

**New England Jesuit
Oral History Program**



**Fr. William J. Cullen, S.J.
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AMDG

THE IMPORTANCE OF ORAL HISTORY

Oral histories are the taped recordings of interviews with interesting and often important persons. They are not folklore, gossip, hearsay, or rumor. They are the voice of the person interviewed. These oral records are, in many instances, transcribed into printed documentary form. Though only so much can be done, of course, in an hour or some times two, they are an important historical record whose value increases with the inevitable march of time.

For whatever reason, New England Jesuits, among others around the world, have not made any significant number of oral histories of their members. Given the range of their achievements and their impact on the Church and society, this seems to many to be an important opportunity missed. They have all worked as best they could for the greater glory of God. Some have done extraordinary things. Some have done important things. All have made valuable contributions to spirituality, education, art, science, discovery, and many other fields. But living memories quickly fade. Valuable and inspiring stories slip away.

This need not be. Their stories can be retold, their achievements can be remembered, their adventures saved. Their inspiration can provide future generations with attractive models. That is what Jesuit oral history is all about.

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Interview with Fr. William J. Cullen, S.J.
By Fr. Richard W. Rousseau, S.J.
March 19, 2008

BEGINNINGS

RICHARD ROUSSEAU: Welcome to our conversation.
We will proceed chronologically through your life.

WILLIAM CULLEN: I feel like I'm taking my "ad grad"
all over again [an important exam during a Jesuit's
formation].

RR: No, it's nothing like that. All you have to do is talk
about your own life. So let's start from the beginning.

WC: I was born on what was probably the worst day in
economic history of the United States, the last day of
the fiscal year, June 30, 1932. The Great Depression
was in full swing, Franklin Roosevelt hadn't been
elected yet. Herbert Hoover, who had affirmed that
the U.S. Constitution had given him no authority over
the Depression, even if he wanted to, was still Presi-
dent. So economically, things were in very bad shape
in the country as well as in the Cullen household. But,
though we were pretty poor, as were most of our neigh-
bors, we were a wonderful family with a wonderful
Mom and Dad.

RR: Where were you born?

WC: I was born in East Cambridge, on Cambridge Street, zip code 02141, not to be confused with zip code 02138, the People's Republic of Cambridge, Harvard Square and its environs. It was literally on the north side of the railroad tracks, what we thought was the best side.

RR: Was that where you had so many friends?

WC: Yes. It was the neighborly side of town. We were mostly Irish, but there was a solid Italian block and a sizeable number of Poles. Of course, all were Catholic; each nationality had its own church. The Irish considered themselves the only natives; all the rest were foreigners. I can remember one day when my Aunt Nora came into our kitchen all in a dither, shrieking in her high-pitched Corkonian brogue, "Oh, Mary, Mary, terrible things are happening." Ma said, "Just calm down now. What's all the fuss about?" All out of breath she said, "There's an "Eye-talen family moving in next to the Sweeneys on Otis Street." At that time, Otis Street was in the Irish section of town.

"What's so bad about that? You didn't make a fuss when the Polish family moved across the street from us." "Oh, Mary, I don't mind the Poles so much, at least they're white." [Fr.] Tony Picariello [S.J.] always enjoys that story so much. But that's the way people thought in those days.

HARD-WORKING FATHER

RR: Tell us more about your father and mother.

WC: My father was a man of little formal schooling. He went five or six grades of school at St. Joseph's in Union Square in Somerville, the last of five brothers. His family was as just the opposite of mine—five boys, one girl. He was a pleasant, easy-going man with a good Irish temper if you got him going. We knew it was all a bluff. He was unable to speak without first saying, "Goddam" before everything he said. My mother

would say, “Joe! The kids.” To which he’d say, “Goddam it, Mary! I can’t help it.” He was a gentle, easy-going, friendly man. People in the neighborhood and in the workplace liked him very much. He was just a good guy.

RR: What did he do?

WC: He was a custodian, much like the men working around Campion Center. He swept and washed floors and did general maintenance work in the leather district in Boston. In later years he worked as a security guard for the Hood Milk Company in Charlestown. He really wanted to be a stationary fireman in charge of a boiler in a big plant, so he studied hard to pass the test for his license, which he got.

But every time he got appointed to a job as plant fireman, someone else who wanted the job reported him as a “cripple” and unable to do the job, and Dad lost out. There were no rules for the so-called “handicapped” in those days. So he went back to ringing security boxes all over the Hood plant. He did have a slight “handicap” resulting from a birth injury, which prevented him from raising his left arm much above a certain level. It never prevented him from doing anything, and we never noticed it.

Anyhow, in the early years many a time after a long day of work, he’d walk home from Boston to Cambridge to save a dime of carfare to buy something extra for supper. In our house, every dime counted. He worked, never missed a day!

He was totally devoted to his wife and family. If I had to characterize him and his life by one word, it would be fidelity. He was completely faithful to my mother and faithful to his six kids. He was just a wonderful guy!

I produced a play once with the lines, “We adjust, we adapt, we roll with the punches, we bring victory home

in our teeth!” Our family not only survived but flourished, by the grace of God, and brought victory home in our teeth, because we had such a good father and such a wonderful mother.

COURAGEOUS MOTHER

RR: What about your mother?

WC: Mother was more the introvert—serious and reserved. She had many hardships to deal with when she was growing up, some of which she had to face alone, which made her strong and independent. As her life unfolded, she had to be strong. She used to say in her later years, “I was always the strong one, I had to take care of everyone. Sometimes I wish I were weaker so someone could take care of me.” Even later she would say, “You kids are so good to me since your father died, after the way we had to deprive you of so much when you were young.” Our answer would always be the same: “Ma, you gave us everything—love, family, and faith. We didn’t need things. You and Dad gave us everything.”

RR: Was she active around town?

WC: Are you kidding? She had enough to do at home to keep ten women busy! In all, she had six children: Mary (1931), Billy (1932), Kathleen (1934), Pauline (1937), Anne (1940), and Bernadette (1943).

SIBLINGS

WC: My third sister, Pauline, was profoundly retarded mentally. She had a cerebral hemorrhage when she was a week old, which severely damaged her brain. Physically she grew normally as any child. As a matter of fact, she was a very beautiful child. It was only after some years when she didn’t talk or walk at the normal time did Ma and Dad began to think that there might be something wrong with her. They took her from one clinic to another. Her mental age would never

progress beyond a year and a half at most. That was a blow. Her body grew, but her mind did not.

She was mischievous and destructive. She would pour ink on our homework or tear it up, break any toys we might have, trip us and then laugh. Every year she would tear down the Christmas tree, even after Dad built a fence around it. After a while we were not able to have any friends in, because she would tear her clothes off. When Ma was cooking, one of us had to stand guard over the stove so that she would not pull the hot pan off the stove all over herself. In spite of all this, she was sweet and lovable. At the end of a bad day, Ma would say, "Pauline, Pauline, you have been a bad girl today, but come over here and let Mama love you." She would drop whatever she was doing and rush over into mother's lap and sit peacefully and quietly for however long.

She needed to be loved; she got plenty of that. She was Daddy's little girl. He would pick her up and dance all around the kitchen with her, bouncing her up and down, and she would laugh her head off. To this day, she loves rhythm and keeps time with her hands.

