did you embrace Latin easily and . . .

JO: Insofar as we could, you know. But you know, they say Latin's a dead language. And it is, but handy for etymologists and people like that, but anyway, I really don't know what that is. That . . .

SL: It's . . .

JO: They were chanting or . . .

SL: Uh-huh. It's the priest just solos by himself. Maybe that's just what—the way it's done at St. Joseph in Fayetteville, but it's during communion. It's during the preparations, and he just says the mystery of faith, and then he sings—it's almost like a lullaby.

[02:13:04] JO: Oh yeah, they—that is proclaim the mystery of faith. It contains something like, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again."

SL: Yes.

JO: That's just one. There's a whole catalogue of those, and they're good.

SL: Yeah. I've always found that comforting.

JO: Yeah.

SL: There is something about a melody . . .

JO: Exactly.

SL: . . . in the middle of the ceremony that's a solo, and it's very personal.

JO: Yeah.

[02:13:36] SL: Yeah. So have you stayed in Little Rock all this time now? Since . . .

JO: No, no. I've been—let's see. Where'd I go? They sent me to

Pine Bluff. So I was there about—I think I was there about ten years. St. Joe's. Then where did I go after that? Then I went to IC in North Little Rock. Then I think that's all I did.

[02:14:22] SL: Were there African Americans in your Pine Bluff congregation?

JO: Yes.

SL: I mean, it's predominantly . . .

JO: Few . . .

SL: . . . African American that . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: That city.

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Oh yeah. But there's a Black Catholic church over there, St. Peter's. And pretty—it's a viable church of—they're courageously independent. And there was talk under Bishop McDonald about closing St. Peter's, which was the Black church, amalgamating with the white Catholic church. And they talked about it, but nothing was ever—ever came of it.

SL: But the white church did integrate and . . .

JO: They did, but the most of the Blacks still go to St. Peter's, the Black church.

SL: It's so daunting that way back in history, this whole
desegregation and . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . separation of the races just got accepted, and then once it
got accepted, it got ingrained.

JO: Oh, indeed.

SL: Into the culture.

JO: Amen. Right.

SL: And to this day.

JO: Right. To this day.

SL: It's still there.

JO: Right. Exactly. You're right.

[02:16:00] SL: Whe—is there—are there any passages in the Bible
that support that?

JO: Support?

SL: The separation of the races. Is there something that they draw
from the Bible that justifies . . .

JO: I have no idea, but I don't think—I don't recall anything in the
Bible that—except, you know, back in the very beginning of the
testament had fights between different sects, *S-E-C-T-S*,
sects . . .

SL: Right.

JO: . . . of both in Christianity or Judaism. [*Clears throat*] 'Scuse me. And that was lying there, and some accepted it, and some didn't, you know. And it was up and down, you know, it was Jews fighting Jews, Jews fighting Arabs, and everybody. Off and on.

[02:17:28] SL: So there was one parish you mentioned that I hadn't—that I was not aware of. You went to Hot Springs, came to—went back to Little Rock, and then there was another parish. Holy Cross or . . .

JO: That was in pru—let's see, in the—that was over in Eastern Arkansas.

SL: In the Delta?

JO: No, it wasn't in the Delta. It was one of—you might say it was on the way to Jonesboro but—what was the name of that town? Whew. It'll come back to me, but anyway, that was in—over there in Eastern Arkansas. And those people were really out of it entirely. And the parish over there is mostly German descent. And they were not—did not take to strangers kindly, you know.

SL: I'm tryin' to think. There's Forrest City, Marianna . . .

JO: Oh, yeah. They were tough.

SL: Yeah. Well, these things that you can't think of now, if you—if they come to you . . .

JO: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: . . . you can just . . .

JO: Okay.

SL: We can just get it out . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . get it out whenever it comes to you. [02:19:23] So you went—you were sent to Pine Bluff for ten years. You stayed ten years in Pine Bluff. Is that right?

JO: Yeah. I did. I liked it, and they had some problems because they had some nice, committed Black people down there, and but there was also a coterie of Blacks who didn't want to integrate with white Catholics. We got our parish, and we're gonna keep it. So we said, "Okay, that's fine." So it's still a Black parish today.

[02:20:22] SL: You know, Josh and I were in Helena a month or so ago, and there's a Black Methodist church that, at the time, whe—it was the largest Methodi—Black Metho—Black church in all of America or . . .

JC: Black Baptist church.

SL: Oh, it was Catholic.

JC: No, it was Black Baptist.

SL: Baptist. It was Black Baptists.

JO: Right.

SL: The—that's kind of a oxymoron, isn't it?

JO: Oh, sure is. [*SL laughs*] Yeah. Amen.

SL: Yeah.

JO: That's in Helena.

[02:21:03] SL: In Helena, and it was—the architect was African America.

JO: Really?

SL: Uh-huh. And it's a huge structure, and of course it's about to fall in. And they actually did refuse some grants that would've given them a new roof and . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . kept it from decaying where it is to now, but they didn't wanna take anything . . .

JO: They wouldn't—that's right.

SL: . . . money that was white oriented.

JO: Right. Right.

SL: So there's a cost to that . . .

JO: Whew.

SL: . . . commitment in many ways.

SL: Yes.

