

8-4-2014

Sr. Jean Michael Sauntry

Mary Ellen Lennon Ph.D.

Marian University - Indianapolis, melennon@marian.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://mushare.marian.edu/wrp>

 Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), [United States History Commons](#), and the [Women's History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lennon, Mary Ellen Ph.D., "Sr. Jean Michael Sauntry" (2014). *Women Religious: Oral Histories of the Sisters of St. Francis, Oldenburg*. 21.
<https://mushare.marian.edu/wrp/21>

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives at MUShare. It has been accepted for inclusion in Women Religious: Oral Histories of the Sisters of St. Francis, Oldenburg by an authorized administrator of MUShare. For more information, please contact emandity@marian.edu.

August 4th, 2014 – Sister Jean Michael Sauntry speaking with Professor Mary Ellen Lennon at the Convent of the Sisters of St. Francis in Oldenburg, Indiana.

Abbreviations

SJMS: Sister Jean Michael Sauntry

MEL: Mary Ellen Lennon

MEL: This is Mary Ellen Lennon in Oldenburg, Indiana at the Convent of the Sisters of Saint Francis. I am very happy to be sharing this interview with Sister Jean Sauntry. Would you like to introduce yourself Sister?

SJMS: Yes, I would. Actually my religious name is Sister Jean Michael Sauntry and it's often we just used the Jean. That that's my religious name. My birth name is Bernadette. So I would like to start back when I was just four years old. I had double pneumonia and I was, the doctors gave up hope that I would even live through the night, but my mother got a telegram from her uncle who was a Monsignor George LaForest who was up in Michigan saying, "Have no fear she will live." And so after this all happened, my mother said to me one day, "God has some plan for you in the future otherwise you would have died last, that night." And so all of my life I was wondering about that.

When I was about 8 years old I had a doll collection and my mother brought a nun doll ah for my collection and sat me down and told me what—the life of a Sister. And we lived in a little town in Iowa and there was no Catholic school there and so we didn't have any Sisters in it and I had never seen any Sisters, but from that moment of that discussion with my mother I am sure that's where my vocation began.

And so as my life went on I, I eventually entered the convent here at Oldenburg, Indiana when I was 17 years old and I thought to myself, This is what the plan was way back then. Then life went on. I taught school after uh, after I was educated and as a teacher and then something else came into my, my life, oh I, excuse me. Back when I was 8 years—no not 8—about 11 or 12, I would sing if I was doing dishes. I would sing at the top of my voice, I love to sing and I was hoping that a talent scout would come and whisk me off to Hollywood. Well this didn't happen of course, but as time went on I was able to be in a few plays the *Oklahoma!* and *Sound of Music* and *Beauty and the Beast* and then another *Sound of Music* with the Academy students here. And then I thought to myself, This is it, this is it. This is what the Lord wanted me to be able to use my voice and to sing. And that's what I was doing in all these plays. Well as time went on and I was able to go to Carnegie Hall and sing and I thought, Ah-ha, this is it, this is why I was able to live all this time to be able to go to Carnegie Hall.

But then one day we were told about the mission of Papua New Guinea and right before we heard about Papua New Guinea, the Holy Father in Rome asked for all the religious communities to take a mission in a foreign country and I think if I remember correctly, specifically in South America. And so we were all to make novenas and I prayed for that intention. While we were doing this novena two priests, Capuchin priests, came. They were on leave from working in Papua New Guinea and they were looking for Sisters to come and

work there and the main reason they wanted sisters was because the men in Papua New Guinea would not let their women or their girls that come near the priests the Capuchins. And so they couldn't educate the girls and that's what a big thing that they wanted and Capuchins wanted to, of course to, to bring Christ to the people, but also to get these women so they too could share in this wonderful experience.

And so we accepted that mission after some time and we were told a letter came out to all of us who were teaching in different areas in the States and so as we were asked if we would have that desire to go we should make a novena of our own, pray for a week to discern if that's where God was really calling. Well then when this all happened I thought, Ah-ha, this is the reason I'm still alive. And so I made the Novena and I wrote my letter to the Reverend Mother asking to go, to be one of the missionaries to go to Papua New Guinea. I did not receive any answer. However, four other Sisters were chosen and went and the next year two more and two more and life went on like that and I thought well maybe this isn't what I'm meant to do.

But, so I thought, Well I was accepting that, that I wasn't going to be chosen. But then the Sisters came home from mission, for a leave time from Papua New Guinea and the stories that they told and the experiences that they had and then my heart was pulled again and I just knew, I just knew, that this God was calling me there too. And so again I wrote, I wrote the letter. By this time, Mother Marie was the Reverend Mother and she had been my high school principal and so I knew her and she knew my family and so I when I wrote my letter and she would answer and say and she said to me this one time which really broke my heart, "You may not go because I know how dear your father is to you and you to your father, so you may not go to New Guinea until after your father dies." That was such a shock to me to hear that hear those words and I thought, Oh my, because I said to her, "Mother you don't you don't know my father. He is so excited about the fact that I may be chosen to go to Papua New Guinea. He reads every article that ever comes out about Papua New Guinea. He got the encyclopedia and he read all about Papua New Guinea and he would be thrilled if I was chosen."

Well, I wasn't. So then I'd wait and then another group would come home from New Guinea and then I'd write another letter and this kept it going for thirteen years I waited to be able to go and finally I got the answer that I—"Yes, you may go." And so another Sister her name is Sister Paulita Schuman also had the desire to go and she got the courage to ask after I was received and we got to go together so we traveled together back to Papua New Guinea, not back but to Papua New Guinea and we were separated as far as being that same mission, but that was fine because we were you know at the stations, so I was sent to Kagua and Paulita remained in Mendi, which was the headquarters of the diocese and we had another mission over in Tari. So I actually served in all three of those areas of the deanery of the Mendi Deanery.

So well before I went to Papua New Guinea I was twenty years in elementary school. I taught second grade most of the time. Sometimes first grade and one time even kindergarten so, so I loved the little children. So I went to Kagua and I taught two years in Kagua in the second grade. It was quite different teachings of the children in the second grade there then it was a teaching the children that second grade here in the States. First of all I had to get used to a lot of things like I would walk down the aisle in the school room and weeds would be coming up out of the, between the boards. Something I would never

experience here. Another thing was seeing footprints, not shoe prints, but footprints all over the floor as they walked in on the hardwood floor, that was, that really caught me.

So the children did not know too much English. They were they were very—they just, I'm thinking that the first-grade teacher used their language to teach. Oh I might state that there's over 800 languages in Papua New Guinea and I was in Kagua and that their language was Kaywabi?. So these children knew that language, but they didn't know much English and in Papua New Guinea because there were so many different languages there they took adapted a Melanesian pidgin English for all, for the whole country because if you would just drive like a one-hour distance to another station that would be a different language area. So that would be in Mongu? Over in the, for an hour's drive from where we were. Another hour's drive in Mendi. The language was called Mendi, so that was, that was the area there. So to be able to converse with their own countrymen they had to use this Melanesian and Pidgin English and I'll let you know what that sounds like in a while.

So I talked a second grade for two years there in Kagua and that took me up to oh I went over in 1973 and so then I taught two years and in 1975 the country became independent and so they did not want any expats, which we were in this country to teach in their elementary schools anymore because now they had enough of their own Papua New Guinean teachers to teach in the elementary school. So we could stay in high schools, but we could not teach in the grade schools anymore. So I was sent over to Tari, which was another area in the Diocese of Mendi and over there Sister Maureen Mahon was teaching in a catechist school so she had met young men and young women and she was teaching them to be able to go to their churches way in the bush area and bushes like country, it's way far in that distance and they would walk in for miles to come to this school every week and then they would stay during the week and then and they would be taught and so I went over to assist Sister Maureen in teaching the Catechist in that school and that was a great experience to do that.

I had to well I had learned Pidgin English, Sister Paulita and I had studied it before we went over and we knew many, many words, but putting them into sentences was another, another something. So I had a grammar book for Papua New Guinea English, I mean Pidgin English and so I would study the lesson and then I would teach the new catechists that came in because in Tari the people were called the Huli's and they it was such a huge large area that they never even had to leave that area to talk to others so they did not know the Pidgin English. So I had to teach these young fellows that came in and only knew Huli, their language pidgin. I had to teach them pidgin. So that was a neat experience it was really, I enjoyed it so much.

