

**New England Jesuit  
Oral History Program**



**Rev. William J. Hamilton, S.J.  
Volume 91**

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ISBN 1-60067-088-1

August 2009

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## 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 sometimes 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 G. Hamilton, S.J.  
By Fr. Richard W. Rousseau, S.J.  
January 6, 2009

**FAMILY BACKGROUND**

**RICHARD ROUSSEAU:** Good Morning.

**WILLIAM HAMILTON:** Good Morning.

**RR:** Welcome to our conversation. We're just going to be talking about the things that have happened to you over the years. So let's begin with when you were born and where.

**WH:** I was born April 1, 1930 in Proctor, Vermont. It is about six miles west of Rutland.

**HIS FATHER**

**RR:** Tell us a little bit about your father.

**WH:** Well, my father, William J. Hamilton, was of Scotch extraction; my mother, born Anna Tennien, was Irish Catholic. My father was a convert. My mother's family goes back to the potato famine in Ireland; they came over then. And my father's family goes back to the time of the French and Indian War.

**RR:** What kind of person was he and what did he do?

**WH:** Well, he grew up on a farm. He probably had a tra-

ditional Yankee background. His father was like the traditional country squire—the prominent farmer in the area. My father went to the normal school in Castleton, Vermont, and got the credentials to teach, but never did so. He had rheumatic fever, which delayed his development. At the time they didn't know what it was, and that caught up with him later. Yet he went to World War I. After that he worked for the Vermont Marble Company first as a foreman and later as superintendent for the mills.

RR: Whereabouts in Vermont?

WH: He started in Brandon. That's where my mother was from. They met one another, got married.

#### WORKING WITH HIS FATHER

RR: And did your father try to get you interested in his work at the mills, or get you to do work on your own?

WH: His work at the mills was hard work and, really, I wasn't physically fit for it, because I wanted to do what he was doing when I was smaller.

RR: Yes.

WH: And after he became a convert, I wanted him to hear my catechism lessons. And then he'd bring my elderly grandmother to church—she lived up into her nineties. And so then he did become a Catholic and became a little more observant than my mother, although she and I would attend Marian devotions. He was quite close to our pastor, who had a strong concern for poor attendance at the devotions.

#### SPORTS

RR: And how did he interest you in sports?

WH: Well, I have curvature of the spine.

RR: Oh?

WH: I was awkward. And, of course, I still wanted to play sports. I have mis-mated shoes—one's an 8½, the other a 10½—and that was noticed. They had a clinic at the Rutland Hospital run out of Boston. The doctor was Dr. Barr. And they treated me for what they call a lumbar curvature, scoliosis, and a couple of discs missing. I wore a miserable brace for about a year. So that limited sports, except for fooling around—a little more than my mother would have liked.

Well, I did what sports I could. The doctor there agreed that I could play touch football, which was still a little rough, and I wasn't too good. But Dad tried to discourage me.

#### HIS MOTHER

RR: Well, let's turn to your mother then. Tell us a little bit more about her and how she "brought you up."

WH: Talking about where she came from, I don't see too much difference between Sandgate, my father's birthplace, and Brandon, where my mother was born. But probably my father's family had a little more stature.

Her difficulties growing up were due to her father, who had that Irish bad habit of going on binges and was not too reliable. And so very early she had to take over.

But she was bright. They wanted her to go to the normal school, as my father had. He could afford to go to college, but she couldn't. In the end her qualification to teach was her high school diploma. She taught in a little two-room school in Sudbury next to Brandon. Then she worked for the telephone office and met my father. Before he got into World War I, they got married.

RR: I see.

WH: And my sister Mary was born just after the war in 1919. I came along later in 1930. That may be one of the difficulties. My mother had phlebitis when I was born, and, of course, that was bad news. She was in the hospital for a long time.

RR: Oh, my.

#### HIS SISTER

RR: Tell us something about your sister Mary.