SL: Both white and Black.

JO: Yes. It is.

[02:21:44] SL: Well, do you think that the Civil Rights Movement was one of the greatest blows to the church as far as their stance? I mean, was this only in the Southern states that this was common? Was it more open north of the Mason-Dixon line?

JO: It was open. We—in places like Philadelphia, we had a lot of Black Catholic churches. And they weren't ready to integrate with anybody about anything. And I'm sure it was the same way maybe around DC. Had some Black parishes down there. These were very viable parishes, you know, and where they are now, today, I don't know. I don't know.

[02:22:57] SL: What about any relationships you may have with African American priests? Did you ever develop any friendships, or was it just too far apart to . . .

JO: Yeah, I was in—I was pastor at St. Augustine's in North Little Rock, which is a Black Catholic church. How long was I there? I think I was there two years or three years. I don't know where that came from or whatever. And course, I liked it, you know, and people liked me, and we had a good time. But it was short lived. It was, like I said, maybe three to four years. Maybe it was because no white Catholic priest would take it. St. Augustine's. But it's a neat, neat parish.

[02:24:15] SL: So priests have the ability to not accept an offer or is it—I always thought it was maybe you were assigned to a place, and you must follow suit.

JO: Well, that—well, it—the way it used to be. But now when priests—I don't know, maybe they tell the bishop, "Look, if I have to go to Helena, North Little Rock, or wherever, I'm leavin' the diocese, goin' somewhere else." I don't know if that's what they say but—and I personally don't know any priest that has rejected any appointment on those grounds. I know priests that wouldn't take a parish because it was too—well, too poor or too out of it or whatever. I don't know.

[02:24:15] SL: So they—I mean, can they just—if a priest refuses a parish, and if—and he ends up following through with his threat of leaving that particular diocese, can he just walk into another bishop's domain or does he have to have an invite or . . .

JO: Probably another bishop would not take him.

SL: That's what I was wondering.

JO: Because you wouldn't get there without a letter of reference from the bishop that you were leavin'. And the diocese that you were leaving would just—the bishop to which—to whom you are going would say, "No. Too risky."

SL: Yeah. I would guess there's the obedience plank.

JO: Oh, boy, yeah.

SL: In there.

JO: Yep. See when they get Holy Thursday, which will be coming up next week, we make that promise in the cathedral with the Bishop. "Do you promise me obedience" and so on. And we said, "We do so promise." With the fingers crossed and everything. [*Laughter*]

SL: To a point.

JO: Yeah, to a point. [*Laughter*] Yes, sir.

SL: Until you're wrong.

JO: Till you're wrong, yeah. Yes, indeed.

[02:24:15] SL: Well, there i—it is—you know, the relationship with God is personal.

JO: Oh, amen to that.

SL: So m—when you have that—a—that relationship and someone else is telling you something that you're not hearing . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . there—it seems to be—there ought to be some kind of respect for that, I would guess, and I would assume in your case, they didn't really lose any respect for you. There was something about your ability to connect with folks that was valuable, you know, to the . . .

JO: Perhaps, yeah.

SL: . . . church. Yeah. That's interesting.

JO: But then maybe I wasn't committed enough. And you know, I'd get a cardboard sign and go out, walk up and down or something like that.

[02:28:28] SL: So you did take some flak from the notoriety.

JO: Oh, sure.

SL: 'Cause it was news.

JO: Yeah. Yeah.

SL: That you were taking a stand. And the others. And you were young then. You were pretty young then.

JO: Well, let's see, I . . .

SL: I mean, as—let's see, I take that back. You were thirty. You were in your thirties. Is that right?

JO: Yeah, I was about thirty, yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: A little more than thirty.

SL: So that's pretty young.

JO: Yes, it is. Especially in the bureaucracy of the priesthood, you know. [02:29:17] We had a priest—this is off the subject, but nothing secret or anything. We had a priest in Helena, Arkansas. His name was John Kettler, *K-E-T-T-L-E-R*.

SL: Kay.

JO: German descent. And he was a native of Helena. And [*voices in background*] John was a rounder. You know, he was about six foot seven. He was a giant. And when he'd get excited, he would stutter, you know. And he'd say, "Y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y-y-yes, bishop—bishop," you know, and the guys say, "Oh, John, come on, shut up." [*SL laughs*] "Forget it." But he—I guess they didn't treat him well. They said he was kinda different, you know. And wouldn't say he was a troublemaker, but he, at some of the parishes where he was, he just was not obedient and doin' what he was supposed to do, et cetera. But I member this one occasion we had. This is shortly after the—Rome said priests could amalgamate or they could congregate or organize or whatever. And so priests around the world did, I guess. [02:31:23] We did in Arkansas. And [*voices in background*] you know, I was the—fact, I think I was the first president of the council of priests in Arkansas. And we had—that's during Fletcher's time, and big Joe Murray, and those types who ran the ship, you know. You didn't count for anything. You didn't know what you were talkin' about no matter what you said. So anyway, was—we had a general meeting during a retreat. The bishop said, "I want all the priests here, have a meeting." So he

went up—the bishop got up and said some—I don't know what he said, but it was a little homily about our obedience or something. And this John Kettler got up, and here he is, like, six foot five or something, and he said, "Bi-b-b-b"—when he got excited, he would stutter. "B-b-b-bishop." And so he stood up, and here's this hulk of a man, you know, crying his eyes out. He started to cry. He said, "As a citizen of the United States, I have legal rights. As a member of the Catholic Church, I don't have anything." [*Laughs*] [*Unclear words*] said, "Oh, geez." Whew. [*SL laughs*] But Joe Bishop didn't have anything to say about that, but it was a . . .