It was like being in retreat the whole week when I was working with these young men and women because we were preparing them to take the Sunday readings the first, second and the Gospel and we went through those lessons and taught them and showed them how to teach and told them how to teach other people. So they would take all of this out to their churches and then they would conduct these services and with their people. So it was just a real rewarding time to be over there with them and so okay.

I would like to go back to the time I was teaching the second grade. One of the ways that we taught them and helped them to learn English was to repeat sentences so we might say, "This is a desk." Then the whole class would say, "This is a desk." And then they repeat it

and repeat it, This is a desk, this is a desk. "It is raining today, it is raining today, it is raining today, it is raining today." They would repeat, repeat. Well by the end of my two years, this class, I said to this class, "Now it's time for you to tell me a sentence and so what would you like to say?" So this one little girl had her hand raised and she was all excited. So I called on her and she said, "Sister Jean is very fat." (laughs). So the whole class says, "Sister Jean is very fat, Sister Jean is very fat" and I had to laugh because I wasn't fat at that time, I had—but to them I was. I had more meat as it was on my bones than they did. So that was just the experience that I backtracked with.

MEL: I'm interested in those children that you taught the second graders.

SJMS: Yes, I had the girls and the boys. Of course you kept them separated because even in churches when they came from services the women would be on one side and the men would be on the other and so that's the way it was in school: the girls were here the boys were here. But as time went on, we did things you know together and they kind of interweaved with each other. But mainly it was, they were separated. The boys were wearing their native garb which is leaves in the back and a little netted affair in the front and that's all they had on and the little girls had grass skirts and that was all they had when I when we first went over there. Later on they began to wear European clothes as they would call it because things would be sent over to the country and so we had they began to wear clothes and more so when I went over there after 13 years of the Sisters being there then when they first began the mission.

What can I say about the children? We would go one time we went out together to have a mumu and that of the mumu is when you would prepare your food and then dig a hole in the ground and put rocks in the bottom, that had been cooked, as you say, fired up, heated stones and then you would put banana leaves over the heated stones and then put your food there and then cover that all up with more banana leaves. Banana leaves were huge huge big leaves and then put the dirt back down over it, cover that all up. And when it would steam. When you would see steam coming out of the ground, you would know that the food was ready to take out and so then the children because they have been these children were oh they probably were about maybe seven or eight years old because they might even have been older than that. Some of them probably were. They didn't start you know as we did, early. They had experienced and knew how to do all this. They would do it, they did it themselves and they would—so then it was time to take it out and they opened up the hole and they took the leaves off very carefully so the food wouldn't get anything on it and then they would give us, they it would pass out these great big leaves we'd all sit in a circle and then they would come and put the food on our leaf and so we enjoyed that together that was a very nice experience.

Another time we would all go down to the river and we, but enjoy sitting there with our feet in the water and just enjoying the water coming down a little stream a little tiny waterfalls. I remember doing that. That was a lot of fun. That's about the only thing we did there at Kagua as far as leaving the school area. At noon time it was really nice because we didn't have to have a lunch period because their mothers would have cooked kaukau, which was a sweet potato and they would have that in their little bags, which was called a bilum, a string bag and so they'd have it with them. So they'd go out to play and after at lunch time and they would have just take out their potato and eat that. At here in the States, bread is the main thing, but in Kagua it's the potato, the sweet potato and there were different types

of sweet potatoes over there. They were all delicious, but you could, they would just take it out, pound on it because it was full of ashes from being cooked in the ashes, but during the night and then they would just eat it, skin and all. It was fun. Nice to see that, you didn't have to worry about their dinnertime.

So now we're back in Kagua, I mean back in Tari. Besides teaching in the catechist school, I had a group of adults that came and I had a big chart with Bible stories on it. I remember the first day I began they must have been maybe about ten men and maybe eight women it was a nice group and I began to teach and when I would teach in Pidgin English. I'd say it in Pidgin English and I'd have an interpreter and it was a woman this was a young girl and she would stand, repeat it in Huli. So it was from that pidgin to and then she would take it and say the same thing to them; we hoped that they were saying the same thing we would, you know, at that time, we didn't know. And so one thing I said I had taught about, oh maybe 20 minutes and I stopped and I said to her, "You ask them all, Havi got some fella question or no got?" and so she would talk and all of a sudden a man way in the back he was going on, talking, talking. I thought, Oh my goodness, what is he saying? I was getting really worried and finally she kind of chuckled and she turned to me and she said, "There's been a bon em e, emy talk al same. You yeh, you go, you work long dispella. Story, al getit, finis. Behin you me ask em questions." So, he was saying, "You go ahead and teach your whole lesson and when you're finished, we will then ask our questions" (laughs). And so I thought, Okay. And so I went ahead and I finished my lesson and when I got finished, oh maybe a half an hour later. I said, I said to the lady, "Now do you have any questions?: You me all get a got questions now?"

So she said that to them. And they all put their hand, they wanted to talk. And they, they went right—it was amazing. They would go back to the first—the first story that I told or the first part and asked the questions. Their minds were so clear because their minds were not all you know filled with the distractions and things that we have from childhood on and they were very and a very intelligent people they really were. We found that amongst all of them, they're very intelligent and so that amazed me that they could remember from the beginning of the story and they asked their questions and I just enjoyed working with them so much; it was just wonderful. So between the catechists and teaching those people via these other adults that were not catechists, they were mothers and fathers, and just ordinary people and so that was a wonderful experience that I had in the Tari area.

After that I was in Tari, I was in Kagua for two years then I was in Tari for six. And this was—it was time for a leave because I—we went home every four and a half years or sometimes three and a half or four, four, or four and a half years. We went home for a leave, we would stay home for maybe three or four months and just refresh ourselves here in the States and then we go back and believe me, we really needed that time. A time away. It was wonderful being there, but when you came home and were back in our own air as you know, life back here. You just, you just needed that time. You just needed that time to refresh yourself and to get ready to go back again although it was wonderful; I couldn't wait to get back and all that, but when I came home this time in 1980, '80, '81, I think it was, I'm not sure and Sister Ruthann Boyle's parents had come and so when I went home on this leave Paulita, Sister Paulita and I, when we went home on this leave we accompanied her parents home, yeah so that was a nice experience to, to have them with us, take them home. And so—

MEL: I'm interested in the leave. Do you remember how it felt to come home?

SJMS: Well it was hard in so much as in—here in the States everything was going so fast. There in Papua New Guinea everything was slow. I mean if Mass was supposed to be at this particular time, they, people weren't in a hurry to get there. They might come, you know, I think they would they would either blow a whistle or not a whistle, they didn't, they would just go, "Woo" and they'd shout out and it was like a talking messenger and that would go out and out and out. And then the people would start to come, you know, they came, came. So you might start Mass like at eight o'clock and it didn't happen till maybe til eight-thirty because you're waiting around for the people to come. And it was—it was just a relaxing time. There was no hurry hurry up, hurry hurry and then wait wait. It just happened.

Part II

MEL: This is Mary Ellen Lennon on August 4, 2014 in Oldenburg Indiana at the Convent of the Sisters of Saint Francis. I'm continuing my conversation with Sister Jean Michael Sauntry. Sister would you like to continue?

SJMS: Yes, I mentioned going home for leave and in 1981. Well at this time I was in the throes of menopause and I was having a hard time with that and so when our leave was over and I said to Sister Paulita, "Don't you think it's time for us to start getting our things ready to go back to Papa New Guinea?" and she said, "Don't you think you should stay home a little longer because you're not ready to really to go back." And I said, "Well, I realized that I—I'm having a hard time with this and so, so Pauli—Sister Paulita went back by herself and I stayed, I remained in the country. At that time Sister Miriam Claire Hessecamp was regional superior as I shouldn't say regional. We used that word regional over at Papua New Guinea. She was our community—the head of our community and she—when I told her that I was—I wish to stay a little longer to get rid of—over this time in my life, this woman time in my life and she agreed with that just fine. When we come home from leave on leave, we also get things ready to send back, so that we have the things that we need clothes wise and other such things that we would need to have for the next four years that we were going to be over there. So we send boxes over and so I told Reverend Mother that I had sent my box over and she wasn't very pleased with that and I had a feeling in my heart that she's not going to let me go back.