Bernadette was my youngest sister. Mother had lobar pneumonia and scarlet fever when she was carrying her, and she was born seven or eight weeks prematurely. She had many strikes against her before she was born.

Her brain was severely damaged; the optic nerve had not been fully formed, which left her blind (except for shadows); her spinal column was so damaged that she could not hold her head up, could not swallow, nor use her limbs—in other words, she was a totally broken child. Somehow, Mom and Dad kept her alive for almost six years with Pauline kicking up her heels in the house day after day. They tried to create some kind of a normal home for the rest of us. No easy task.

RR: It must have been very difficult for your mother and father to take.

WC: When Ma got home by subway from the Mass. General Hospital where doctors had told her what was wrong with Bernardette, and not very gently, she was devastated. Dad was home waiting for her to return. At the end of a long discussion, I fumbled into the kitchen to hear Ma say, "Joe, we have one. What are we going to do with two?" My father's response, "Well, Mary, God gave one, now He's given us two. We have to accept His will, roll up our sleeves, and begin all over again." And that's exactly what they did, God, bless them!

Ma was an openly religious woman, who lived her faith and taught it to us. Dad was not ostensibly pious, like most Irishmen, but he was a good, solid man of faith. Mom and Dad got all of us together and said, "Now you know we have many problems to face, so we have to pull together as a family if we are going to make it. We all have to share the load." I always regard this as the beginning of my novitiate.

OLDEST SISTER MARY

RR: Tell us about your oldest sister. Does she live around Boston?

WC: We were very close growing up as kids. After she graduated from St. Mary's High School in Cambridge (Notre Dame Sisters), she got a very good secretarial position in an elite firm in Boston (which I got for her through a St. Joseph Sister). Can't you hear the rivalry in our voices? Her first Christmas there she came home with a \$500 bonus. Ma was resting on the parlor couch. When Mary told her, she almost went through the ceiling into the upstairs bedroom. Dad didn't make that in many weeks!

Anyhow, she married a chief in the Navy. When she

first brought him home, Dad would hardly speak to him, which was not like him at all. Aha! We realized. His full name was Warren Spurgeon Milliken Munroe, a Protestant. Dad was cool to him, until he showed up one evening with a catechism and asked how he could become a Catholic. I was in college at the time and taught him his religious doctrine. Then Fr. Finnegan, priest at Sacred Heart Parish, examined and baptized him. Thank God, he remained a staunch Catholic all his life.

A week after their wedding they went out to Hawaii where he was stationed. She loved Navy life, the rough and tumble of life on the base, being a Navy wife and all that went with it. He was a wonderful man; he died suddenly a few years before she did. She had open heart surgery about eleven years ago. After the surgery, all systems failed, and she died within a few days. Typical of her, she was so disappointed when Warren retired from the Navy. She had really loved the Navy style of life.

OTHER SISTERS

RR: What about your other sisters? You mentioned a sister Kathleen. What was she like?

WC: She was totally different from the rest of us except Pauline. We were all blond, blue-eyed, and tended to be short and round. She had almost pitch-black hair, green eyes, and was quite tall compared to the rest of us. Kitten was Dad's pet name for her when she was a baby, a name that caught on within the family. She hated it, as you can imagine, as she got older, and threatened to strangle anyone of us on the spot if we used it in front of non-family members. We didn't dare. Not only did Kay differ from us physically, but temperamentally we were miles apart. Dad, Mary, Anne, and I were extroverts in varying degrees; Kay was just like

Mother, very much the introvert, reserved, quiet. She had friends, but never a big crowd of them. When I was in college, I would take her to parties, dances, and college affairs. After a while I'd go looking for her, only to find her behind the ferns.

In spite of her shyness, she met and married a wonderful man two years to the day younger than herself. Don Kenneally was a printer by trade and a very good one. He was from Lynn, but they settled in Medford.

She suffered many painful illnesses all her life, rheumatoid arthritis, double breast cancer, and her final illness, pancreatic cancer. She was treated well at the Mass. General Hospital, but because of some sort of HMO snafu she had to be moved to the Spaulding Rehabilitation Center. At MGH she was given sufficient pain killers to give her some relief, but at Spaulding they could not or would not give her morphine to relieve her terrible pain. Like our mother, she had a high tolerance for pain. I remember being with her one day when she jumped up in bed and cried out in great distress, "Lord, please take it away. Please!" She was in terrible pain. When she fell back into bed, they gave her only Tylenol! Thank God, she died a few days later.

Don visits her grave often; he still misses her very much. He and his two daughters and his four grandchildren remain very close friends of mine.

A DIFFICULT DECISION

WC: My next sister was Pauline. I have spoken a lot about her before. Bernadette, a totally broken child, was a full-time job for Ma. Taking care of her, Pauline, and the four of us was becoming impossible for one woman. It was clear that Ma and Dad had to make a decision. One of them had to be institutionalized. They decided Bernadette needed more mother's care than Pauline.

Since Pauline was epileptic as well profoundly retarded, Monson State Hospital (now call Monson Developmental Center) was the only mental hospital that would accept her, for us a long way from home. She went on December 20. Every December 20, Ma stayed in her room and cried all day.

Hospital authorities told us not to visit her for a month. We left her a spritely, active, roly-polly child. We found her a grayish, wan, backward child who had forgotten us completely. They told us that she pined away from lack of love. To the day he died, Dad insisted that she recognized him. She really didn't, but we humored him and it made him feel good. Pauline is still living at seventy-one. She had a stroke recently, but is recovering nicely, thank the Lord.

SISTER ANNE

RR: What about your sister, Anne?

WC: Anne is the love of my life. She is eight years younger than I. When I tell people that I had five sisters, their first remark is usually, "Boy, you must have been spoiled." As you can read in the above pages, there was not much room for anyone being spoiled.

Now can they ever say it! Anne spoils me all the time, as does her husband, Dan Wywoda. She married an international businessman, a wonderful man. Before he retired, she joined him on many of his business trips—Tokyo, Taiwan, Seoul, Singapore, Paris, Vienna, London—you know, all the famous places.

They built a nice home in Milford, Connecticut, and have a wonderful life together. We are great friends. We talk on the phone at least twice a week, they visit me here at Champion, and I visit them at Milford when I need a change of venue. Anne is the best. I love her dearly. She deserves the good life she is able to live now. She and Dan are the best couple.

HIGH SCHOOL DAYS AT MATIGNON

RR: Tell us a bit about your schooling.

WC: I went to my parish grammar school. Matignon was in the process of being built in North Cambridge and was using Sacred Heart Central High School as temporary quarters. Since Sacred Heart was my home parish, I didn't have to pay tuition. But tuition at Matignon was \$85—for me, out of the question. Ma would never ask for help; her expression was, "We'll do without, but we'll do without with dignity." But she did it for me, because I was a very bright student. She felt that I needed something more than a public school education.

RR: So how did she work this out?

WC: She knew about the Sister superior of Matignon (who lived at Sacred Heart). Though she had a reputation of being rather strict and a bit of a tyrant, she was really a kind old gal. Ma called on all the courage she could muster and went to see Sister Magdalena.