SL: Right.

JO: Boy, it was a tough moment. The—this big hulk of a man . . .

SL: Yeah.

JO: . . . crying. "I don't have any rights as a Catholic priest." Phew. Everybody sittin' there was saying, "You know, you're right.

[02:33:41] SL: That's right.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: But nobody else stood up to support him or say, "I second the motion" or whatever.

SL: Oh, really. So that hurt him.

JO: Oh yeah. It did. He was very hurt.

SL: Did—do you regret that you didn't stand and second him.

JO: Mh-hmm. Yeah. Nobody did. As president, I wasn't supposed to. But it was a bad moment. But again, the church and the diocese got over it. But it was a sad moment. And there were lots of those. Not lots, but some during those days.

[02:34:37] SL: Well, you have to say the Catholic Church has been more than resilient . . .

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: Over the centuries.

JO: Oh yeah. Good grief.

SL: [*Laughs*] Or the millennia.

JO: Ooo. Tell me about it.

SL: They've been through some tough times.

JO: Tell me about it. Right. [*Laughter*] Amen.

[02:34:56] SL: Do you think there was—are there some pivotal moments in the church history that you think stand out more than others?

JO: Worldwide?

SL: Worldwide, uh-huh.

JO: Hmm. Well, we could throw in the Protestant Revolu—
Reformation. St. Francis of Assisi was troublemaker.

SL: So maybe you should tell us in what way. I—how was he a troublemaker? [*Buzzing sound*]

JO: Well, first of all, he dressed like a beggar, and the rest of the monks didn't like that. And people liked him, and the rest of the monks didn't like that. And he just did his own thing as a priest.

SL: To his faith.

JO: Yeah. And but he's a, you know, big saint today. St. Francis of Assisi. Whew. But he wasn't allowed to do much when he was living. He could, but they'd ignore him. You know. You can't punish him for something, you just ignore them. Maybe they'll go away. [*Laughs*]

[02:36:38] SL: Well, this—rather than punishment but just ignoring—and this kind of also goes back to rather than taking a stand one way or another just turning their back on the civil rights issue. The—do you think that that somehow in some way helped the church get through these crises . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: Where they didn't have to take a stand, that there was something more to life than the human conflicts and . . .

JO: Right.

SL: . . . that it will work out in the end, that it will all resolve itself one—in a certain way whether this happens or this happens.

JO: Yeah, and then we look back, and we say, "Oh my God, that was a blessing, and we thought at the time it was a curse." Well, you know what the Lord can do, but there was—I've—in the history of the church some terrible, terrible decisions relative to the career destiny of man, mankind, or people. You know, you think of like Joan of Arc. Good grief.

SL: Yeah.

[02:38:18] JO: It's amazing. Poor Joan.

SL: Poor Joan.

JO: Those were crazy days. Boy. Put people in those wagons—trumble, they called 'em, I think. Hauled 'em off to chop their heads off. Oof. Tough stuff.

SL: Well. They just couldn't hear—they couldn't hear the commandments, I guess. Or they couldn't hear, you know, the right word or the word. They would—you know, it's like how—I—you know, it is—there are tough times. You know, and I'm not sure that there aren't tough ti—that there probably tough times almost every day.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Maybe not on, you know, Biblical proportions . . .

JO: Big proportion, scale. Right.

SL: Yeah, scale, but if you were to add up all the personal tough

times together . . .

JO: Boy.

SL: . . . then it starts to take on . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . proportions.

JO: Proportions are way beyond. Phew.

[02:40:07] SL: What—is there anything—I know you ha—you've been retired for some time now.

JO: Yeah.

SL: But is there anything that's currently happening that is really placing the church in the same sort of advocate or ignore situation? Do you—you know, I know the abortion plank—they faced that head on. Are there any other issues that kind of bubble up to the top as far as volume, you know . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . as far as what people are hearing or experiencing within the church? [*Buzzing noise*]

JO: Well, offhand, I don't know. That other than—get back to the same thing, obedience to the bishop or to the pope or somebody.

[Recording stopped]

[02:41:19] JC: We're good. Go ahead.

SL: Oh, we're rolling. Okay. I found the quote. I—it says, "The nuns who taught us were always talking about vocations," you said. "In high school, the priests would tell us, 'Be a priest, go on a mission, spill your blood, be a martyr.'" [JO laughs] "So I did." [Laughter]

JO: Yeah. So I did.

SL: Well, there is a bit of a martyr on your stand for the human rights during the integration. There was something there. You stood up for what is undeniably the right thing to do.

JO: But not at the time. [Laughs]

SL: No, I think it is a timeless thing. I think it was the right thing to do and at precisely that time.

JO: Well, it was, but I mean in terms of the church, it wasn't in the right time. And I don't know if it ever would be the right time for that kind of thing in the church.