And that's what happened, but she left me kind of hanging until after, after Christmas. And then she told me she dropped the bombshell that I was not going to return. But in my heart I knew that I would return sometime and so I needed to have a position and she said what do you want to do? I said, Well the only thing I know is teaching, but my teaching license has run out. So she said well you can go to Ball State and get the credits and there is a kindergarten over in Bedford, Indiana perhaps you could apply for that position. So I did I applied for the position and they took me right away, hired me right away after my interview and I went to Ball State that summer and I had to get eight credits to be able to do that teaching, but I came away was 12 in early childhood education. So I went and I taught that kindergarten half-day in Bedford, Indiana and the afternoon I taught religion classes in two other classes where we had teachers that were not Catholic and they didn't teach the religion. So I was enjoying that and I was there for two, summers two years. I had to go back to Ball State again the second summer and I got 12 more. So I had 24 credits in early

childhood and I—every year we get a paper for discernment of what we want to do the next year, are we happy with what we're doing or do we want to change or whatever. So at that paper and at the end of these two years, I said, I would like to return to Papua New Guinea.

By this time we had a new Reverend Mother and new counselors and one of the counselors happened to be the first sister that went over to Papua New Guinea, so I went to her and I asked her I said, "Well, what does the council and the Reverend Mother think of Sisters that want to go to Papa New Guinea? And she said, "Well we haven't really discussed that, but I'm sure that they would be open to it and I said, "Well I want to return to Papua New Guinea and she said, "Well give it a try, see what happens." And so I wrote that and they called me in for an interview. So I came to the interview and I can't remember—I could only remember two people and one was Sister Claire Whalen who had been a professor at Marian College, I think she still was at that time and the other was Sister Ramona Lunsford who was one of the counselors. I can't— and they were other sisters there, but I can't remember who and they were all questioning me: "Why do I want to go back to Papua New Guinea?" And I gave them my answer that I just feel in my heart that God is calling me back to working with the people in Papua New Guinea. And Sister Claire Whalen said, "But you are halfway to a master's degree in early childhood and I know how important that paper would be for you and I said, "You don't know me very well." I said, "I don't need a paper to tell me that I'm a master in early childhood. I know I'm a master in early childhood and in Papua New Guinea we don't need a master's degree to teach in their schools."

So we left it at that, but then I—because I was in home here at Oldenburg. My mother lives only a half an hour away in Harrison, Ohio, so I went to spend the evening with her and Sister Ramona that was on the council and was there for the interview called me on the phone and kept me on the phone for an hour and my mother was fit to be tied. She couldn't understand what was going on. But sister wanted me just stay in the education department here in the States and she said, "You're such a good teacher" and all that. But I said, "No, no, no. I didn't—I don't want to teach here in the States. I want to go back to Papua New Guinea."

And so finally she gave up and our conversation ended and so I went back to Bedford, not knowing if I was going back or not. But when the papers came out there said, "You may return to Papua New Guinea." So I was able to go back and I was so grateful and at this time when I went back, I went to Mendi. I was stationed in Mendi and as I as I came into the mission, this is so unbelievable. Sister Paulita at this time was our regional superior over there and she handed me this flier that had been posted all around Mendi. A preschool, no—yeah, a preschool teacher needed apply by writing and I said to Paulita. She said would you be interested in this. I said, "Would I be interested?" I said, "That was my desire to come back to Papua New Guinea and my original I wish was to gather up the little children that could not go to school and then I could teach those little people, but this is perfect. A preschool you know just right there at my hands.

This preschool was up in the town of Mendi at the end of the airstrip and right next to it was the Australian Army Camp, but not camp—headquarters because the Australian Army was based in Mendi, some of it, was based in Mendi and they were working on the roads teaching the Papua New Guinea people how to build roads and bridges. So that's why they were here. And so Australian children were in the—were to be in this school and there were other countries, children from other—whose parents were from other countries or they were

too, like England and Holland and Australia, Australia of course. And so it was like a League of Nations that's what it was like. So I went for the interview; I mean they called me the next day after they got my letter and they said, "Can you come for an interview?" and I said, "Yes."

So I went to the interview and here were all these—there were Papua New Guinea ladies and different nationality ladies standing, sitting around and they were shooting questions at me: "What would I do in this circumstance?" And so, I heard somebody say, "She's giving all the right answers" (laughs). And so, anyway, they hired me on the spot. So I taught at this preschool and I had a Papua New Guinea lady to assist me and another Papua New Guinea lady to clean up to do the cleaning part and it was wonderful I had these little expat kids were like three years old and three and a half and school was for two years. They would be there for two years and then they would go on. These people would go on to a school for international children that was in Mendi; they didn't go to the other the high school where the Papua New Guinea students were or the grade schools where they were.

And so but the Papua New Guinea children were like five and six year olds. So I had these three and—yeah the difference in their ages, but these Papua New Guinea children had not had all the experiences that the expats children had. So it was very interesting so I would teach in two languages. I would teach in Pidgin English and I would teach for the Papua New Guineans and teaching English for the other students, the expat students, but by the end—half of the year was over, the English children knew the Papua—Pidgin English, Pidgin English students—and so they really got along well. It was it was fun. I had a marvelous time at that school and I taught there for five years. Besides teaching there, I went once a week to the high school to teach religion. At first I did the teaching. Then later I got others, Papua New Guinea's young people to teach these classes; I would teach them how to teach and then they would teach. And I would observe them, so that's that was what I would do once a week. That was before the class for preschool because the early class and they did come till later.

In the afternoons I would go to the prison and I took care of the women in the prison and gave them Bible lessons and talked to them and if they wanted to they could tell me their reason for being there and if I thought, I felt that they were being unjustly in there in prison, I would go to the magistrate in the courthouse in Mendi and I would get the papers—I didn't go right to the magistrate, I went to get the papers. You can request papers for anybody that was there in prison. And I would read it over and I would—then I would take those papers to the magistrate and say and show the unjustness of this person being there. So I got a lot of women out of prison while I was there in this at this time in my Papua New Guinea career. One lady was there for adultery and that was a big case and so I got her out on her own recognizance—is that the right word? Yeah—and I couldn't have, she couldn't be tried there in Mendi because the man that was being charged adultery with her was being tried in Mendi so I had to take her all the way to three hours away to a Hagen in in another area to tell my story about what had happened and all that and then wait for the judge to come; the judge was an Australian. When he came and he saw right through the whole thing, she was being falsely accused. She, for one thing, he said, "She and this man went into the chicken house and spent the night in the chicken house." Well they didn't because the father of this girl was in the chicken house all night keeping the little chickies, new chickies warm, keeping the fire going. So that was shot right through. So anyway that was just one incident

and so I got her out and she made a bilum for me, a string bag, to thank me for getting her out of prison and so that was the biggie.

And there's a judge in Papua New Guinea, there was, the only woman judge and her name was Judge Teresa Doherty. She was from Ireland. She was the only woman judge in the whole country and so I would call her if I didn't know exactly how to proceed in getting this lady out and she would walk me through all the procedure and that's how I was able to get her out because I had help from a real judge to help me to know what to do next, the next, the next. So that was a good experience. Yes—

MEL: I'm interested in—you even driving this young—you said she was a young woman. Your conversations with her or even getting to know this young woman.

SJMS: For one thing she was the sister of a lady that worked for the mission and so that I knew and Noreen was the her sister and the one that was in prison was Martina, Martina and so this one that was Noreen and the one working for us. I would say to her, tell her things that I read on the paper and she pointed out to me all the things that were false like the chicken house and she said, "This you know, this could not happen, this could not happen" and so that's how I was able to really get into the story and had helped Martina get out of prison and she was so grateful. It was just unbelievable. But I said "You know, would this be a danger for her to get out, while her husband really you know, inflict her in some way?" And they said, "They didn't think so." But here's the thing that happened was Martina told her husband, "If you bring another woman, in other words, if you marry another woman, then I believe you." And he did. He brought this other second lady, second they called it Marisa: "You yet, you burying a mung pera nari ey come, burying a pela nari, ey com. Sin down here one time you, me losin you. Me I woul go." If you bring another lady I will bury her, I will leave you. Which she did.