After she had huffed and puffed four stories, Sister met her at the head of the stairs. "Mrs. Cullen, I've been trying to get in touch with you to give you some good news, but you have no telephone, so I could not get in contact with you. Archbishop Cushing is offering a scholarship to Matignon for the top student at Sacred Heart, and your Billy is it." Ma was so grateful that she didn't even have to ask, not to mention how proud she was that her son got that top honor.

GRATITUDE FOR THE SISTERS

WC: And that was that. I had the Sisters of St. Joseph for twelve splendid years. I have great devotion to those Sisters of St. Joseph and to all nuns. So though there isn't much I can do for those nuns who taught me in grammar school and in high school, if ever a nun asks me to do something for her, I am more than happy to

say yes! “Father, would you . . . ?” My answer was always a quick YES.” That was my way of saying thanks to all the good sisters I had over the years.

I never had a bad one. I get really ticked off when I hear people say, “Oh, the nuns always used to beat us.” I never, never saw that happen. All I ever saw were the kindness, gentleness, generosity, and patience of these good women. They were wonderful. I could talk about them forever, so I had better stop here.

EXPERIENCING MATIGNON

RR: What was life at Matignon like?

WC: I had a great experience there. People always talk about all the troubles they have during the teen years with all their growing pains. But for me, high school was a breeze; I had no problem with academics.

Matignon was coed. I always had a load of friends, who traveled around together to dances, basketball games, and the like. There was always a party at someone’s house. We had a kookie old nun, Sister St. Augustine, who made us laugh constantly with her nutty comments. Anne Fleming and I used to get so giggly we couldn’t stop. Even to this day, Annie and I still talk on the phone and get giggly over a Gussie story. She helped to spice up our Matignon days. I just had a wonderful time in high school with no significant hang-ups. They were happy years.

HAPPY COLLEGE YEARS AT BC

RR: It really sounds that way. In the course of all that, what was it that gave you an interest in the Jesuits?

WC: I never even knew what a Jesuit was. As long as I can remember from the time I was a very little boy, my father would always say, “When the time comes, son, you’re going over there.” And he would point somewhere across the river toward Boston College. That

was a given, there was never any doubt about it.

I took the entrance exam, which I passed with flying colors. But where would I get the \$300 for tuition and expenses? Imagine now, \$300 for tuition and expenses at BC! That was still a lot of money for my family.

My mother used to go to the many devotions and services at St. Mary's in the North End, where Fr. Whelan was pastor. She and Fr. Whelan had become close friends. He was her regular confessor for many years. He had become treasurer at BC. One day she ran into him and mentioned that she would like her son to go to BC, but it would be hard for the family to meet the tuition. He said to her, "We have scholarships all over the place. I'll see if I can find one for Billy." A few days later he called to say, "I couldn't get a full scholarship, but there is a half-scholarship available." With help from my oldest sister Mary, who was working full-time, I was on my way.

RR: How did you do at BC?

WC: My next step was to see the Freshman Dean, Fr. Francis O. Corcoran. When he looked over my high school grades and entrance exam, he thought that I should be in an honors program, so he gave me an honors Latin exam on sight, which I passed with no problems. I never had any Greek before, but BC was starting an experimental Greek program. So here I was, a BC Honors freshman with Latin, Greek, English, French, chemistry, math, and fine arts—one hell of a load!

RR: I should say so!

WC: But I managed to get through it somehow. I loved my four years of college. I really did. I had many friends. A.B. honors was a small group, so we tended to move around together a lot.

Among them you might remember the names of Jim Hosie, who left BC after one year and began again at Holy Cross, and Al Cardoni's brother, Ed, who died

just recently. And Jack McNiece, and so many more.

In those days we had mostly all Jesuits in class. Many impressed me very much, but the two that impressed me most were Fr. Bill Leonard and Fr. Leo Reilly.

RR: They were well known and liked on campus.

WC: Oh, yes. In all my years of schooling, Bill was the only one who ever flunked me. I flunked my midterm exam in English in January. When I got the notice, you can imagine I was devastated, crushed.

Late in the afternoon I decided to see Bill in the old barracks building left over from World War II, where classes were held. I knew he would be there. It was after 4:00 PM on a dark, slushy afternoon.

Bill was still in the broken-down wooden classroom correcting papers. I knocked with fear and trepidation. He greeted me with a welcoming smile, "Come in, Bill. I've been waiting for you. I knew you'd be here before long."

This was followed by a long chat, the first among many. He explained the failing grade by saying, "I could have passed you. You're a good kid, but a bit cocky. I thought that this was the time for you to get your ass kicked. Why not now at the beginning of your college studies, to get you started on the right path?"

He was right on track. From that time on, I was an honor student. After a long conversation, he put his black cape around my shoulders and headed up the hill towards St. Mary's Hall. From that day on, we became fast friends. He was my close connection with the Jesuits.

THE FREEDOM OF FR. REILLY

RR: How about the second Jesuit who impressed you?

WC: The second man who really touched me very much was Fr. Leo Reilly. I had him for ethics in my senior year and had observed him over the years. I thought

he was just wonderful for the way he handled himself with the students.

The thing that stands out in my mind was his freedom. I remember one day in particular. While walking across campus one rather warm day in April, I passed Fr. Reilly, who was singing, “It came upon a midnight clear . . .” I came up behind him and said, “You’re a little out of season, aren’t you, Father?” He turned and looked at me and said, “Bill, when I feel like singing Christmas carols, I sing Christmas carols, no matter what the season.” And he invited me to join him. I thought to myself, ‘Whatever makes him that free, I want.’ He was always free. I also felt that in their prayer life, both Bill and Leo were close to God.

There were others, too. Maybe I’m too superficial, but Fr. Leo McCauley’s horrendous jokes—and he had many of them (we used to call him “Uncle Miltie”), as well as Fr. Joe Connor’s leading the cheers in Latin at the football rallies, both impressed me very much. These in addition to the fine teaching and scholarship that BC provided. They all merged in forming in me a great attraction to the Society of Jesus.

USHERED ALONG INTO THE JESUITS

RR: What brought you to Shadowbrook?

WC: I was always a pious kid. During October and May a group of students would assemble before the statue of our Lady on campus and recite the rosary each day. Another group would go to St. Clement’s Shrine in Boston once a month for nocturnal adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Today they would do different things, but that was our form of service in the 1950s. I used to go to Mass every day, sometimes in St. Mary’s Chapel, usually at my parish church at home.

Oh, I forgot to mention another influential teacher in my life, a layman who was as much of a Jesuit as any

Jesuit I know, Mr. John Norton. He got married while we had him in first-year Latin, and we couldn't believe it. He was a bit of a cynic, but he kept us honest. I lost contact with him for years after BC. Years later, he lived in the parish where I spent many happy summers on the Cape. We shared many happy hours sipping a scotch and soda on John's back porch. He loved Jesuits, and was always so positive and encouraging.

Well, back to my Shadowbrook story. All the while I was at BC, I would visit Fr. Whelan regularly to give him a progress report. On one of my final visits, he said to me, "Bill, there are several graduate fellowships available if you would like to continue your studies. I could look into those for you, if you would like."