SL: So the church, then, would appear to be inflexible or not able to react because really, that sort of crisis is perfect . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . for the church to take a stand.

[02:42:52] JO: It is. Right.

SL: So I guess you could argue it wasn't the right time for the church, but it was the opportune time for the church.

JO: Well, that's right.

SL: In many ways.

JO: Right.

SL: But they decided that it wasn't the right time for whatever reason. I guess they felt the church was above all of that. Is that kind of the attitude that . . .

JO: Mh-hmm. But then when is the ideal time? The right time for anything?

SL: Right.

JO: You know. Can't—you just can't carve out your time and—or your vocation in terms of what you think is right or what may be right, may be wrong. But it just takes the congregation or of some people, anyway, to move the church.

[02:44:17] SL: Any organization that's—must sustain itself can fall prey to the monetary concerns of the . . .

JO: Amen.

SL: . . . impact . . .

JO: Oh, boy.

SL: And the impact of losing . . .

JO: Right.

SL: . . . dollars because of a stance or a decision. And but somehow it is still resilient. It is still . . .

JO: There's no doubt about it.

SL: I mean, I don't know what the worldwide membership is, but it's substantial.

JO: Oh, yes. Well.

SL: Yeah. That's a lot of folks believe in the church.

[02:45:11] JO: But if you go around and look at some of these parishes and diocese and try to measure what they're doin' or what the facts are of different cases and different styles of liturgy and worship, we might be surprised, you know. Surprised in the sense of how little is being done, you know, with the big issues. The—we have a big issue about war and peace. And the church has started wars, you know. And here we are on the brink of another war, it looks like, with Syria, and you know, where is the church on all this? I mean, would the pope go to anyplace to march or just proclaim peace and justice to all people?

SL: Be the martyr?

JO: Yeah. Be the martyr, and if he's killed or—whether he's killed or not killed, but it'd be a great witness.

SL: You wonder. That just makes me—it makes me wonder, you know, if the pope were to do something like that, to go to Syria and testify against war, would that take on apoleptic levels? I

mean, would it be, you know, a part of the apocalypse of that . . .

JO: Well, it'd be interesting to see what the reception would be by the lay church or even the ecclesiastical church, the bishops and the priests. But how much would they accept it? And are we called upon to do something about it even, you know, like before it happens 'cause we think there's a—but war now is unthinkable because of the weapons that we have. And I don't know who it would be that would bring the church to jump out and say, "Hey, this is crazy. We're gonna blow up the whole planet. And it's the only planet we know of. [*Laughs*] We live in." I don't know what all that means, but would be interesting to see what people feel about it. About what a church should be, what the church is doing or not doing.

[02:49:57] SL: I guess there's—there must be a point when an organization becomes inactive or doesn't take a stance that it starts to lose its viability.

JO: Yeah.

SL: You've used the word viable many times.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And I'm assuming that generally means active, that there is a congregation that is loyal and active and possibly growing.

JO: Yeah, exactly. And honest, you know, say "Hey we gotta put our money where our mouth is." Get out there and do it.

[02:50:40] SL: So are there any moments that you are most fond of in your career? Is there—are there any—are there a few that just stand out above others? And it—you know, for me, it can be the slightest, littlest thing that . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . means nothing to anyone else . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . but—I'm just wondering if there's something that really moved you from time to time in your career that struck home.

JO: It'd have to be something in line with the poor or the needy, and poor doesn't mean just poor of money. But it means poor of spirit, poor of anything. And to—that—you know, Jesus says comfort people. Comfort the dying, comfort this one, that one. We don't think a lot about that, but it's certainly a viable vocation, you know. But when you look at it, you think—over the centuries we would find—like there was a St. Francis of Assisi. Then you could go down and—up and down the scale and pick out a saint who really kinda saved the world. Or just saved a locality or saved random people. That'd be fantastic, you know. But the church is so big now. I don't know how we can

do that. But we should be able to take a stand on it, anyway.

[02:53:30] SL: Yeah. Swords into plowshares. I was actually in a art show a few weeks ago where someone had actually taken swords and made them into a plowshare. [*JO laughs*] And it was bu—of course it was a beautiful piece.

JO: Beautiful piece, yeah.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Amen. Woo. [*Laughs*] Gracious.

SL: Actually, it's an artist from North Little Rock. [02:54:17] You know, you mentioned the Protestant Reformation as a major event. Why don't you talk to me about the Protestant Reformation a little bit?

JO: Well, course you know all about Martin Luther, but what we forget is Martin Luther was exercising his theology as he saw it. Also his piety. And if he were around today, you know, he—people would have spared him, and they would have followed him. And maybe there is a Martin Luther out there somewhere ready to go do battle with whatever. I don't know. But if he were here today—it's amazing how many priests—I mean, notorious pre—notorious. I don't mean negatively, but notorious famous and fulfilled and all that—how many priests are like Francis of Assisi today. And most of 'em you don't know about

and most—you know, a lot of them in Latin America. Gosh, a slaughterhouse down there. Whew. Lots of martyrs. But I'm sure if Martin Luther were here today, he'd be railing again. I don't know against what. Maybe war, probably. And then—and there's beaucoup good books coming out or are out already that many lay people are reading. And they come to mean something very deep in the life of a Catholic Christian.