But in the meantime, after this happened, he was not happy with his second wife because she was not a good worker and Martina was a good worker and he wanted her to get her back again, but to punish her for leaving him he accused her and then he bribed the magistrate and he bribed everybody, you know, so there in Mendi it was hopeless so taking her to Kabu was good. We had cars like jeeps they were called Suzuki's and actually at that time I wasn't driving long distances. I learned how to drive over there but I didn't drive a long—and so another Sister would—drove me, drove Martina and myself to Mendi for these three times we had to make a trip there for that and so but we—that's how we got there. So it was and she was so, so grateful and so happy and she's fine now. Yeah, I write to her sister and she tells me all about Martina. Yeah.

So that's the experience of that and then, um, let's see. Another thing that I did when I came back after that time was I worked in the office and I put all the baptismal records into the computer and then one of the Capuchins made it into a book, so that they had better, you know, references to the baptismal records of the people in the village of Mendi. After I had done this for five years: teaching at the preschool, teaching people to teach the religion classes at the high school and doing the prison ministry, and typing the baptismal records, I was having terrible pains in my abdomen and they thought it was my heart there; they didn't really know what was wrong with me. So I was sent home a second time to—actually I went home on leave in [19]88 and then this was [19]89 when I went back, that this happened after here being back as that happened I was still in Tari and so—no I wasn't in Tari, I was

in Mendi. I was in Mendi, excuse me, and so they sent me home thinking I was having heart troubles and I wasn't going to return and so I got—we had a doctor in line, they had a doctor ready for me to go to—after I landed one day I got to the hospital. There was nothing wrong with my heart. I said, "Well I've got all this pain," I said, "What is it?" and he said, "I have them test your esophagus." So we did that. Nothing wrong with my esophagus.

But since I was home they sent me to a renewal program in in Little Falls, Minnesota. It was a nine month course. So I went to that and during that time that I was there, I got this terrible pain again and it was my gallbladder and they said it had been my gallbladder the whole time (laughs). So I had my gallbladder taken out there and in Minnesota, Little Falls, Minnesota and then I said can I go back to Papua New Guinea now, I got a new gall bladder? And so they said, "Not until"—did they say six months? I think six months, so you can recover from your operation and so then I got back again (laughs). I got back to Papua New Guinea. And this time when I went back I couldn't—see a missionary's work is to work yourself out of a position, so that the natives can take over. So okay we worked ourselves out of the primary schools and when we came, when I left the Kagua area from the catechist school, a well-trained catechist took over that school so we worked ourselves out of that school and then the preschool, the lady that I then was working with me and teach—she was teaching half the kids, I was teaching the other—she took over the school, so when I came back, she was the teacher of the preschool and so I worked myself out of that and so now what am I going to do now that I have returned?

And so the thing that, we had a new bishop and I asked the new bishop if there's anything I could do for him and he said I would be grateful if you would go through my my records and straighten them out. They were a mess, the previous bishop and so I did that, I went through his files and made new files and got the whole thing all, so I did that and then I thought, All the other Sisters all have positions as they're working strong at and so I decided to be a hospitality person and take over all the cooking.

So we had a lady in the kitchen, who prepared vegetables and things like that. She could make bread she knew how to make bread and she did all of that, but the cooking part in the evening she would be gone and then we would do the cooking and so I did that and then when anybody came, I saw that they got to where they were going and all that, what a hospitality person do and I was doing that my Jubilee came in there my 50th Jubilee came in there and we had a wonderful celebration of that and the bishop took over and I mean the celebration and as it was a marvelous experience all the missionaries that worked there, the different Sisters from the different orders and the different Capuchins that were all over the place. They all came in for my Jubilee and Sister Ann Vonder Meulen was there, she played a guitar and I motioned the song up in the sanctuary. It was all lovely I have to show you those pictures and so that was all a very nice experience for me.

And then all of a sudden, I got problems with my knee and they didn't know what to do with me with my knee. It was a bad knee, well by this time it was 1999. My Jubilee was 1998. [In] 1999, I decided, I thought I would stay until 2000 and then I would go home for good because I had you know, you work yourself out of all these positions. And so it was time. A missionary knows when it's time to leave. And so, my time had come a year or sooner than I wanted, but it came. And so then I came home and I still have the same knee, I never got it—it cleared up, it's full of arthritis, but it's not bothering me right now.

Part III

MEL: This is Mary Ellen Lennon with Sister Jean Sauntry on August 4, 2014. Please continue, Sister.

SJMS: Well I wanted to say the first five years of the Sisters being in Papua New Guinea I just took it for granted that that was God's will that I did not get to go, but when Kate came home who was Sister Anata at that time, when she came home for her leave her first leave and I was telling her how I felt, she said to me: "Well write again." And so I did, I wrote again and all the time after all the—several years after that I never got any answer, but every time another Sister would come home, I would ask, I would write another letter and then another letter and then another letter.

And then Mother Marie Dillhoff was in office and so she would always talk to me about it, but she said, "Oh no, your family is too dear to you and you to them and so, "No you cannot go." So then some more Sisters would come home and I'd write another letter and she said, "Child, you, I just know how important it is to ask—for you and your father to be together. I know that there's such a strong bond." I said, "Yes Mother, there is, but my father reads everything about Papua New Guinea, he's even read this encyclopedia and he has, when there's ever a little article he clips it out and sends it to me and he is so interested in my being able to go there and she'd shake her head, "No." Then I'd write another letter the next time somebody came home for leave and she came to me and she said, "Child, you may not go to Papua New Guinea until after your father dies." And that was such a shock to me. I, I just, it's hard to even talk about it to think that I had to wait for that to happen.

And so my father did die in 1970 and I knew I couldn't go to Papua New Guinea that year for my mother's sake, so I waited a whole year and I went back to my mother and I said, "Mom, I'm thinking about going back to New Guinea, I want to know what you think?" and she's, she cried we both cried and she said, "I feel the same way that your father and I felt when you first asked if I could go—that I wanted to go. And yes we want you, I want you to go and I want you to do God's work and you have my blessing."

And so I wrote another letter and Mother Marie came fast. I was sitting in chapel there was a there's a bench right as you walk in chapel and I was sitting there before our prayer and she stopped there and said, "Come and see me in my office on Tuesday after school." At that time I was teaching in the grade school right across from the convent and so I said, "Thank you Mother." I couldn't hardly contain myself. This was the first positive thing that happened to me.

So I went to teach school on Monday. I could not wait for Tuesday. I went up to her office after school on Monday and I said, "Mother I can't wait till Tuesday can we have that talk now?" and she said, "Child sit down" and then she said, "Lick these envelopes, put these stamps on and take them over to Sister across the hall and then we'll talk." So I was licking the envelopes and putting the stamps on and then finally we had our talk and she said, "Yes, you may go to Papua New Guinea." And so that was such a thrill to me and this was 1972, 1973, no it was still [19]72 because it was like October, I think it was around that time or November and I remember coming down.

First of all, I said, "Do I have to keep this a secret?" Because the first Sisters that went they were not allowed to say anything to anybody and when they received their mission cross they had to leave chapel without talking to anybody and I said, "Do I have to go through all that?" She's said, "No-no child." She kept saying child. "You can tell anybody." So I came down to the phone room and Sister Paulita was sitting there, she wasn't on duty, but she was sitting at the table there. And I told her and she smiled real big and then I was talking to all the other sisters in the phone room and not realizing the Paulita had left, she had zoomed up to Reverend Mother and asked if she couldn't go? And here she had wanted to go all those years, but she didn't go because of her mother now her mother had died in September of that year, September and so she was free and so Reverend Mother gave her permission.

But we couldn't leave right then because I had signed a contract for the, this is a public school across the street at that time. Well it was the whole time we taught there and so I had the contract so I had to finish the school year and so and that also was my twenty-fifth anniversary and the convent. So we had Jubilee that summer. So there's all excitement - Jubilee and then we left in October, I think of '73, is when we went over.

MEL: You always knew, you always knew this was your calling.

SJMS: I always knew, yeah, and then finally I got the yes to go.

MEL: And you hadn't heard anything for many years when you wrote those letters?

SJMS: No I didn't. Only, only when Mother Marie was in that was Mother Cephas was the one that took the mission and she never answered any of my letters or ever talked to me about it, but Mother Marie did. She kept telling me because she knew my family and she felt free to tell me how she felt about my family.

MEL: Thank you.

SJMS: So that's that.

MEL: No Sister that was beautiful.