After hemming and hawing a bit, I said, "Don't do anything yet. I've been thinking I might investigate the Jesuits and apply to Shadowbrook." And that was the first and only time I ever said anything like that to anyone. A few days later, I was called out of class to Fr. Whalen's office, who informed me that Fr. Provincial was here and would like to meet me. That was interview #1. By noon the next day, three others followed.

I was told I had to take a physical examination. I was twenty-two years and only weighed ninety-eight pounds. I would be informed later about whether or not I'd be accepted. I hadn't told my Father or Mother anything about what was going on. I wasn't even sure myself. I felt like I was being shanghaied!

RR: How did your parents react when you finally told them?

WC: I didn't even have a chance to tell them myself. Before I could get it all together in my own mind to spring it on them, I got a letter in the mail. Dad was home alone; Ma was out doing errands. He didn't bother to read the name of the addressee; he just saw Cullen and

opened it and began to read, “. . . and you are to report to Shadowbrook on July 30 . . .”

He got so excited, he ran up Sixth Street waving the letter like a madman. Luckily, Ma was coming down the street. I got home a short time later. Ma and Dad were still babbling. Anne was baby-sitting a little child whom I picked up. Then Dad said, “There’s a letter for you on the cabinet.” I picked it up and read it. I looked over to see my mother crying. After a brief pause that seemed like an hour, I asked whether it was all right with them. Dad said, “Son, whatever you want to do, I’m behind you one hundred percent.” And Ma confirmed, “And so am I, one hundred percent,” and threw her arms around me and continued to cry. They were happy at what I was about to do.

TRAINING AS A JESUIT

RR: Could you give us an overview of the years of training, perhaps focusing on two or three important experiences during the course?

WC: As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a teacher. Dad used to say, “Billy ought to be a good teacher. Kids and dogs take to you.” That’s why Jesuits were so appealing to me, and not the diocesan clergy.

NOVITIATE LIFE

WC: I loved life at the novitiate from the very beginning. At first regular order was fine, the other guys were great, prayer had its difficulties, but it had its moments, the landscape couldn’t be beat, and Thursday holidays were the greatest. John Post was kind and gentle, but scary, at least I found him so. His spirituality I found rather harsh in those days.

As I mentioned before, I was very small, quick, and high-strung, all of which were considered faults to be “rooted out.” *Agere contra* [to act against] was the name

of the game. Bear [Don] Larkin was given to me as my model of religious behavior. Imagine, the master of novices told me in all seriousness that, if I did not become like Bear Larkin and calm down and slow down, I wouldn't last as a Jesuit. At another time he told me, "I don't think you'll last very long in the Society unless you change." I was young and impressionable. This was devastating.

And the *socius* [assistant to the novice master] never missed a chance to put me down. He liked the big guys like Larkin, Charley Hancock, Jerry Starrat, Mike Connolly, who helped him to chop down trees. He would humiliate me because of my size, my inability to hack down trees or to work on the farm—me and a few others like me.

We had to weigh in once a month in his office. I dreaded it. I was more fearful of myself than of him. I was afraid I would belt him or throw something at him. If I complained to John Post, his only response was, "Thank God, Brother. Pray for more."

Both the master and the *socius* told me that I would never be successful in the Society. I bore that burden all my life in the Society. Don't forget, these were years of formation, and I was being "formed."

RR: I'm sorry all that happened to you.

WC: I had never really gotten over the constant humiliation. The point was not so much that I was small and scrawny and not like some of the other novices, but that there was something wrong with me. This fact haunted me not only during my novitiate days; it was something that affected me up until fairly recently. I had been left with the feeling that whatever work I tried to do, I would fail—not a very healthy start to my Jesuit life.

RR: I'm sorry you were treated this way.

BURNT OUT

WC: Well, anyway, the Shadowbrook fire interrupted the relative calm and regular order of life at Lenox. Although a traumatic experience, the whole situation was resolved in three days.

The whole community, after the stay at the Red Lion Inn, our very temporary home of only three days, was relocated to three other novitiates—at Plattsburgh, New York, St. Andrew-on-Hudson [Poughkeepsie], and Wernersville, Pennsylvania.

I ended up at Wernersville, a place so different from Shadowbrook that it would take a whole book to describe it. After finishing novitiate there with first vows followed by a year of juniorate, we took a train to Weston, which was to be our home, off and on, for many years.

PHILOSOPHY

WC: Life in the philosophate was a happy time. Preparing for my master's in philosophy and/or licentiate was a good experience. Looking forward to a life in education, I chose the work of John Dewey as the subject of my thesis, and Reggie O'Neill as my director. Reggie was a pleasant man and a good guy to work with. When I think back, I really liked my two years in philosophical studies and had many friends among the men there.

REGENCY: BC HIGH AND HARVARD

WC: BC High. My dream come true. Latin, Greek, English, and religion. In those days, we knew everything. A chapter or two ahead of the kids. As long as they didn't know that. I never stood on the floor, but always on the platform: they were all taller than I, though my first class were only sophomores. My head was in the clouds for two years. Teaching and prefecting all day, prefecting the dance on Friday nights for Bertie [Ed]

Crowley (“Great source of revenue!”), football games at White Stadium on Friday afternoons, driving the fathers on their weekend calls on Saturday and Sunday, correcting papers in the rec room in between duties, swapping dumb answers—never a dull moment. It was wonderful.

At the end of my second year regency, I was looking forward to my third year at BC High—no more dumb mistakes. I was now a seasoned teacher, or so I thought. Then I got a telephone call from Jim Burke, the Prefect of Studies, who asked me to do two things for him—be his liaison person between himself and the scholastics on retreat at Holy Cross and at summer school at BC, and to apply to Harvard School of Education for a master’s degree in education.

My first reaction was, ‘If I go to Harvard, I’ll fail.’ But Jim insisted. Being an obedient Jesuit, I applied, was accepted, and went. I missed my third year of teaching, but continued to live at BC High, with the great Frank Gilday as my rector. I was able to maintain relationship with many of the kids I had had in class. And to my surprise, I loved Harvard, one full year of hard work from June of 1961 until July of 1962, and I had my Ed.M.

I picked up my degree on a rainy summer night, never dreaming anyone would have wanted to go through the rigors of the commencement ceremonies in Harvard Yard. Years later, Dad said to me, “I was always sorry that you didn’t walk in the Harvard commencement ceremonies to get your master’s degree.”

Thunderstruck, I said, “Dad, I never dreamed that you would have wanted to have done that. I would have gladly done it had I known. Why would you have wanted to have done that?” Typical of him: “Just to show those sons of bitches that we’re just as good as they are!”

CHANGE AND TURMOIL

RR: So you did well?

WC: That's what all my grades said. I finished my Harvard degree in one year. I was happy that I didn't have to do it bit by bit.

RR: Why?

WC: Our theologate years were coterminous with Vatican II. We knew that change was taking place, information was being leaked out—some authentic, some spurious, some speculative.

The faculty was split, some ready to embrace change, others not; some seeing change as undermining the whole structure of Catholic theology and tradition, others seeing it as a necessary updating of Catholic thinking and practice.

There were some external conflicts as well. Some wanted to move out of the country and onto the Boston College campus, where ideas could be exchanged more openly. Others said, "No way." Scholastics were young, impatient, very vocal, and opinionated, to say the least. Thank God for Paul Lucey's wise leadership and Daddy [Thomas] McDermott's shenanigans—we never would have made it without them. [Daddy was minister of the theologians and philosophers.]