WH: Well, there is about eleven years difference in age. I can remember especially her getting into college and majoring in French. She got me a French coloring book, but I wasn't too bright to pick up too much French. Yet it was amazing what you could pick up at that age, because years later I went to the University of Montreal before I got into the Jesuits, and I did take the course in French to get a degree there—probably shouldn't have. We could take the exams in English, otherwise I wouldn't have got through it. But the courses were given in French.

RR: Oh, I see.

WH: And my sister cared for me, but maybe not too well all the time. I remember they'd let me go around on a little tricycle, and once I went right off the front porch, while my sister was supposed to be watching me. Fortunately, I didn't land on my head.

RR: I see.

WH: Then the other thing when we growing up was we were congenial. But the age difference meant that she went to college just after we moved in 1936; so we weren't so close, because she was away most of the time I was growing up.

RR: Right.

WH: I also remember we liked to get some ice cream, especially at Christmas. She would tease me by offering

me a nickle or a dime. I always took the nickel.

RR: Right.

WH: So she asked me, "Why the nickel?" And I said, "Well, if I took the dime, I wouldn't get anything any more."

RR: Does your sister have any children?

WH: She has six children.

#### CHRIST THE KING PARISH

RR: OK. What about your parish and your parish priests? Were they an important influence on your life?

WH: Yes.

RR: OK. Were you an altar boy?

WH: Yes.

#### EDUCATION

RR: Tell us about your education.

WH: I went to a kindergarten just near our house. After we moved in 1936, I said I wanted to go to the Catholic school, which was quite a distance away. But, I prevailed and went through Catholic grammar school.

RR: So you had to travel every day?

WH: Yes.

RR: Was it a good school?

WH: Yes, I thought so.

RR: Did I understand you correctly to say that your courses were in French?

WH: Yes, but only much later in Montreal.

RR: Oh, I see. So were mine, but in grammar school.

WH: Better not try the rest of the interview in French, though.

RR: No, don't worry about that. So, how was your high school?

WH: We had the Sisters of St. Joseph. I couldn't go out for sports, but I played the piano moderately well. I

ended up salutatorian. It brings me down to earth to see that was a little different from being salutatorian at BC High, where I go for my days off.

#### VOCATION

RR: So, at what point, then, did you begin to think of becoming a priest?

WH: Well, despite being just a boy then, the nuns picked it up, though quite often they were wrong. I had thought of it, maybe, at the end of high school, but I didn't make a decision. From 1948-1950 I went to Georgetown University in AB Greek, but I wasn't much of a linguist.

RR: Oh, I see.

WH: I was talking with some of the Jesuits there at Georgetown.

RR: So you were able to get some ideas from them?

WH: That's right.

RR: And so you finished your first two years of college then at Georgetown?

WH: That's right. Well, seeing the need for diocesan priests in Vermont, I started with the Diocese of Burlington and got approved to go into the diocesan seminary. I reckoned that, even if you went into the Jesuits later, you'd get into their philosophy program, so you probably wouldn't be losing time by studying philosophy in the diocesan program.

RR: Right.

WH: At that time Northern New England—actually Vermont, New Hampshire, and also Springfield—liked to send their seminarians up to the Séminaire de Philosophie at the University of Montreal. So I went there two years [1950-1952] and finished the philosophy program.

RR: I see. That was before you entered the Jesuits?

- WH: That's right. I entered the Jesuits on November 25, 1952.
- RR: I see. So you had quite a background, when you finally got into the Jesuits? You had done quite a bit?
- WH: Yes, with a little different background than the other novices brought.
- RR: Yes, that was good. And so, there you were in Montreal, and you began to think of the Jesuits. And what led you, then, to actually apply to the Jesuits at that particular time in your life? Was it some particular Jesuit that was a friend of yours that led you in that direction? Why did you turn to the Jesuits at that point?
- WH: Well, the Sulpicians in Montreal noted that I had, perhaps, a feel, a taste, for Jesuits. In talking with the Sulpicians, I'd get concerned, because you're supposed to learn French during recreation. That was one reason I took that course in Montreal. But I wasn't learning enough French; that wasn't working at all, just like Latin talk later in the Jesuits. We really didn't learn much Latin by trying to talk Latin during recreation.
- RR: Right.
- WH: And being involved with the French Catholic tradition, you had to appreciate it to make it work. I came to see that, really, there was a great variation even within the French Catholic tradition.
- RR: How so?
- WH: You had people steeped in the French tradition. So those who were more mainline French looked down on the Franco-Americans— "Maine-iacs" they might call them, or something equally derogatory. Sometimes I'd manage to fit into that hostile environment, but not too often. So I would get into trouble.
- RR: Right.