SJMS: But it's sort of out of sequence though.

MEL: That's okay. That's oral history and that's what I mean, so I want you to understand. So we have—the point, especially the first meeting is just you talking in any sequence you want remembering that the job of the historian, hopefully, is that we can find ways to use parts of your story with other people's stories to then bring clarity to a question or to a time period or to your mission there. But right now it's just recording your voices and again I want to emphasize that this is this beautiful product in and of itself because just to, like I'm going to be enjoying listen—just like I'm very grateful for listening to it now, I get to listen to it again and we'd like it to be in the archive so others, but we have to find ways to make sure it gets out there because a little dusty CD in the archives it's not enough. We want to tell these stories. It's beautiful, but I do. I have so many more—I just, I think I'm surprised well I was surprised by many things I'm learning about the Sisters of Papua New Guinea, but I didn't know your work with the women in the prison's. I mean did you expect that work?

SJMS: No not when I first went over I didn't know. But Maureen again, the one that was in the Catechist school, she was the one that was going out to the women and she was being changed now to go to Mendi and so, she took me once to prison with her before she left Mendi and then showed me what to do. I tell you the first day I walked in there and they closed the gate and it locked I thought, uhh, here I am with these women in the prison. But it was like um it was a building and the gate there was a gate out here that's the gate I'm talking about. You walk in the gate, the gate goes all around the compound and then there's another house here where they cooked their, their own food that the prisoners did. So, and this was the women's prison. The men's prisons was up the hill. You could see it from where we were, but there was no connection between the two and they would not let us go to the men. Women, Capuchins went to the prison, but we couldn't go. And so here's the building and so at one point I was able to come out and play with them in this area. They had a ball and they would you know hit the ball over there something like volleyball and some would come and play and some didn't, but it was it was like I was edified, you know, that the women would trust me enough to tell me the story and all the others, ladies, were sitting there and they all had empathy for each other, you know, and so they were so beautiful about telling their story and I'd always say to the new ones that came you don't need to tell me anything but if you want to share your story, I would be happy to listen and if I can get you any help I will do that.

And the other women would encourage the lay because I knew that I was doing this and they knew the results of it. Now some were they're for killing somebody and I could never get them out. That would be impossible. But they would tell me about that too and then see I didn't say anything about this but the Sisters, the FSM Sisters I would take them with me and let them see what I was doing and then I would take them, still take them with me, but they would conduct the Bible lesson. And I tell you, they could reach the people much easier than we could because they know their people, they know their language and it was beautiful. They would teach in Pidgin, of course and so I knew exactly what they were saying.

Let me read some of that, so you can get a sense of what it sounds like. This is an ordination and it's all in Pidgin. I don't know, do you mind if I ask you, Are you Catholic?

MEL: Yes, oh, yes I am.

SJMS: Okay so you do know about church, when I'm talking I didn't know whether you had. Well this this was um maybe that other article, back here would be easier to read. It was a newspaper, it was in Pidgin with the Sisters I think it was. I thought it was.

MEL: Take your time, you labeled everything.

SJMS: Eighty-two to eighty-five, I didn't know I did that. The Sisters, there's Paulita, there's Paulita. There's Martine and these are Swiss Sisters, these two this one

MEL: You had a community with sisters from other orders as well?

SJMS: Oh yes, very well. Oh yeah, we were all in it together. It's the first one, oh here it is here: "Catholic Diocese belong Medi even started one peliline local sista belong me

straight." So the Catholic Diocese of Mendi began a new religious community. "Start him new pella line, like local Sister," the Sisters of this country.

MEL: Oh I see.

SJMS: "Name belon line yew ya, name belon." The name of this country, the name of this community here, "em ee Franciscan Sister belong met Maria." The Franciscan Sisters of Mary. "E got for pelinary ey be joinem des pella line." So there's four sisters that have joined this community at this time. "Ah geta ah e belong e Southern Highlands yeh." All of these sisters came from the Southern Highlands. See they've got Sisters coming from different diocese, not just the Diocese of Mendi. "Le melong for pella sit em—no—name belong for pella em here. Here's their names: Sister Maria, now Sister Elizabeth, now Sister Patricia, now Sister Claudia. Kagua. "Sister Maria Kundiapu em e got close to twenty Christmas." So she's twenty years old. "Emy belong place mooli." That's her place. She is from Mooli. "Close to long ya alibu." So Mooli is a little place near this town of lalibu. "Emmy willim six pella yer long schools." She went to sixth grade. She "wennimin" "Long time em e stops some—hyphenated words are hard for me to read even in English, sometimes I guess it says. "Any stop some time yet. Papa now mama belong em e die finis long one pela de tessul." So both her father and mother died the same day.

MEL: Now is this sister a sister from Papua New Guinea, she's and actual Papua New Guinean Sister?

SJMS: Yeah and she's from the highlands, the Southern Highlands.

MEL: Do you remember, is it called the ordination of the Sisters or it's not quite that

SJMS: No priests is ordination.

MEL: So what is it when a Sister becomes?

SJMS: Oh we have a investiture and profession.

MEL: Oh so do you—would the sisters train right there in the highlands? Like a young woman who wanted to be a sister? Do you remember those ceremonies? I bet those were beautiful?

SJMS: Oh yeah. And they would dress in their native garb and come in and then they would change.

MEL: And into the habit?

SJMS: Into the habit. It's beautiful, yeah.

MEL: Next time I would like to ask you about Masses in the Highlands too.

SJMS: Oh they were wonderful, I don't know if I've got any pictures of the profession. I don't think I do in this book.

MEL: Was it difficult for you to learn how to read this or do you know the history of Pidgin English? (16:25)

SJMS: Yeah in a way I do. It came—when the people were taken to work on plantations. I'm not really sure about this. I think that's how it came. (unintelligible) And they couldn't talk to each other, they gathered up people from different areas to work in the plantation and so they I think that's how it came about. I don't know how it started. They adapted Melanesian Pigeon English. So Melanesian—

MEL: Is the language?

SJMS: Melanesian is an area. In the South Pacific.

MEL: Right. Oh, okay. No I would very much like to talk more about this, but I'm aware of the time. No you must be, you've spent so much time.

SJMS: These three places.

MEL: These were all

SJMS: This Sisters are from here and then this Sister's from here and the other Sister is from here. That's why it's different.

MEL: Oh it's beautiful. And these are the Sisters, so like you said they would they would work with you in the different parishes.

SJMS: Well see they would visit the people and hear their stories and talk to them about the Bible and—

MEL: Oh Sister this is so beautiful. May I ask you a couple questions just for thinking of this—you said if I wanted to look at this with you we could do that in a different time and I can read it here. I have another question.

SJMS: You can take it with you if you want to.

MEL: No I don't. I don't because I want to be very careful with it. I would—I'll read it here.

SJMS: You see it's been—

MEL: Well but I don't want to, I have a toddler at home. (laughs)

SJMS: Oh.

MEL: But you know Sister, I was also wondering you were mentioning—oh I'll have to listen to it again, but you were talking about letters—oh that you wrote letters and that people wrote you letters as well. Do you have those letters? I'm not asking for them, but did you just throw them out or do you know what happened to these letters?

SJMS: No, no I don't have any of those letters.

MEL: I wonder, I'll ask—maybe they're in the um, archives.

SJMS: There might be. There's—I have a couple articles that I wrote. They weren't in the newspaper, but they were in our communication. I'll look those out to see where I put those. When I moved from—I was sick in November, I had blood clots in my lungs, I was real sick and they advised me to move from where I'd been living over to St. Francis Hall and I had to downsize a lot of things I threw a lot of things away even pictures and yeah I just can't carry all this over there. There's no room. I didn't have enough—I had a big room there and this was a smaller room then I—so a lot of things I have thrown away, but I kept this, and I think I put one of these albums in their archives.

MEL: Well I'll learn that, but that's, but that's part of this larger project is I want you know I don't want things thrown away, but the most important thing is your voice on tape, which is beautiful was this okay for you today, Sister? I feel very blessed by it thank you so much.

SJMS: Thank you.

MEL: Would you like to think about it for a while or would you like to set up another date?

SJMS: Let's go ahead and set one up. Because my calendars' fill up quickly.

MEL: I see that, I do.