A TRUE FRIEND

WC: I was experiencing much personal turmoil during those years. Having achieved my goal of teaching during regency and living a normal academic life at Harvard, I found the closed atmosphere of Weston smothering. At thirty years of age, I was back in the little red school house. I could not have had a better friend and benefactor during those days of internal and external conflict than Paul Lucey [the rector then]. He reserved every Monday evening in his office to listen to me pour out my woes. He listened so patiently. After several

weeks when I finished, he sorted out the whole mess for me, tried to make sense out of it, and sent me on my way with his blessing.

TUTORING IN BOSTON

WC: One thing he realized: I needed some outside work. A few of my fellow scholastics had been working on a tutorial program for the summer and on weekends for disadvantaged kids in the South End of Boston at the Immaculate. In those days, it was unusual for us to do work beyond the community except to teach catechism.

Paul gave his full blessing to Jack Williamson, Dick Cleary, Joe Devlin, and myself to begin. This meant adult things—organizing a program, raising money, dealing with government agencies, etc. As you would expect, we got full cooperation from the great Frank Gilday, who provided us with living quarters, classroom space—whatever we needed.

The program was successful, and lasted many years after us. It later became known as “Jimmy Talbot’s Program,” because he took it to greater heights after our time. Paul Lucey’s insight in getting me into some apostolic work along with some of the other men got me through the tough days of theological studies and on to the priesthood. I will never forget him for it.

TERTIANSHIP AT POMFRET

RR: What about your tertianship at Pomfret?

WC: Tertianship was a very calm, peaceful year after theology. It also meant we were coming to the end of studies. Besides the long retreat, the highlight of my year was the three months I spent as a teacher and counselor at St. Thomas More School in Oakdale, Connecticut. It’s Jim Hanrahan’s dream still in the process of fulfillment. Jim was the founder and headmaster of the school. Joe Trinkle [S.J.] was a close friend of mine

who had spent first semester there, had enjoyed it very much, and had figured that I would also.

So Joe said, "I'll put in a good word in for you." Jim was a man whose glass was always half full, a man of deep faith and hope, and generous beyond compare. Jim and I were kindred souls in the way we felt about the kids; we became fast friends. Jim invited me back many years later, where I served for five and a half very happy years.

Jimmy Coleran was the tertian master and John Post was the rector. Jimmy got sick during the long retreat, and John Post was assigned to finish. Some people would not go to John's points, but finished the retreat on their own. They had refused to accept the fact that John had changed. But he really had.

Having been burned in the Shadowbrook fire and broken his back in the fall from the window, and later when at Fairfield, he fell in the shower, turned the faucet to full heat and lay scalding for about seven minutes before anyone heard him. His suffering had opened his heart to full expression of compassion to anyone who suffered. His seemingly harsh spirituality had completely disappeared in his later life.

BISHOP CONNOLLY HIGH SCHOOL

RR: John Post had certainly changed by that time?

WC: He certainly had. Later I will recall one more John Post story. When J. V. O'Connor, the provincial, made his visitation at the end of tertianship, I wanted to ask him to send me to Cranwell. Before I could say anything, he spoke up, "Well, Bill, it looks like Fall River for you." I didn't know at that time whether Fall River was animal, vegetable, or mineral. He informed me that the Diocese of Fall River had asked the Society to staff a new school, which was under construction, was temporarily operating in a local parish school, and

would assume full operation in September. I would go there immediately to finish the year in place of the history teacher, who was heading for early summer school.

In the meantime, I would live at Round Hills in South Dartmouth and commute back and forth to Fall River. We moved into the new residence in September. We literally moved into the new residence with the furniture on our backs, but that was exciting and kind of fun.

DIRECTING PLAYS

WC: I didn't realize it at the time, but I was about to embark on another career besides teaching, preaching in local parishes, giving retreats, etc. I stuck my head into the principal's office one day on some business or other when he said, "Come in! I need your help. I'm trying to line up people for extracurricular activities, and I'm stymied on drama. Who on the staff can teach drama, and, more specifically, can direct plays?" Equally stymied, I shrugged. Then a direct question, "Do you know anything about plays?" "Not much. But if you need someone, I'll give it a try. It sounds like fun." It was the beginning of a whole new "extracurricular" career for me.

In ten years, the Connolly Players presented nineteen full-length plays and fifteen festival plays. We had a good reputation around town and were well attended. To give the kids status beyond what they considered a backwater town, I joined the Mass. High School Drama Guild, and we hosted many festivals on our home stage. When we won locally, we had to take our winning play on the road, ending up at the Dorothy Quincy Suite at the John Hancock Building in Boston. What a thrill ride that was for a Fall River kid!

RR: What about the students themselves?

WC: The Fall River students were great—simple, unsophisticated, and not a bit unruly. They couldn't believe that we could go back and forth to Boston in an evening—so far away was it. They were open, warm, and friendly, very easy to get along with.

Since we had to go out on call to the local parishes every weekend, we got to know the local community very well. The Portuguese there are warm and loving and embrace newcomers quite readily. The French are a bit stand-offish until they get to know you; then you become part of the family. I was adopted by four French grandes dames, whom I always called my aunties and who were as dear to me as any relatives.

AN EYE-OPENER

WC: A kid story. I remember in particular a troubled and troublesome kid. I had to go to Boston one evening and I invited the boy to come with me. He wondered if he would be able to get home that evening. I assured him he would, and, with parental permission, we started on our long pilgrimage from Fall River to Boston. When my business was finished, we went to a restaurant along the wharf, Jimmy's Harborside, I think, where we got a seat by the window.

While we were eating, a yacht pulled alongside and the passengers got out and came into the restaurant. Since we were sitting right next to the door, a man and a woman stopped to speak to us. The lad was dumbfounded (as was I). The movie, "The Thomas Crown Affair," was being filmed in Boston at the time, and the man and the woman were none other than Steve McQueen and Faye Dunaway.

Then, as we were leaving the restaurant, an elderly gentleman stopped, held the door for us and chatted a bit. After he passed, I asked Pip if he recognized the old gentleman. I responded to his negative answer, that

that was Arthur Fiedler, the conductor of the Boston Pops Orchestra. Wow! Pip thought that I knew everyone!

RR: That would have been exciting for anyone.

WELCOMED AND ACCEPTED

WC: Here is another story I like to tell—it's one of my favorite compliments. I was talking with a somewhat troubled kid who had asked to see me privately. At one point in the conversation, he looked up and said directly at me, "You know, it's nice to have you around, Father. I feel very comfortable telling you anything, 'cuz you're not so hot yourself."

CAST'S WONDERFUL SPIRIT

RR: I assume you were quite friendly with the students who took part in your plays.

WC: The cast and crew of a play, including the director, are a very tight group. They loved to be together even at rehearsals when they were not needed. They didn't worry when I was screaming orders at them from the back of the auditorium; it was when I was silent that they worried. That's when they worked hardest. And, God bless them, they did work hard.