WH: And that bothered me. I didn't know quite what to make of what I was encountering. I got upset enough to see the Bishop of Burlington.

RR: I see.

WH: I tried to get it across to my bishop what the situation in Montreal really meant for me. I might have already been thinking of the Jesuits, so I tried to tell him, "You know, Vermont really needs priests. Isn't my discomfort there of any consideration to you?" He said, "Well, you know, God will provide." I didn't have any idea that his motto as a bishop was "*Deus providebit*. [God will provide.]"

And my pastor had given the bishop kind of a hard time. So the bishop told me in no uncertain terms what my future might be as a priest in his diocese. And so I thought that, well, then I was definitely going to go along to another group. I guess he was mad enough that he wouldn't give me an *exeat* [canonical permission to leave the seminary], although canonically that was not correct. So I was just getting ready to go back up to Montreal to theology when by chance the former Bishop of Providence, Gelineau, called me up and said he would give me an *exeat*.

RR: Oh.

#### ENTERING THE JESUITS

WH: So, I didn't try to go back down to Montreal, and I found out that I could get into the Jesuits, although a little late—November 25, instead of between July 31 and September 7.

RR: So tell us a bit about your first impressions when you did go to Shadowbrook.

WH: At that time Fr. Peter Dolan was in the community. That was good, because the novice master, Fr. John

Post, was rather distant. It was good to have a little warmer welcome.

RR: Ah, yes.

WH: And I met Bro. Timothy Cummings, the baker, and certainly the smell of the bakery was good.

RR: Yes.

RR: Oh, sure.

WH: I liked Shadowbrook. The food was good.

RR: Did you find Shadowbrook a nice building? Did you like the surroundings and the countryside?

WH: Yes.

RR: In the summertime, especially, you could take walks and all that kind of thing, right?

WH: Well, of course. In Vermont, my father's hobby was gardening. He was brought up on a farm,

RR: Oh, I see.

WH: So that type of thing appealed to me.

RR: Sure.

WH: Although there was some harder garden work, I might have had a little bit of a stronger feel for that kind of thing to begin with than the other novices.

RR: Sure.

WH: Shaping gardens and that type of stuff.

RR: So your first two years at Shadowbrook went reasonably well, right?

WH: I thought so.

#### JUNIORATE

RR: Good. And then you went to the juniorate?

WH: Yes, but for only one year.

RR: One year? Well, because you'd been in college, right?

WH: That's right.

RR: How was that year?

WH: It was good. But I suppose one of the difficulties with that year was having to repeat things that I'd already

done. The humanities weren't an area I was going to go into, so, in a certain sense, it kind of bothered me. I felt I was marking time.

RR: Right. Yes, anybody who had gone to college in those days found that happening, because they were repeating what they had already done. In the end, it worked out all right, but it doesn't seem the most efficient approach.

WH: Yes.

#### PHILOSOPHY

RR: Right. So then you went to Weston for the first time, right?

WH: That's correct.

RR: What was your impression of Weston when you first arrived there?

WH: Well, again, it was the beginning of the second year. I was a little nervous, because our Jesuit approach to philosophy differed from the Sulpician's, so, like it or not, you tend to compare them somewhat.

RR: Right.

WH: And, truly, I thought the Sulpicians' approach was better—more down-the-line Thomist.

RR: That's not unusual for people who had a different background. And was there anything special that happened during that time?