August 18th, 2014 – Sister Jean Michael Sauntry speaking with Professor Mary Ellen Lennon at the Convent of the Sisters of St. Francis in Oldenburg, Indiana.

MEL: This is Mary Ellen Lennon in Oldenburg, Indiana at the Convent of the Sisters of Saint Francis. It is August 18, 2014 and I am enjoying a conversation with Sister Jean Sauntry. Thank you for being here today.

SJMS: You're welcome. Happy to be back. I'm going to talk about the prison, I mentioned it before, but when—the prison is about more than a mile away from Mendi and so I get into my little jeep and drive, the scenery is just gorgeous we're up in the mountains of Southern Highlands and there's a big waterfalls that you see as you go along and sometimes I just would like to just stop and look at the gorgeous area, the mountains and the rivers and the foliage, it's just so different than from here. But to get to the prison, I arrive at the prison and park outside the gate that there's a wire fence all around the area. This is the women's prison, but we do not go to the men's prison, we're not allowed to go to the prison men's prison. So I go inside, one of the wardens come, a woman also comes and opens the gate for me and then closes it and locks it and the first time that happened I felt, hew-hoo, here I am.

And I didn't know what to really expect, so I went in to the building and the room where had the women had four, at least four, maybe six of these picnic benches that's what that was in there two rows of them and the women were all seated there and my first time to go there I brought my picture album and I had pictures of my family and so to introduce myself

I thought it would be good if I'd introduce my family and it was the best thing I could have done because when I walked in I saw all these really hostile looks on the faces of the women and I thought, Lord, please what do I have here? But I took out these pictures and I told them, "Me like some you pitcha belong Papa now Mama belong me' I want to show you my parents, my father and mother. And the faces on the prisoners all lit up because they are so faithful and joyous with their families and here I'm showing them that I am human, I have family too being a religious Sister they sometimes wonder what we are. So I showed them my mother and father and I had put, actually I had put the pictures in cellophane so that they would, because I wanted to pass them around, let them see them and then I took—I said, "Now me got to culla to culla grata da to pella sousa, now grata one pella grata name blarnium, Bill, notta pella barata named blarnium, Bob.' So I want to show them my brothers and my sisters and I showed them first my pictures of my brothers and I passed them around. Then I told them, "Now me got to pella sousa too, to pella sista, one pella, Patricia, another pella Alice, now, "Me like some pictua belonga." So I told them about my sister, Patty and Alison and showed their pictures.

After I did that, they were just, they were all excited that all the oohs and aahs that came from them and then and they passed very carefully got them back to me and then I told them about their children. "Now bruten now ah sousa em alcata demi gat emi got picanini." So they all have children and as I introduced the children to them.

Well that was the best way I could have done to cut the ice between them and myself and so when we got finished with all that, then I had a Bible lesson that I gave them. That's the way I began to work with the women. But later, I began to ask and I began to teach them at sorry I began to ask them if they were here in prison and they wanted to tell me why they were there I would be happy to hear their story and if possible I could go to the magistrate and the judge and see if I can get you out of prison if you're not here justly of course I said that all in Pidgin. Suppose you liked talking story belong me. Me like harden. Suppose you no like, em me alright." So, if you want to tell me your story, fine. If you don't, that's alright with me and that's the way I proceeded and every time I came back to the prison at different times and there was a new lady there, I would say that to that lady too. I said, "You no, like talkin displace story, long me, emi alright." So if you don't want to tell me, that's alright. But if you do and I can help you, I will. So, "Suppose me lik helpin you emi alright, mak it happen you."

So it was a wonderful experience and I was edified by the women and felt privileged that they would give their stories to me and so I proceeded that way and I got several of the women out because some of them are there because their husbands were angry with them and for different reasons some of them were there for murder, so I couldn't help them and they understood that they did. They knew they couldn't get out, but they were willing to tell me the stories, but often it was one woman killing a second wife because you know that's hard if the man brings home another wife and there was a lot of that in Papua New Guinea. Some men had several wives and when they wanted to join the church they had to decide which wife they were going to keep and the others they had to let go and many of them did that that was hard for them to become Christians and to follow the church and to follow Christ.

And so, back to the prison. After a while we had some Sisters that we were trained some ladies that we were training to be Sisters in Papua New Guinea they were Papua New

Guinean women and they were to belong to the Mendi diocese. They did not belong to our community it was going to be a separate community of their own. And they're still there in Papua New Guinea now, but that I don't remember what year that started, but when you interview somebody else that worked with them more or less, that's how you.

So we had three of those Sisters in Mendi where I was stationed at this time and so I asked them one day if they would like to go with me to the prison and yes they, oh they were all excited about that so I would take different one and then I would take them and then I let them watch me as I gave the Bible lesson and then I passed so the next time I took that same Sister then I had her, told her to be prepared to have the Bible lesson and it was wonderful to see them. The Papua New Guinea religious sisters could reach their own people much better than we could. They just had it, well of course naturally they would and so that was a nice experience for me. I would I would drive the sister there I would be present there and observe her and see her teach them and see how they all opened up to that sister. So it was a wonderful experience and I enjoyed doing that about eleven years I worked with the women in the prison.

But the one woman that was in prison for adultery I know that was, we knew that that was all a mistake that she was did not actually commit adultery, but she actually she had bribed not she, the man that, her husband, I should go back to her husband, her husband had brought home another wife and this this particular lady told him if you ever do bring another woman I will leave. "Suppose you kiss another pella medi now me no stop one time you me like run ego." So if you bring another woman home, I will not stay with you I will leave and that's what she did. She left. But he wanted her back because he found out that the lady that he brought home and his second wife was not a good worker in the gardens, didn't do a good job in the gardens and particularly. And so he wanted her back, but she would not go back and so he drummed up this adultery story and had her in prison, she was in prison and so I knew that this was a bigger job to get her out of prison than I was able to do. So I contacted Sister, I mean Judge Doherty, Teresa, Judge Teresa Doherty who was the only woman judge in Papua New Guinea and so I contacted her and told her about and I got the papers from the magistrate you could you can get all papers for anybody in prison and read their story their history or anything and so I did that and I told, so I called the judge and I told her this and I explained the whole thing to her and she said, I will walk with you the whole way. So she did. When I had a question I could call her up and she could give me the answer and I had proceeded further and then that's the way we did it and so to make a long story short I did get her out of prison and at one point I got it out on her own recognizance is that the word.

So she was there in Mendi with me and we went to the store and her husband saw her. And so he came over and he gave her a push and I walked up to him and I said, "Sorry you have no right to do this" and he said, "I'm her husband I could do what I want to do with her" and I said, "No you can't and I said to Marteen, "Get into the car." Her name is Martina. "Get into the car." So she did and then he shoved me and I and I said, he said, "She's in prison, I put her in prison." I said, "Yes you did, but you didn't put her in there for a good reason." And of course I said all this in Pidgin English, because he doesn't know English. And so I got back in the car and we went on. So, so because she was being tried for adultery and Mendi Court was taking care of the man that she was accused of adultery with, I couldn't take Marteen to the Mendi judge. I had to take her into Hagen, which was I can't remember

now, but I think it's at least an hour's drive, if not longer, almost roads because they went on you know real good roads.

So I took, I had to take her into that the first time I had to take her in to explain it all to—I can't think of the name of the person you go to first and then and then I had to go come home and then go back, but when they had the court case and then the court case the judge said, "I would return in such-and-such a time and I'll have her judgment" and so the third time we had to take her back to Hagen and he's alright see her husband was there and he got up and he spoke and then the judge said right away, "Topler on eu e no thuro." What you are saying is not true and he dismissed him and then the final time he he didn't even come. He was so angry that she was let free and so she was free and then she made me a beautiful string bag of different colors to show her gratitude for my helping her get out of prison. So that's a nice experience.

Sometimes when we went to the prison they—as I said there was a fence around the whole complex and there was a nice space where they could have like recreation where they could do what they wanted where they had a ball and so they played kickball and volleyball out there on the field and I played with them this one time and then they were playing and I that was one of the times when some of the ladies wanted to talk to me privately and so they were playing out there and we were all outside. I was sitting down and they were they would come and they would tell me their story and then I would work with them and it was a wonderful experience.

MEL: Did you—how often did you go to the prison? Was it every week?

SJMS: I went to the prison every Wednesday I think it was in the afternoon after my preschool. I was at the preschool at the same time and then did that.