Pre-performance, we would always have Mass, plenty of time allowed for makeup and dressing, and a period for relaxing, then time for a short prayer, everyone in place, and curtain. The stage manager had complete control backstage. After the final curtain, thank you speeches were not allowed—not professional.

We had a favorite hangout across the river, The Somerset Lodge, into which we all piled after every performance to chow down on the best pizza in town, and where we would dance and sing and clown around until all hours. The drama director at a local girls' school and a great friend of mine would bring along a

couple of carloads of her young ladies to add to the festivities.

STUDENT GIVE AND TAKE

WC: The school athletes always supported the Players. The gym and the auditorium were off the same foyer, so when the varsity team was practicing, the junior varsity watched play practice from the rear of the hall, and vice versa, with the varsity. When the actors were not needed on stage, they were in the gym supporting the team. And they went to every game. The relationship between the two groups was excellent.

Only a few deadheads would refer to the players as “fags.” We countered with an offense. We defined ourselves as the “Fag Actors Guild” with lapel buttons with the logo, “FAG.” It diffused some of the nonsense.

One day a track man was passing by the auditorium, looked in, and sneered as he went by, “. . . a bunch of fags in there . . .” I decided not to let this pass. So I said, “Hey, Sam, what gender are they?” “What?” “What sex are they?” “Boys and girls.” “And we are the only activity on campus that is coed. And you know what? They’re all dating one another, they’re going to the prom together.

“Now let’s take a look at you. You are half-dressed, you’ve been chasing young boys around the track for an hour. You’re going in, taking all your clothes off, and taking a common shower with these boys. Now what’s faggy? Now get out of here, Sam! I don’t want to hear that kind of talk out of you again!” Sam avoided me for the rest of the year.

Later that year after graduation I met him on a street in Tiverton. He crossed the street and came right toward me. ‘Oh, oh! I’m in for it now,’ I thought. But he said, “I was mad at first when you said to me what

you did, but now I'm glad. I needed to hear that. Thank you for saying it." He shook hands and went on his way. You never know, do you?

FALL RIVER TO FAIRFIELD

RR: What did you do after Connolly?

WC: I was very surprised to receive a phone call from Frank Moy, the head chaplain at Fairfield University. He thought that I might fit in well with the campus ministry team. I had never thought beyond high school, but was delighted with the prospects of working on a university campus, and not a little overawed. I was to live in a dorm with the students.

When I got down there, I found outreach very difficult, because I was working in an out-of-the-way office and had little opportunity to get acquainted with the students. Fairfield was so much larger than a one-building high school.

I kept asking myself how could I reach out to the students beyond my dorm corridor. I wasn't very good at organizing programs. Then I realized that my strongest suit was dealing with students on a one-to-one basis.

RR: So what did you decide to do?

WC: There was a bench outside my dorm building, which was halfway between the quadrangle with its four dorms and the student dining room. Scores of students had to pass it three times a day. What better place to meet the community than a park bench?

So each evening at meal time, I got a book or the newspaper, occupied the bench, and waited for customers. It took a while, but bit by bit students got used to seeing me, same place, same time. They would make friendly remarks, soon some would stop to talk, later many would stop to talk, and before long I had made many friends. The "Bench" soon became an in-

stitution. Then they would drift into my office, see me after Mass. My work had finally begun. It took time and patience, but was worth it. I attended almost all student functions.

After only five years on campus, the students dedicated the yearbook to me. On my fiftieth birthday, the RA's [resident assistants] in Gonzaga, my dorm, presented me with a Yamaha moped. Imagine, a little fat man buzzing around campus on a moped. Larry O'Neil [S.J.], who's a good friend and had received the yearbook dedication the previous year, said, "Yeh, Willie, I get a yearbook, you get a Yahama. I can't ride the damn yearbook!"

He also used to say to me, "Willie, you're a disgrace, hugging and kissing all over campus—the boys as well as the girls." I always gave him the same answer, "Well, Larry, that's one of the advantages of being short and round."

DIFFICULTIES IN CAMPUS MINISTRY

RR: Were there other interesting changes at Fairfield?

WC: Yes. Frank Moy had resigned as Director of Campus Ministry. Philip Pusateri had been appointed to replace him. I had some influence in hiring a woman for our campus ministry team, but she had turned out to be an ultra-feminist and a real problem. The president knew that he needed to release her (simply not renew her one-year contract). Not so easy.

Universities are terrified of law suits. Fairfield decided to reorganize the whole campus ministry team. Word went out. Philip resigned. In solidarity with him as friend, I resigned. We were able to spare the university a law suit. The only problem with all of this was that I was without a job.

BARRY HYNES' NEW SCHOOL

RR: What were you able to do instead?

WC: This happened at a time when the Province was no longer assigning men to particular jobs. Each man had to find his own line of work. It was all new to me. Anyway, I turned to my old patron, St. Joseph, to get me a job. On May 1, the feast of St. Joseph the Worker, while I was at lunch, there was a stranger at another table (a stranger to me). Someone told me his name was Barry Hynes [son of Mayor John B. Hynes of Boston 1950-1960], that he was in the process of founding a new school in Roxbury for poor kids, that he was looking for a Jesuit to help him, and that he would like to begin at once.

Barry and I met, talked over the whole project. It sounded right down my alley, something I had always wanted to do, had done before, and loved it. Barry was happy to get an enthusiastic warm body. Because there was no one else, Barry dubbed me principal. As administrator he was able to give structure to the whole operation. It was patterned after a school in New York. Having worked in Nativity in New York, Barry had a clear and distinct idea of what Nativity in Boston was going to be like. It was very exciting starting something very new.

The Archdiocese of Boston gave us part of St. Francis de Sales School in Roxbury, where the pastor Fr. Jerry Osterman was wonderful in getting us started. Barry worked at recruiting a team of volunteer teachers, which he was able to do in a remarkably short time. And he was able to get several. I, along with Barry, was trying to recruit students and win them over to a new experience.

Parents were attracted, but not a little skeptical. Some had been burned before by empty promises. By the opening day of school, we had twenty-eight students

for the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Each grade had the name of a Jesuit saint—as you would expect, Loyola, Xavier, and Gonzaga—a tradition that continues on. Our program was designed for sixty students max after the New York model, a quota that was easy to fill after our first year. Our good reputation spread very quickly.

RR: What kind of students were they?

WC: They were like kids you might find in any middle school—bright, average, some below average. Many, if not most, were below grade level in math, reading, and language skills, so that's where we concentrated. Like most kids, they were impish and undisciplined, but certainly able to be trained. Because they were so needy, they responded to orders and did what they were told. If not, they spent the afternoon sport time in JUG [detention]. No one wanted that. In time, they learned to toe the mark. We took them many places as a group, and never once did they embarrass us.

RR: Where were your students from?

WC: Most of the students came from Roxbury, Mattapan, the South End, and a smattering of other places. The school day was long:

8:25-3:00 Class

3:00-5-00 Sports. Home for dinner.

7:00-9-00 Supervised study hall in school.

A long day for student and teacher! On Saturdays there was always a field trip to some educational place or just plain fun! Once the kids declared ownership of the Nativity School and its program, they loved it.

RR: Clearly!