[02:57:10] And I had a lady the other day come see me, and she had the book by Richard Rohr, *R-O-H-R*, Franciscan. Texas. See, Richard Rohr would be among the loyal, faithful, among the kind of people who are an itch, who are a pain in the neck, but nonetheless they're onto something. And Richard Rohr has— anyway, this lady came the other day, and he just wanted to share with me. It was a revelation to her about what Richard Rohr was trying to do. And what we should all be doing, saving the world, not only saving the church, but saving the world. And saving our worship and our culture in terms of theology. Incredible. And he's got a very, very large coterie of people following him. So I was glad that that lady came to see me. And she said, "Look, read this." She said, "I never heard that before." Said, "Well, there it is." [*Laughs*]

[02:59:03] SL: So what was she—there was some of it that was

troubling to her or challenging her . . .

JO: No, she was challenging—challenged because she wanted to—wondered several things about why didn't I—why wasn't this told to me before? How come this priest from Texas comes along now and says what I've always believed? You know, about the church or whatever.

SL: So he spells it out.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And it was good news for her.

JO: It was good news for her.

SL: But she was concerned that it didn't come until now.

JO: Yeah. She thought she'd been gypped.

[Recording stoped]

[02:59:56] JO: Anyway. Who will be the next St. Francis of Assisi?

SL: Well, you may be right, it may be some Latin American country.

JO: Boy, they're suffering terribly down there. Economically and—whew.

SL: Well, let's—that's kind of—that's consistent with the miracles of the past. They happen with unknown folk. I mean, I can't—is there a miracle that happened with someone really famous, or—it always seems like it was the poor or the . . .

JO: Somebody . . .

SL: . . . the sick.

JO: . . . nobody. Yeah.

SL: Or nobodies.

JO: Yeah. I don't know. [*Intercom in background*] Hmm.

[03:01:15] SL: Well, there's all—I don't know. I guess you had a really good moment with her, then.

JO: Yeah.

SL: When she brought this to you and had these questions on how this happened.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And I guess she left you the book to read, is that . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: And you read it, and you see where she's coming from and . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: And did it raise some hope for you?

JO: Sure, it made . . .

SL: Did it affect you in the same . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . way as it did her?

JO: Yep.

SL: I guess I'm gonna have to read this.

JO: I'll get that book for you.

SL: Okay. That's a deal.

JO: Sure will.

SL: That's a deal.

JO: Yeah.

SL: That'd be good.

JO: You'll be—you'll love it. Quite sure.

[03:02:08] SL: I love that. Thank you. Well, so when did you start thinking about retirement?

JO: Well, to tell you the truth, I never thought about it.

SL: You just made the decision in 2009 and did it?

JO: Well, it was partly the bishop's retirement, not mine. *[Laughs]*

SL: Ah.

JO: Oh, my. I told him I was not happy.

SL: With the bishop's retirement?

JO: My retirement.

SL: Ah, I see.

JO: And then he told me he was not happy. *[Laughs]* So what the heck.

SL: So you in some way crossed him once again, and he just felt like it was time for you to retire?

JO: Mh-hmm.

SL: Well, you had had sixty years?

JO: Yeah.

SL: Somethin' like that.

JO: With all due respects it's not—that's not too bad, you know.

That's a long time.

SL: It is a long time. [03:03:42] So in that sixty-year period, what was the hardest thing for you?

JO: The hardest thing. Gosh. Hard to narrow it down, but what was hard for me was when my classmate Walter Clancy retired—well, he didn't retire, he quit and got married. And then Jim ?Durain? quit. I don't know what exactly the sequence was. Then Edward Bauman. Joe Biltz. You know, there's four or five guys that . . .

SL: That were in the same boat with you.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And had left the boat.

JO: Yeah. And everybody kept saying, "O'Donnell, when are you leaving?" [*Laughs*] So I'm not leaving yet.

SL: You know, I get the impression you feel like your work is not done.

JO: Maybe so. Mh-hmm.

SL: I just feel like you felt like you were retired before your time. Is that . . .

JO: Mh-hmm.

[03:05:59] SL: You know, I would think that—I—maybe not, but I would think the charge to comfort the dying would be a hard thing to do. 'Cause that never ends. Course, none of it ever ends, really, but you know, the—for me, it's people that you know.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And cared about, and they are leaving the boat.

JO: Yes.

SL: With you still in it. But they're doing it—it's not their choice, you know, it is their time. So I would guess—I mean, is there so—is the other side of that that they're moving on to a better place? I mean, that's what everyone always says. Their suffering is . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . over.

JO: Yeah, he's in—right. The obituaries all, mostly all of them, say something to that effect. "My husband's gone to a happier state, place."

SL: Joined the Lord.

JO: Yeah, joined the Lord. Lord has received him.

[03:07:36] SL: So you still have siblings that are alive.

JO: Just one.

SL: Just one.

JO: Mary.

SL: Mary.

JO: The nun.

SL: The oldest?

JO: Yeah. The oldest. Still alive, and she's ninety-five, six, somewhere around there.

[03:07:58] SL: And where is she at?

JO: She's in Pennsylvania at the retirement home for the nuns outside of Philly.