MEL: Do you remember—how did you find out about the prison and what did people tell you about it?

SJMS: I found out about the prison because Sister Maureen Mahon was doing that work previously. Well if you recall, when I came to Men—to Tari to work in the catechist school Maureen was the head of the Catechist school and so she was doing that in Tari, she was sent to Mendi and I was still in Tari and I ran the school. So while she went to Mendi, she became involved with the prison and then when I got, when I was transferred from Mendi and came from Tari I mean, and went to Mendi and she was leaving the country actually and so then she took me herself to the first time I was with her with the women and then the next time I was by myself. So that's from Sister Maureen, how she started I don't really know that story.

MEL: Do you remember how you felt, because you'd been doing preschool, do you remember how you felt thinking about going to the prison?

SJMS: Well Maureen had talked a lot about it and told me about the women and everything and actually I think she's the one that asked me if I would like to do that and so I was kind of excited about going, yes, I wasn't scared or worried about it.

MEL: I'm trying to picture the women talking to you and also the scripture lessons. Did you sit outside in the yard and did everyone participate or did you meet with them separately?

SJMS: Everybody, all the women were there on these benches and also there were two women guards, wardens that started with me when I first came and I think it was because they wanted to see what I was gonna do and how I was going to do it and so after two visits they never came in anymore. They didn't come into to the session and so that's how. The women were there and I saw the prison—the room that we were in was a pretty big room to hold these picnic tables, these tables but after that there was like a full, a big square and in the corner of each of that square that was for real confinement where the prisoners were not allowed prisoners were not allowed to get out of those, those four little areas. So they couldn't come in to my talking and further on, they had bunk beds and there were no mattresses, it was just plain plywood and they were given two blankets and one underneath them and one that they used on top and their outhouses would have been out of that building but still in that confinement that they went to. So the sleeping, I imagine that was pretty hard, they even mentioned that they're the ones that told me I didn't even ask them about their beds and all that but they told me about that after they knew me a while. No I did all that talking personal talking and the teaching inside the building, but then when we went had time to go out and play. Then that's when we would, I (unintelligible) myself for a while and then the women came to speak to me individually it was a nice experience. I enjoyed it very much.

From the compound where we were you could look over and see the compound of the men, but they had no connection at all with them.

MEL: Do you remember the scripture lessons? Would you—so every Wednesday you would also give a scripture lesson. Would you read a Bible with them?

SJMS: Yes I would take the Bible lesson, by that time this would have been in the wasn't [19]73 this would have been in the [19]80s, a 1980 area and by that time they had a Pidgin Bible created so then, they didn't have the Bibles, the prisoners didn't but we had the Pidgin Bible and I would read it for the pigeon, say it was just something from Mark and it might read that or maybe it's the Sunday readings and I would read one of those and then we would talk about it and so that was a nice experience yeah.

MEL: Were most of the prisoners Catholic?

SJMS: No, we never made the Sign of the Cross and we never talked about the sacraments, but we just did something spiritual because they were all in different religions.

MEL: Do you remember what stories they responded to or what readings they responded to?

SJMS: No not really. I can't remember that, but they were just happy to hear it and it was just really beautiful.

MEL: Did they see their families much or—?

SJMS: No not at all, um, some of the children, the women had their children with them, there in prison, yeah, I know there was a little boy at one time and there was a mother that was there suckling their little baby.

MEL: I really liked hearing about Marteen's story. Do you remember any other women that you helped or got to know?

SJMS: I never did that I never did any more uh women in that capacity. Such a big one. These were all, they were in there because their husbands were angry with them and they didn't want to be there but I can't think of any particular story right now.

MEL: I guess my last question about the prison is I'm interested in this judge, the only female—

SJMS: Judge Doherty.

MEL: How did you get to meet her and what was it like?

SJMS: It was actually through Sister Ann. She knew her and I don't remember how she knew her but she's the one that advised me to get in contact with her and that she would be able to help me. I don't know how Ann knew her, I don't recall that. But she was wonderful in helping me. We still correspond at Christmas time. She's not in the country anymore in Papua New Guinea and she left and she's in Ireland and she talks about a lot of different places; I don't know where they are. She's a very lovely person.

MEL: Would you like to talk about your catechists now?

SJMS: Mm-hmm. The Catechist school was just a little room. It wasn't very big, this was over at the Tari area and it was a big field outside of their house at their building and we had simple desks in there for them; however, they are—the Papua New Guinea people are such outdoor people that the more you can do outdoor with them the better. And so after that I had the class outside and they would sit like sort of like a circle and I had a stool, I sat upon a little stool, not to be higher than them or for that reason at all but just because it was hard for me to get down on the ground (laughs) and so I have a picture of them sitting around listening to the story, but I would use pictures sometimes we had that there's a printing place in Papua New Guinea that printed pictures of their Bible stories and so I can remember this one time I had a picture for everybody to do that would take care of, I forget what big feast it was going to be, but everyone would have it and they could color it in. So I was counting those out. This was actually, they were busy doing something else at the time and I was counting out these pictures and I was one short and I thought oh no this can't be I have to have one for everybody, because they all went to a different area they couldn't share this picture with their work so the idea was to take it with them and give the lesson from the picture so I counted it again and I think I must've counted at least four times and I was always one short and I said, Oh Lord, please I need one for each one and I counted them again and I had enough. I had enough for everybody. I was so excited and so then I gave everybody their picture and they were, they were coloring away and they did a really nice job.

I mean, if you could if you can picture these men particularly that this big strapping men with their native feathers all in the back and leaves on the back and a little lap black a little piece of material woven they do it themselves and it's connected to their belt and it goes down the front. That's all they have on, so they're all these bare breasted fellas sitting there and with these crayons and coloring these pictures. Oh, it was just wonderful to see them do that and as they did that, you know, I would talk about the reading again explain it, they're all excited.

And then I had them outside one of these times with one of these pictures and just held the picture and had the different ones say something about the picture. Then, that's the way we taught. But that the one time when I went over at, I don't know if I mentioned that we had a group coming in young these are very young Papua New Guinea men who were coming from way back in the bush and they knew nothing of English at all they knew nothing of Pidgin English either and so it was my job, this was when Maureen was still there. It was my job to take these, I think there were four of them, to take these fellows and to be able to help them to learn the Pidgin English so that we could get something into them for their stories and so it was a wonderful experience I enjoyed it so much and it was you know very simple like it didn't like we did in the primary school like "This pella a one pella, book." This is a book. "This ever one pella book." No I really couldn't use the English with them because they didn't know any, so it's just all Pidgin and then I point to the sky. "This pella en sky, sky." Of course in pidgin this part, I don't remember what they used with, but anyway it was interesting and it helped me with Pidgin English much more because I would study the grammar before the lesson and there you know really taught them their, the pidgin, well and then it helped me to be able to say it well to do it well.

It was like being in retreat all the time when I worked with a catechists because it was always about Christ and you know the Bible stories and it was a marvelous experience.

MEL: Did they, I want to picture, when did they come to catechism school? Did they live there? Did they come from far-flung places?

SJMS: They came from far, far away of places. They came once a week. They came on Monday and stayed until Friday. Then they would walk all the way back to their place and teach their people and then Monday they would come all the way back again and they have another lesson and then they take that lesson all the way back. So they were there five days and then they went home for Saturday, Sunday and then they were back on Monday for five days and that's the way it was, just like a circle.

MEL: Did you write the lesson plans? Like did you plan the whole day with them?

SJMS: No we just plan the readings, on Sunday there's three readings and so we took the—mainly we took the Gospel and then but then we did we touched on the other two readings too, but the Gospel was the main thing that we worked on.

MEL: All week or just for one day at a time?

SJMS: We worked on them during the week those five days.

MEL: And you would eat lunch together and dinner together and they would sleep there?

SJMS: No, we didn't eat with them. They had a special place where they stayed and they had, we had to build a fire there and they would get, they would put their potatoes into that the coals of the fire and that would cook all night and so then the next day they had their breakfast was potato, dinner was potato, I mean it was just, that was the way their life was. It was the same with the little kids, we didn't have to take them to a dining room to eat. They had their dinner right in their little bags that they had.

MEL: I'm very interested in Papua New Guinean Catholics. So in their individual villages they would have their own church. What would those churches look like and what would the Mass look like?