DIFFICULTIES WITH HEALTH

WC: I could go on and on. This was a very important time in my life and a very happy time. However, it was not without its problems. Barry and I did not always see

eye to eye on some things. He was a business man by background and I a school person, and so we differed. But that never affected my work with the youngsters. Besides my work in the classroom, I prepared several for Confirmation and a few for Baptism. All in all, it was the work that I am most proud of.

After a while, I began to have problems walking because of circulation problems and spinal stenosis, and was unable to chase little kids around the school yard anymore. Much to my chagrin, I had to give it up after nine years.

My year after Nativity was such a painful one that I'm going to employ Ciceronian preterition and pass over it entirely, except to say that I was in a parish with the last of the medieval monarchs.

ST. THOMAS MORE SCHOOL

WC: One day at Newbury Street where I had been living during the duration of my work at Nativity, I got a phone call from Larry O'Neil from Fairfield. Typical of Larry, "Willy, Jimmy wants you." I knew exactly what he meant.

What he was saying was that Jim Hanrahan, the Headmaster of Thomas More School and a very close friend of Larry, had an opening at the school for a full-time chaplain, and he wanted me to fill it.

I said to Larry, "Oh, I don't think so, Larry; my diabetes is getting the best of me. I can't walk very well." "Jimmy's not going to take no for an answer. He wants you." Larry insisted, "He's going to go after you until you say yes."

So I said, "I'll tell you what, Larry. I'll give you a tentative maybe until I talk to my sister, Anne, and see what she says." Her response was more or less what I expected, "Oh, Billy, it sounds perfect for you. Take it. Call Larry and say yes."

All Larry could say was, "Jimmy will be very happy." Right after he got the news, Jim called me all excited (he was a very excitable man!) and told me to come right away. He was building me a brand-new chaplain's house on campus on Gardner Lake. School was about to begin. Then he showed me the new chapel, about four years old, also on the lake, which is absolutely beautiful and liturgically perfect. What an ideal setup for a chaplain!

RR: What were your responsibilities?

WC: I taught the students religion and prepared them for the reception of Confirmation. In former years, the students received their Confirmation mixed in with the students of the local parish. I had great relations with the local pastor and was able to help him out often. However, I thought it important that our own students have a sacramental identity of their own. The bishop agreed and sent the chancellor of the diocese each year while I was there to confer the Sacrament of Confirmation on our own students in our own chapel before the whole faculty and the entire student body. It had great witness value. All the kids were quite impressed.

And the Chancellor Bob Brown had a wonderful way with young people. It was a special day on campus in every way, a day I was very proud of. I forgot to mention, only about three quarters or less of the population were Catholic, but all seemed to be quite moved by the proceedings.

CHAPLAIN'S HOUSE OPEN 24/7

RR: How did the house work out?

WC: My house was quite a magnet for the kids. All the students were boarders, a rather institutional lifestyle. My house had five rooms (upstairs was off-limits), a very large sitting room, which I divided into two rooms,

one for TV and one for conversation, and a full kitchen—always fully stocked, and with a door I could close for private consultation, when it was not in use. The door to my house was never locked, which the headmaster appreciated, some teachers didn't.

Everyone was always welcome, whether I was there or not. There was always a good supply of soda and goodies. Sometimes they would cook their own meals. We had many Korean youngsters who used to cook their own food illegally and dangerously in their dorm rooms. I was aghast when I heard this. Never again. I told them, "Use my kitchen any time you want." About twice a week there would be a faint knock on my door with a faint voice saying, "Noodle party."

"Of course, come in." Then there would follow about eight or nine Asian youngsters carrying bags full of Asian ingredients for an all-out noodle party. I loved when they came, because my kitchen was never cleaner than when they left. I wish the American kids did the same thing.

My house was full of students, and I loved every minute of it. They came individually and collectively. Their knowledge of religion was sparse. I moved Confirmation preparation from one hour of free time into a full-time curriculum with five periods a week. This led to many questions, in class and out of class, both from my own students and their friends.

Whether Catholic or not, all had to attend Sunday liturgy. Preaching offered me a good chance to spread the Word. At first I objected to obligatory Mass attendance; then I realized that many private prep schools have a chapel dimension as part of their program.

RR: How many years did you do that?

WC: I was at St. Thomas More School for five and one half very happy years. The founder and headmaster emeritus and dear friend was very pleased with my work.

TWO PAINFUL YEARS

RR: Why did you leave this work with kids and come here to Campion Center?

WC: It was not my own choice, Dick. One of the kids at Nativity accused me of molesting him, a youngster I don't even remember. I was wrenched out of St. Thomas More School by the provincial and *socius* at nine o'clock at night and driven to Weston.

I was devastated. Having spent forty-seven years working diligently with youth on several levels, this was more than I could comprehend.

It was announced to every student past and present at Nativity and at St. Thomas More, and a letter was sent to every house in the Province. Talk about humiliation. I was stripped of my priesthood, all because of what turned out to be a false accusation. It was two years before the civil court exonerated me of all charges, and six more months before the Society restored me to the priesthood. The Lord had asked me to bear a heavy cross in my old age.

RR: I'm sorry you had to go through that.

WC: It was an especially difficult time in my life.

AT HOME AT CAMPION

RR: Do you now feel settled here at Campion?

WC: Everyone here has been great to me from the very beginning. I don't like to single out individuals; however, some people stand out for their special kindness during the hardest times: Paul Lucey—as always, Joe Casey, George Murray, Bill Foley, Frank McManus, Tony Picariello, and Joe Devlin, to name but a few. But everyone has been exceptional in their manifestation of kindness. I do love it here and am very happy. I do have some physical problems—at seventy-six who doesn't? The Campion care is the best in the world.

RECONCILIATION WITH JOHN POST

RR: Do you have any additional memories?

WC: Yes, I have two stories I would like to add.

RR: By all means.

WC: The first one is a John Post story. A group of us were having breakfast at the Jesuit community residence in Fairfield one morning. John Post was among the men at table. When John got up to leave the room, we remarked among ourselves that John didn't look so well.

Just a few moments later, someone came rushing into the dining room and saying excitedly, "The landing! The landing! John is on the floor of the landing!" Jim McEleney ran to call 911, while I ran to the chapel to get the oils. John was in the midst of a serious heart attack.

I leaned over him with the oils on my thumb and thought, "Take it all back, John! Take it all back!" Then I anointed him and said the prayers for the sick. As I was finishing the Sacrament of the Sick, John opened his eyes and said in a faint voice, "Thank you, Billy. Jesus loves you, and I love you." He then fell back into a coma and died later that day. What a happy and blessed memory to have of a saintly man, whom I knew in good times and in not so good times.

RR: That's a great memory for you and for all of us who knew him.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

WC: That brings me to my second story, a story of unconditional love. One day I was scolding my sixth graders at Nativity for not doing their work up to snuff: "Class is over now. I want you to work extra hard at night study to have it done as well as you are capable." The boys were a bit upset as they scrambled out of the room, because I seldom showed anger.

One boy remained at his desk writing something. I said in a harsh voice, "You, too, Ayne. Go now and make sure you have everything right for tomorrow." He finished what he was writing, took it in his hands, tore it into a heart shape, folded it, and, as he passed me, put it into my sweater pocket. I picked up my books and started out of the room when I saw him peeking into the door. So I thought, 'Maybe he wants me to read the note.' I returned to my desk, opened the note, which read, "I love you, Fr. Cullen, and I hope you're not mad at me. But even if you are, I still love you."