WH: Well, I did pretty well in philosophy—maybe that's why it was a disappointment.

RR: Oh, I see.

WH: But, I didn't do quite so well in theology.

RR: Yes.

WH: And I liked Fr. Paul Lucey. I still have him as my spiritual director.

RR: Oh, do you? Oh, good. Yes, he's still going strong.

WH: That's right.

## REGENCY AT CHEVERUS

RR: And then at the end of philosophy, you had the opportunity to actually get into something active during regency. Where did you go for regency?

WH: Well, I had regency at Cheverus High School in Portland.

RR: What did you teach?

WH: Chemistry, which was a shock. My background in chemistry up in Montreal was sort of a gentlemen's course and very different from what you would expect to teach in high school. I got a crash summer course at Boston College. And I was just a little bit ahead of the students.

RR: But it was nice that you were up there in Portland, Maine. You were much closer to your family's home in Vermont.

WH: That's right.

RR: So that made it a little easier for you in many ways, I suppose.

WH: That's true. Sure.

RR: And so was that one year of teaching?

WH: Two.

RR: And I assume by the second year, at least, you were settled in a little bit.

WH: It was a little bit better, but then the administration managed to get someone with better qualifications in chemistry than I had.

## THEOLOGY

RR: OK. So, at the end of your two years of regency you went back to Weston to start theology, right?

WH: That's correct.

RR: And what was your overall impression of how things went for you during theology?

WH: Well, I probably showed a little Vermont disposition

and was somewhat more on the critical side.

RR: I see.

WH: And the Thomist tradition, I thought was good. I like Thomas; I still read Thomas.

RR: Really?

WH: And there was a question of incorporating Karl Rahner, for instance, and Bernard Häring.

RR: Right.

WH: As well as other theologians who had new ideas at the time.

RR: There was a lot going on, a lot of new things were happening.

WH: That's right.

RR: Sometimes it was hard to keep up with them.

WH: How true.

#### ORDINATION AND TERTIANSHIP

RR: So then in your third year you were ordained there, right?

WH: Fourth.

RR: Oh, fourth year? All right.

WH: Thankfully.

RR: And so by then you'd been through the training and you'd done a little teaching. Was tertianship a time for you to organize yourself a little and clarify the way you would like to go, or was it just a routine?

WH: Neither.

RR: Neither? How so?

WH: It was a time to try to figure all that out. The tertian instructor was hoping that I might rethink my experiences during theology. I was slated to go to Fordham for some mathematics; Tom Gibbons and Joe MacDonnell were there already. Their studies followed a pattern, really, which didn't work well for me. Actually I had to leave Fordham early, and

then I never did get the degree from Fordham.

RR: And you weren't basically that interested in mathematics to begin with, is that right?

WH: I was interested in math, but I used the longer procedure. Although deep down I know that my own preferred approach was analytical, in the final years of theology I found I had to adopt a more memorizing approach. Instead of patiently thinking everything out, I found I just had to go ahead and memorize it all, since there was so much of it to cover for the exams.

RR: I see.

WH: So in the same way in the end I got too far behind, actually, to do that math, at least for an advanced degree.

#### STARTING IN PARISH WORK

RR: All right, so what was your next big change or development?

WH: Well, I got into teaching a little math at Cheverus [1965-1967]. And then in talking with Fr. Guindon, the Provincial, I got into the type of work I've been doing ever since—I call it troubleshooting. And because of the various backgrounds in my own life, I try to see if I can work with the bishops and so give a more pastoral sense to theology. I try to see if relations between the various religious orders and the dioceses could be better.

That troubleshooting approach helped them out in a tough time, because they were not closing parishes but cutting down on the number of people there. And there were tensions on those people coming out of the parishes, who found it very difficult to work with the new pastors they were assigned to, i.e. placements were getting more difficult.

## PASTORAL MINISTRY

RR: It might be interesting if you could give us a sense of the differences between the parishes, because you obviously were in a number of situations and parishes. It might be informative to get a feel for how that was working for you and for that time in the life of the church. And you began where—at St. Peter's in Concord, New Hampshire?