SJMS: The churches—see when I came, I came in 1973, so it was quite different than the Sisters that you're going to talk to her have talked to that came in the sixties because there was nothing there, but churches were built up when I would get there when I got there, so they had their, they had their churches and they would be just simple, they would make them out of—they take bamboo and pit pit and they weave they would weave it and then make a wall for—with the weaving, the ground would be just the ground it wouldn't be any, no plywood, no wood, no rubber, anything it was just the simple ground and then the roofing, they would take, bamboo and pit pit was what they wove. There was a grass that they put on this roofing of their house and they always have a fire in the center and the smoke would come out the middle of that section. So that's what their house was. What was your question?

MEL: Oh, no you're just, I'm interested in the Catholic Mass in Papua New Guinea.

SJMS: Oh the Catholic Mass. I only know the priest one. The priest would come and he would have the Mass in Pidgin English, but he would have an interpreter who would change, take the Pidgin and change it into the particular language where they were and so this one area as the place was called lalibu and they had two languages in their area so they had a Catechist for Mangu and a catechisim for Kawabi and so the priest would say the Mass in Pidgin English and all the parts of the Mass and but, at the sermon time when it's time for the homily. That's when he would say a sentence and this fella would change it into Inbongu and he would change it into Kawabi. So you can imagine these Masses lasted pretty long and of course we all hoped that the interpreters were saying what they were told to say we never knew we just hoped that they, that they're understanding what's being said and so the Masses we would go sometimes to to be at a Mass of a certain area and so when Father would come there might be one person there and he would sing out real loud and that would go further and further each one would pick it up and he was telling the people to come for Mass, the Father was there and in seconds there were all the people they all came. (laughs) But in Papua New Guinea, things are done very slowly and so you go, you hurry up and go and then you wait and then you hurry up to the next place and then you wait. And you got used to that. At first it was really hard you know because at 8 o'clock you're gonna have this and you everybody's there eight o'clock, nobody's there and it's like maybe one person and they sing out. They call it singing out, they would sing out.

When the Sisters earlier the days when there was a death in the family and there were so little borders there in Mendi and that one of the children ran up to Sister Anada and she's Kate now, but she was Anada and say, she had to go home because her father died and

she said how would you know that, well they're talking they told us, they told us, who told you and then that's how we found out that these messages were coming through, you know one person carrying it on to the next, to the next it was like televisions, not televisions, but what would you compared to telegraph, like a telegraph that these voices would come through the bush and but that's how they found out things that were happening so it was an amazing. And one time somebody said, "Weren't you scared to be over there when you see those men carrying their spears and their bows and arrows and their spears and their—and I said, "No I never ever was frightened because there was just a way that they accepted us and then the reason they accepted us because they saw that we were there to help them."

That's not the case of everything in Papua New Guinea at that time and people were there to exploit them and they could tell the difference. They were very, very intelligent people and so they knew that we were there to help them and they we never had any trouble with them and I was never frightened of them they were just wonderful people, just very, very down-to-earth. Actually yes down-to-earth and who were down there, their houses were down, you had to crawl into them. We did we went to visit different places and saw their homes and they might even have a pig inside in the house now the men would be in one house and the women in another. They would never they would never be together in this in the same house. The women and children would be in this house and the men would be in his own house and where would they meet to propagate the country they would go in the gardens they would go out in the garden and have their time together.

But in church, just two. The women sat on one side and then men on the other and everything we to would sit with the women when we were there.

MEL: But I'm thinking of that story of you talking to Marteena's husband or confronting Marteena's husband after he pushed you. So did you see a lot of that kind of violence while you were there between men and women?

SJMS: No, No I never did. No I didn't see that. He was just so very angry because he was just trying to get back at her because she would not come back to him and she never—so after it all happened I said, "Now, Marteena are you going to have trouble with your husband now since this all happened? And she said, "No he won't come near and he didn't, he never bothered her."

MEL: What happened to her? Do you know?

SJMS: She's still there in the mission there at Mendi just living the common life yeah. No she never remarried or anything. She would come to church.

MEL: Did you—the Masses, you said, the priests were there to celebrate the Mass, but I'm sure that some of the catechists went to villages where they didn't have priests come every Sunday?

SJMS: Yes that's what—that's where the catechists came in and that the catechists were trained in being the Eucharistic ministers and any—the people, the people were trained too, not just catechist, but other men and women in the church could be a catechist, could be a Eucharistic minister. They would have, I don't know if they had other, I think it was just catechists and Eucharistic ministers. So this catechist would carry the Eucharist out to their

bush places. And the Fathers would come, when the Fathers would come then he would consecrate quite a few hosts for a while then the catechists would later on when they ran out because of the priests, there were not enough priests to go to all these places that were there and so I preferred to going out with Maureen for four hour walk out into the bush and actually we went to this one place after four hours and the next day we went another hour to the other cat—there were two catechist in that area and so we went out to his place and saw his area and his—and the people were so gracious and so happy to see us. Ah, they couldn't really communicate with us because they didn't know Pidgin English they only knew Huli because that was such a huge area that they never had the need to learn Pidgin English because they only knew their own people in that area course now they wouldn't know more, it's quite different now than when we were there.

MEL: How would a church start out there in the bush?

SJMS: Well the priests went over in 1955 and they, they're the ones that began the missions and so they had motorcycles that they drove out into the areas where cars couldn't go because there were no roads in some places and those are all stories of their own, (laughs), but the priests, I don't I don't really know how the priests did all that. I just know what I was involved with.

MEL: Maybe my last question is the type of people who became catechists were they all the same, were they different? When you had your class for the week? Could you describe the the people? Would they be young or old?

SJMS: I have no idea how old they were. They didn't either they didn't know how old they were, some of them they, some of them could tell you that they were babies when the planes went over and of course they thought they were a big birds they didn't know what they were so that was during the war because the Japanese did get onto the coast of Papua New Guinea and they also got down in Australia too. So they did, so one of them, I remember somebody telling the story of later on when he had been told by his fam—his parents, he was a little baby in that, in the back—in the bilum, the big bags. When they made these bilums they made them huge for babies, they carry the babies in them, they carried the sweet potatoes in them, they carried this firewood in them. The bags were wonderful, they just used them for all things and so can you imagine these stone stone age people going right into our modern world that was mind-boggling for them, yeah, quite interesting.

MEL: Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about today?

SJMS: I just know that my experience in Papua New Guinea was just wonderful. I found it such a privilege to be with those people and that they trusted us to come in their country and to assist them in their religious bringing out their religious education and to be able to step back after a time and to see them take over what we were doing and that that meant a whole lot to me and I was able to go back. I left in [19]99 and I went back in 2005 for a visit, a week visit because our superior here at Oldenburg was going to see our Sisters that are still there for visitation and so I was privileged to be chosen to go with her and to going, going back there and witnessing how the church had come to be so meaningful for the people and to experience that and see it at a huge Mass because it just so happened that the week that we were going to be there and we didn't know this, they were celebrating 50

years of the church being in that diocese and so there were three deaneries of, from the diocese: the Tari, and Kagua, and then Mendi. And so those three areas came together and there was an outdoor Mass were eight thousand people all sitting on this huge big field in Mendi and participating in this Mass and I remember sitting there under the tree, we Sisters were down, were there and just during the Mass just looking over at this huge area of people and seeing their devotion as they, their eyes were glued to the altar and they, listening to every word and it was just such a wonderful experience for me to see that, to see how the church had grown and how the people were so respectful and so prayerful and I was able too, to get up on that stage after because they were giving gifts at the end and they gave me a gift of an a string bag and I went up and I spoke in Pidgin English, thanked them and told them how happy I was to be back to see them and all and so on. So yes.

MEL: Was it hard to come back in 1999?

SJMS: To come back here?

MEL: Yes, finally, to say goodbye and to—

SJMS: It was hard to say goodbye, yes, I but I knew—actually I wanted to stay until two thousand, until 2000, I developed a problem in my leg and so I um, the doctors there couldn't help me and so they advised that I go and so I came home a year before I wanted to, but that was—but I felt all right about that, I felt that I had done what I had got to do and I was pleased with everything and so I had to leave in [19]99, but going back was a wonderful experience to witness that.

MEL: Well thank you, Sister very much.

SJMS: You're welcome.

MEL: Ok.

End of Interview