SL: Do y'all communicate at all?

JO: Yeah. She was deme—had some dementia for a while there. She was talkin' about Mom and all that like she was still living. And last time she called, she started to talk about things that didn't exist. I just said—I kind of obviously just patronized her and said, "Yeah, mh-hmm." No sense getting after her, say, "Mary, she died twenty years ago." [*Laughs*] That's not gonna do any good.

SL: That's right. Well, it is what they are experiencing at that time.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Whether it's . . .

JO: It is.

SL: . . . real to us or not, it's . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . certainly real to them.

JO: Right.

SL: They're convinced of it. They're speaking openly about it and they're not aware that it may be delusional.

JO: Yeah.

[03:09:35] SL: So do you—I know that you have lots of visitors here. Lots of folks come to see you still.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And that's got to do something for your spirit, doesn't it, that they still come?

JO: Oh, yeah, they did—you know, they—that—without being proud about anything, it's just—makes me feel good if people feel good, you know. No hanky panky, and they just get along and enjoy a happy life. Heck, can't beat that.

SL: Well, it does make the—I'm sure it makes them feel good to see you and that they make the effort to come see you. It's . . .

JO: Yeah, otherwise they wouldn't do it.

SL: Well, I think they may do it to help you feel better, but it makes them feel better, too. It's the . . .

JO: It does. Give and take.

SL: It giving and taking both ways.

JO: Right.

SL: And I don't see that there's anything awful about that. I think that's . . .

JO: Oh, I don't either.

SL: . . . the way it should be.

JO: I don't, either.

[03:11:07] SL: Whatcha thinkin' about?

JO: Thinking about what we just said about [*laughs*] whether we'd come to receive or give, giveth, taketh away, whatever. Heck.

[03:11:47] SL: Well, I asked you what was the hardest thing. Why don't I ask you what has been the most fun? And I'm not gonna rule out throwing rocks at the street lights.

JO: [*Laughs*] Yeah. Woo! [*SL laughs*] Oh, my. I don't know. We've—when I talk about we, the collective we, talking about the—my classmates and other guys that—around here. Some of those who are in Arkansas you see periodically. And kinda gives you a boost, you know. Companionship, I suppose. Interesting that—I think it's interesting, anyway to me, a friendship, which is companionship, which means that you break bread together. Like *P-A-N*, pan means bread. So companion means somebody I break bread with. The Europeans know more about this than we do because they don't take lightly the fact that you're breakin'

bread together. You know, their meals are much more ceremonial than ours, and well, I was gonna say spiritual, but probably chaotic, you know, with all those—you think about the Italian movies you have seen, and particularly when they have dinner together, they have a celebration. It's a—just absolutely pure chaos [*laughter*], you know, but they love it, and they say, "Oh my goodness!" [*Laughs*] Wonderful. Makes me wish I were Italiano. [*SL laughs*] Hey.

[03:15:27] SL: Well, I'm sure you had some wonderful feasts.

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: You know, I like—I always say—speak in terms of—like today, putting my feet under your table.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And sharing the table, actually sitting and . . .

JO: That . . .

SL: I do think there is something—that that means something.

JO: Sure does.

SL: Yeah.

JO: See, again, the Europeans wouldn't—they do not take—it's not like drop in for a hamburger or something like that the way we do or have a Coke or something. When they decide to have celebration or something good, they do it. [*SL laughs*] You

know.

SL: Yeah.

JO: Break the bread. Promise. [*Laughs*] It's wonderful.

[03:16:33] SL: Did you ever get to go to Italy?

JO: Yes, I've been to Italy about five times, I guess.

SL: You've been to Rome.

JO: Yeah. I've taken a couple of pilgrimages to Rome. And I've gone on a couple of pilgrimages, and I've also gone with some of my buddies and some priests, and one is dead now, ?Ernie Fucci? from Oklahoma. He was a classmate, and he died—gosh, not a year yet. But coming up on a year. He loved to travel. He'd call, and he'd make all the arrangements, you know. He knew things that no travel agent ever thought about [*laughs*], you know. And he's, "Hey, John, come on, we're goin' to wherever." [*Laughs*] He was good.

SL: And you probably never turned him down 'cause you knew he'd worked it all out.

JO: No, I didn't. I did not. Unless it was dire consequences, you know, for turning him . . .

SL: Right.

JO: . . . down.

[03:18:29] SL: So I always hate start a sentence with so, but where

do you think—I mean, do you think that the church is in a good place these days, or is it still fraught with inaction and—I mean, there's so many loyal people to the church it's just amazing to me how full the sanctuaries are and how participatory they are. And you know, the—there's also the schools, the Catholic schools.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Are so vibrant.

JO: Right. Indeed they are. But I think the church [*clears throat*]— 'scuse me—is as healthy now as it's ever been, and in some respects more healthy. I mean, the things that Pope Francis is doing are remarkable.

SL: He does seem to be . . .

JO: You know.

SL: . . . awfully popular.

JO: Yeah, he is. And gosh, he does astounding things. Astounding to me, anyway. Like sharing bread or sharin' this or that or the other thing with people and the poor and thinkin' about people who quote "cannot receive communion" and what are we gonna do about all those people. Pretty good.