WH: No. I remained at Cheverus for a while [1965-1967]. Then I got down to St. Robert's Hall at Pomfret, Connecticut, for several years [1967-1972]. I worked in the parishes in Connecticut— that was when I was in transition—until they closed the tertianship based there.

RR: Oh, I see.

WH: And in between times I lived at Weston before it became Campion Health Center.

RR: Right.

WH: After working at Corpus Christ Church in Auburndale, Massachusetts [1972-1976], I went to St. Peter's in Concord, New Hampshire [1976-1977]. And then for a longer time I was in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, at Immaculate Conception [1978-1985].

## SABBATICAL

RR: Oh. And at one point you went to Rome?

WH: That's correct, for a sabbatical.

RR: Did you find that useful?

WH: Yes, very. That was good.

RR: When did you go?

WH: In '85 and '86.

RR: Oh, OK. So you were able to see all the new developments in theology?

WH: Well, it was a process of learning about them.

RR: Right.

- WH: And, of course, I met some very helpful teachers, Fr. Frank Sullivan, among others there.
- RR: Right.
- WH: He led me by the hand through the many choices.

#### OBSERVATIONS ON PARISH LIFE

- RR: So how did you find the parish atmosphere, as you got more and more into that, as opposed to the atmosphere in a high school? Did you really like working in the parishes?
- WH: Well, yes. I got back to Weston to see Fr. Read for spiritual direction and got focused. So I felt I was on a mission I could be effective at. I was also able to get back to an analytical way a little more as I did my work. The tone differed from one place to another, Connecticut from Massachusetts, and both of these differed from the tone in northern New England. And the situation differed quite a lot from one parish to another.
- RR: Well, yes.
- WH: And, in fact, even how individual dioceses worked.
- RR: It would be interesting for you to give us kind of an overview of some of the key things that you came across in the parish, the things you learned, how things went.
- WH: I think, at least in talking with Fr. Guindon, then the provincial, I saw a change in mentality for the Jesuits, as well as in the parishes, because there was a real concern about more cooperation.
- RR: Right.
- WH: There was a new concern that you didn't just put people into whatever slot that became available. And in general, the new spirit would work both ways, I think. Thanks to the Vatican Council there was arising a new ecumenical spirit among the churches, and

the church's predominately dogmatic tone began to be lessened. And within the church and the Society the appreciation of individuals was developing.

RR: Right.

WH: There were many attempts to get together to see if we could formalize something where a stronger sense of cooperation might develop in the order—and also for the bishops.

RR: Right.

WH: And that may have been an attempt to see where the bishops were coming from.

RR: Right.

WH: Then where our provincials came from, too.

RR: Right. And over the years you were thinking about all this, because you did this kind of work in parishes for a number of years. Where are you working now?

WH: Well, I'm at a hospital now, the VA Hospital in Manchester, New Hampshire.

#### DOING PARISH WORK AS A JESUIT

RR: Could you tell us a little bit more about the experience of being a Jesuit who is doing parish work? And could you talk about the kind of overview that it gives you on the church and the way things were going at the time?

WH: Well, yes, I think there was a development. And I think the order has a keener pastoral sense now. And I do think that overall the bishops are more aware of the order, of its functioning, and what it can do for the church in the area. I do think, both in the order and in the diocese, people are better placed than they had been when I entered. And I think there is a friendlier attitude in our houses and in the parishes, too. And yet there's still a real problem, as in Northern New England particularly, of the one-man parish.

RR: Right.

#### CLOSING PARISHES

WH: And then there is the problem of closing parishes, where almost universally that doesn't work well.

RR: Have you been involved in some parishes that closed while you were there?

WH: Yes.

RR: Tell us a little bit how that went, about the people involved and their reaction, and how you dealt with this.

WH: In some cases, the reaction was adverse. One parish I was involved in that closed had the French and the Irish. They were not awfully friendly, but that has become better, basically. So they've got tensions there.