Now that's unconditional love! To receive unconditional love from a little sixth grade boy (about twelve years old) is a beautiful experience, and one that I will never forget. A little Black ghetto kid whom the world ignores as insignificant and pushes aside. I will remember him always.

RR: A beautiful story!

A FINAL WORD: A GREAT GRACE

WC: It was these kinds of beautiful things along with Bill Russell's recent community retreat that helped me to put to rest my negative self-vision. Bill emphasized a sentence in Scripture that I had read a thousand times. Bill reminded us what Matthew said when Jesus called his disciples.

He called them because he wanted them. That's when I fully realized that Jesus really wanted me, though I couldn't chop trees and mow hay, though I wasn't Bear Larkin (a wonderful Jesuit but not me). My Jesuit life was to be with young people, who were not looking for the Incredible Hulk; they were looking for a kind teacher who would reach out to them, accept them, listen to them, laugh with them, cry with them when necessary. Joe Trinkle, whom kids "adored," and my-

self certainly put the lie to the Incredible Hulk nonsense.

Let's go back for a moment to the notion that Jesus wants me, each of us. If you meditate, you know it's right. I am so grateful to Bill for bringing that sentence into my consciousness so prominently, since I suffered from thinking I was unsuccessful all my life. I was there, because Jesus wanted me there. It took me all these years of my life to realize this fully. Though I was doing wonderful things all my life, I thought I was unsuccessful. It was a heavy burden to bear. At seventy-six years of age and fifty-three years in the Society, that burden has finally been lifted. I'm glad it happened before I die.

RR: That was a great gift. We've reached the end of our conversation. I can't think of anything better to close with than to say, "Yes, Bill, you've had a wonderful life."

Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also
yours in Christ Jesus,

Who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
something to be grasped.

Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death,
even death on a cross.

Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name
that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
of those in heaven and on earth
and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2: 5-11

Fr. William J. Cullen, S.J.

Born: June 30, 1932, East Cambridge,
Massachusetts
Entered: July 30, 1954, Lenox, Massachusetts, St.
Stanislaus Novitiate / Shadowbrook
Ordained: June 12, 1965, Weston, Massachusetts,
Weston College
Final Vows: May 1, 1978, Fall River, Massachusetts,
Bishop Connolly High School

1938 East Cambridge, Massachusetts: Sacred Heart
Grammar School - Student

1946 Cambridge, Massachusetts: Matignon High School -
Student

1950 Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts: Boston College -
Student

1954 Lenox, Massachusetts: St. Stanislaus Novitiate /
Shadowbrook - Novitiate [to March 10, 1956]

1956 Wernersville, Pennsylvania: St. Isaac Jogues Novi-
tiate - Novitiate [from March 10, 1956], juniorate

1957 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College - Studied
philosophy

- 1959 Boston, Massachusetts: Boston College High School
- Taught Latin, Greek, English, religion
- 1961 Boston, Massachusetts: Boston College High School
- Studied education at Harvard University
- 1962 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College - Studied
theology
- 1966 Pomfret, Connecticut: St. Robert Hall - Tertianship
- 1967 Fall River, Massachusetts: Bishop Connolly High
School - Taught religion, English, history; Director
of Drama
- 1975 London, England: Heythrop College - Sabbatical:
theological renewal studies
- 1976 Fall River, Massachusetts: Bishop Connolly High
School - Taught religion, English, history; Director
of Drama
- 1979 Fairfield, Connecticut: Fairfield University -
1979-1988 Associate Director of Campus
Ministry
1988 Fall Assistant Director of Admissions
- 1989 Rome, Italy: Gregorian University - Spiritual
Renewal Program

- 1990 Boston, Massachusetts: Loyola House - Taught religion, English at Nativity Prep School
- 1999 Charlestown, Massachusetts: St. Francis de Sales Parish - Pastoral ministry
- 2000 Oakdale, Connecticut: St. Thomas More School - Chaplain, taught religion
- 2005 Weston, Massachusetts: Campion Residence - Pastoral ministry

Degrees

- 1954 Bachelor of Arts Honors, Boston College
- 1959 Licentiate in Philosophy, Weston College-Boston College
- 1959 Master of Arts, Philosophy, Weston College-Boston College
- 1962 Master of Education, Harvard University
- 1966 Bachelor of Divinity, Weston College

Appendix

The following essay was written by Mr. Hudson Ewei, a graduate of Nativity Prep School, as a writing sample on his application form for entrance to Georgetown University. Georgetown sent it to Nativity; Nativity sent it to me. Though a bit self-serving, I would like it included in my Oral History because it encapsulates in a personal way my attitudes and goals in my many years in the field of education. (Hudson was accepted into Georgetown.)

The most influential person I have met so far, without a doubt, is my middle school religion teacher, Fr. William Cullen. I owe much of my general character to him and to his many teachings that have shaped me into a positive young man. By observing him, I have learned many of the important morals I hold close to me today. He taught me the meaning of leadership and its importance in everyday decisions. He showed me how to genuinely put the needs of others before my own, and the importance of friendships. To this day, I hold Fr. Cullen in the highest reverence and will never forget the lessons he taught me.

The difference between leaders and followers is very important to Fr. Cullen. On many occasions, he pulled me aside and delivered a similar lecture: "This isn't you", or "Take your own stands and make your own decisions." These were only a small piece of the advice he routinely pounded into my psyche. His intention was to drill into my brain a notion of what I know is right as opposed to complying with popular beliefs. This continues to be a guiding principle by which I live. Knowing that I am doing what I believe is right gives me an added sense of self-confidence and pride.

Fr. Cullen also stresses the importance of helping others. He became a priest and dedicated his whole life to service. I believe no one can better teach the idea of service than Fr. Cullen whose sole purpose is to serve. Listening to and observing a man who readily accepts any chance to help someone in need really affected the way I look at the world. As a result of his teaching, I really make a conscious effort to help those I can.

As a result of helping so many different people, Fr. Cullen developed many friendships. I often saw him around campus, always with a ready smile, speaking to someone from the surrounding community. For someone who does not have many material possessions, Fr. Cullen is an extremely happy person. His friends are always a top priority, and I never knew him to have any enemies.

Anyone could call on Fr. Cullen, and he would make every effort to offer aid. I also witnessed the other side of friendship when Fr. Cullen was in distress, his friends were at his side, helping him anyway they could. I remember thinking that such a man will never die alone. Dying alone is something people fear deeply, and as a result, they make bad decisions to try to prevent such solitude. They tie themselves down to people they don't truly love, or even like. Fr. Cullen taught me that I shouldn't preoccupy myself with such worries. He showed me that as long as you are kind to people and genuinely care for them, you will never be truly alone.

Fr. Cullen's life is an example of each of his teachings. The one aspect I admire most about Fr. Cullen is that he never told someone to do something he did not regularly do himself. I have had other teachers who have exemplified the adage, "Do as I say, not as I do." And the lesson always seems a bit hypocritical. Fr. Cullen, however, makes a conscious effort to practice what he preaches, and I believe that is why his teaching weighs so heavily on my mind.