SL: How are you doin'? Are you okay?

JO: Yeah.

[03:20:51] SL: Is there—have you thought of anything we haven't talked about that we should be talking about?

JO: Well, yeah, we've talked about, I think, categorically, the spiritual life of the church, the brotherhood of the believers, those kinds of things, you know, all of which are good. And although which I think are becoming more meaningful because—yeah, well, just because the pope gets out and, you know, fondles little babies and talks to people and takes off his zucchetto, his brown hat, and puts it on babies.

SL: Well, or babies take it off him.

JO: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

SL: For him. [*Laughs*]

JO: That's right.

SL: I love that. I love that video.

JO: Yeah, like that.

SL: Yeah. Yeah.

JO: But I've—I think that's all to the good. Really to the good.

SL: It's amazing how strong images are, moving images.

JO: Oh yeah. Right.

SL: Ke—he was so delighted.

JO: Oh yeah.

SL: To have his cap . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . removed. He [*laughs*]*—*He really reveled in it.

JO: Yeah, he did. [*Laughs*]

SL: And you can't help but smile and love that.

JO: You cannot help but that.

SL: Yeah, you don't get the feeling that he's sitting on a do-nothing throne.

JO: Oh, boy, you sure don't. No way. Because as we sit here talking, he's also over there talking to cardinals and tellin' 'em to shape up and all those good things.

[Recording stopped]

[03:22:58] SL: You know, the amazing thing about the internet and the web and what we do is that our audience can really spike really big. Sometimes we'll see as many as 70,000 hits in . . .

JO: Wow.

SL: . . . a matter of hours.

JO: Whew!

SL: So you know, I think . . .

JO: Amazing.

SL: I do think that there is something about us being together here today. I know it certainly is for me. I've been . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . looking forward to this, and I've been hoping that I could rise to the occasion to meet with you because the things that I've heard and the things that I've read about you are so impressive to me. And so I want you to think about this time together not just only because it's between you and me, but that there will be others . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . that will pay attention to this. Certainly your friends . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . and the people that have—that you've affected their lives, their families. But also I think that some of the things that we've addressed today need to be said.

JO: Yeah. I do, too.

[03:24:22] SL: So I want you to think about what you would—maybe not so much if you're at the pulpit, but what you would say if you had a chance to speak to everybody and them be able to hear it over and over again, what would you say? And I know this is kind of unfair to spring upon you. But I think that you have many things that you would like to say. And we've said quite a few, but it's been a little bit constricted and a little narrow because it's a one-on-one dialogue. So you could address any and all with what you would like to leave folks. So I

can shut up, and you can just think about it a while, or you can have that kind of rolling in the back of your head, and we can continue, but I want you to grasp the opportunity here. I think this—I think you're a viable source.

[03:25:42] JO: Well, I wish—thank you for saying that, but I wish I were up to the task. Saying something brilliant or an idea or a new connection or a whatever to pick people's brain or mind, where they're coming from—I must say that in the church today there is more honesty and obviously conversation and dialogue than there has been—I can't say for the whole millennium for all the churches, but I can say that my experience is that we've come, in just my sixty years as a priest or eighty years as a Christian or human being, that it moves me, you know, and then I want to be authentic, and I wanna be wholesome or complete in what I'm thinking and saying. And we have pretty much covered very, very, very many things. And some deep things, but—which is fine, but there is—you know, the old expression, I don't know if Don Quixote or who said, "To start a journey is being where you're going." And so just stand and start a journey, just start anything. Create whatever. And then let it just bloom and blossom. And become something that other people can enjoy and use and some of the people can just make

it their own. I think that's a blessed thing. You know, I always say, a lot of times, I wish I could be like him. Wish I could be like her. And that means in terms attributes, in terms of talents, graces, all those things. And they're within reach of all of us, but we don't know that. We—in fact, my own experiences is that I don't acknowledge it, therefore it doesn't grow on me. And it doesn't become part of me, and it doesn't become something that's outside of me that I can share with somebody else.

[03:30:14] And so these kinds of moments are the reality of what Christianity's all about, or life. You know, we all know people who are—who do not go to church. Maybe some are atheists or what, but nonetheless, they can have deep insights that we need to listen to. We clerics or professional religious people. Which is a big order. But obviously, the scriptures are full of it, but books like—well, good grief, *Don Quixote*. Any number of books that would just tickle our curiosity, but also it would satisfy that curiosity up to a point, but after while we have to kinda let that grow on us, you know. [03:32:05] So to think about things like that, to me is a sense of peace, a sense of nobility, sense of togetherness, whatever, you know. Anyway, that's what we do, at least that's what I try to do. Don't do it all the time, but I try to do when I read something that rings a bell,

that provokes me. Other than that, you know, in terms of today's thought and tomorrow's thought, tomorrow's question, tomorrow's answer. You know, what am I—what do I—how do I face that? What do I do about it? And it's about what we do about it. To ask a question is already havin' the answer. At least part of the answer. Otherwise you wouldn't even know enough to ask the question. That's a wonderful thing, to ask a question. Something undiscovered yet. Anyway, that's about where we are. Where I am.

[03:34:09] SL: I hear—I got stuck with nobility, having nobility, and really I sense that all of us have nobility.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Laying in—if not evident, certainly laying in wait.

JO: Certainly. I believe that. Right.

SL: I think there are a few things that are common among all beings.

JO: Ab—boy. That's right. There are.

SL: And I never hadn't thought of nobility, but really . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . the path toward . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . nobility . . .

JO: Right.

SL: . . . is in that journey within us, right?

JO: Sure. Wow.

[03:35:09] SL: All right, I have—I thought of a question that I hadn't asked yet, and it was one that I thought of before. Is it— it just may be my perception, but in all the churches, I don't know if it's worldwide or if it's just in the United States, but the topics of the sermon at hand each Sunday, do they all—do all those pulpits, Christian pulpits, share the same topic on that day?

JO: No.

SL: They don't. So that's this perception that I have.

JO: Yeah. They do not.

SL: Okay.

JO: Fact, any of—the Methodists follow our liturgy and our words of scripture, you know.

SL: Okay.

JO: And back at the ranch, a lady that sits at the table with us is a Methodist. And has been Methodist, you know, for generations. And very up on things, you know, but yet not holy, not preachy, not righteous, self righteous. But nonetheless, she has a wonderful philosophy of life, evidently. And good natured. She's

coming up on her hundredth birthday, I think. She's a really neat person. Her husband's still living, and he's there with her. Celebrating which—I forget which anniversary, but it's amazing.

SL: So you got to meet her late in life?

JO: Mh-hmm.

[03:37:39] SL: I have a confession. I was raised Methodist. I don't go to the Methodist church anymore. I go with my wife to her Catholic church.

JO: Yeah.

SL: And I did see—it—they did seem to mirror each other . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . in the liturgy, as you said.

JO: They do.

SL: And I was just suspicious. All of a sudden, I thought, "Well, now is this true across the whole spectrum?"

JO: Yeah.

SL: But you're tellin' me it's not. It's—there is some that follow the same . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . liturgy but it's not universal. I—for some reason that kind of makes me feel a little better. I don't know why I was a little bit panicky that every year we're hearing the same thing at the

same time every . . .

JO: Yeah.

SL: . . . every Sunday, and I was thinking, "My gosh, what if we're hearing the wrong thing?"

JO: Yeah.

SL: Or you know, what if the tape is . . .

JO: True.

SL: . . . not true. Yeah.

JO: Yeah.

[03:38:39] SL: [*Laughs*] Well, thank you for clearing that up for me. And I—actually, I think everything that you just said is quite remarkable.

JO: I don't know. It's a great gift God gave us to—which the, you know, the old saying that to begin a journey puts you already there, you know. You've already arrived if you're—you know, when you're on the way. And that's a wonderful thought.

SL: It is a wonderful thought. And defensible.

JO: Yeah.

SL: Yeah. I guess the actual physical journey may reveal a different place than where you thought you were going.

JO: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

SL: May not be exactly the way you pictured it but . . .

JO: Well, but [*laughs*] . . .

SL: The commitment to go . . .

JO: Yes.

SL: . . . puts you there.

JO: That's it.

SL: There is that. Yeah. [*JO laughs*]

JO: Right. What's that old saying? To begin a journey, you're already there, you know. You start out.

[03:40:22] SL: Yep. Well, there is something that we do at the end of all of our interviews. And you can participate or not. But what I ask is that you look straight at this camera and you say, "My name is" . . .

JO: John O'Donnell, whatever.

SL: . . . "John O'Donnell, and I'm proud to be from Arkansas." [*JO laughs*] I think you are from Arkansas.

JO: Oh, why, you're not kiddin'.

SL: Ca—do you—would you mind doing that for me?

JO: No, I'd love to do it.

SL: Okay, well, I'm gonna let Josh direct you here. He'll get you all prepped up, and you really have to look right at the very center of that . . .

JO: Right.

SL: . . . lens.

JO: Okay. I can do that.

SL: And I'm gonna get out of this chair so you're not thinking about me.

JO: I can do that.

SL: Okay. Great.

JO: Thank you.

JC: Whenever you're ready, you can go ahead.

[03:41:27] JO: I'm in—I'm ready. Now I give my name and I'm proud to be from Arkansas.

SL: Uh-huh.

JO: Okay.

SL: He's waitin' on you.

JC: You can go whenever you're ready.

JO: Oh, excuse me.

JC: Go ahead.

JO: My name is John O'Donnell, and I'm proud to say that I'm a citizen of Arkansas.

SL: I like that. [*JO laughs*] I like that. Do you wanna do it one more time?

JO: Sure.

SL: And just say "I'm John McDonald, and I'm proud to be from

Arkansas?"

JO: Yeah.

SM: Josh, have him hold it for a couple of seconds after he finishes.

JC: Okay, and as soon as you finish what you're saying . . .

JO: Yeah.

JC: . . . just continue looking into the lens . . .

JO: Yeah.

JC: . . . for a few seconds.

JO: Will do it.

JC: Thank you.

[03:42:23] JO: I am John O'Donnell, and I'm proud to say that I'm
from Arkansas.

SL: Perfect. That's great.

JO: Oh, good.

SL: Good.

JO: Thank you.

SL: So I think we're done.

[End of interview 03:42:57]