Another parish had some pretty important political people. They felt frustrated at a proposed change. The head of the parish council didn't want to be presented with a done deal, and the whole council was not happy at all. There were loads of tension, because the parishioners felt frustrated. So the parish council deliberately staged meetings to oppose the diocese for planning to transfer the parish to a religious congregation.

RR: OK.

WH: I still hear from them. I think the diocese has learned, but it is rather slow in realizing that people have a sense it's their parish. Some of their grandparents got baptized there in that church, and all the way back for three or four generations. And then you come up and say, "We're going to close it." Well, it doesn't sit well.

RR: No. And have most of those parishes closed by now?

WH: They're still closing; they're still working things out. For the number of priests, they had too many par-

ishes. But it has to be very, very carefully assessed.

RR: Yes.

WH: And it has to be done with an eye to the very independent and democratic culture there—you cannot just set things down from the top.

RR: You have to involve people.

WH: Yes.

RR: Right. Were there any instances where you were helpful in getting them to reverse the closing—where the parishioners protested a closing and then finally the diocese did allow it to continue?

WH: Yes, that happened. I was sort of on the sideline. It was so sensitive. I know the former vicar general quite well; he was the pastor in a parish when I was there. I still have meals with him.

RR: I see.

WH: He went to another city because of the difficulties of the clustering. Generally, people would say, “Well, something’s got to close, and it’s not mine.”

RR: Right.

WH: And then, “I know you’re cutting out an Irish parish. Why don’t you cut out the French parish?” — that type of thing.

RR: Right.

WH: That former vicar general hated to be caught in the crossfire, but he came to a greater appreciation of what we’re talking about.

#### HOSPITAL CHAPLAINCY

RR: And as time went on, you got more interested in hospital chaplaincy?

WH: I actually got into it in 1986. I did that for two reasons. In one parish I was at there was a difficult time, due to having a man that should not have been pastor. And you also had a terrible setup at the state

hospital, which was just way overcrowded. In fact it has been condemned.

RR: Oh, my.

WH: Well, the state hospital had huge dormitories with people that had very, very different levels mental incapacity, and who had files that were very thick. There were people going in and out of the hospital, and they were always around the city and parish. And so there was just a terrific pressure, because the state didn't know what to do, yet the state had to do something.

RR: Right.

WH: And as for the parish, these mentally handicapped people shouldn't be on their own.

RR: Right.

WH: The state didn't have the money, really, to get them appropriately situated. I won't say they were street people, but they weren't living the way they ought to live.

RR: Right.

WH: And they'd be in and out of the state hospital. And so it was necessary to get to know the ongoing situation. It helped me that I already knew the psychiatrist in charge. I had met him in another city. Most psychiatrists don't want to be going to court all the time, so it was very helpful for me to know one who was caring and ready allocate time for court appearances.

RR: Oh, I see.

WH: Another thing, they have moved the court inside the hospital now, as it should have been from the beginning.

RR: I see.

WH: And so the psychiatrists avoided getting into legal difficulties like the plague.

RR: Sure.

WH: So it was good to talk with my friend, the psychiatrist from Concord, for instance, and say, "You know, you've got to work with this person. This person just isn't making it on his or her own." Or, "The set-up with the family, it's just impossible." You don't know, sometimes these people even commit murder.

RR: Oh, my.

#### CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION

RR: How did your CPE training go?

WH: I did the groundwork for CPE at the New Hampshire Hospital, while I was living at St. Peter's in Concord [1976-1977]. Then my CPE supervisor that I was working with for the credentials got a doctorate, and then moved into pastoral ministry. RR: Oh, my.

WH: And so I never really got the credentials for the CPE, but I did the groundwork. And then when I applied to work at the Veterans Administration hospital in 1998, I found out they accepted my tertianship year of spiritual formation, and so I didn't get docked for not having the usual CPE credentials.

#### VA MEDICAL CENTER

RR: Good. So more recently, then, you've been where?

WH: Well, the last eleven years, after I had knee replacements, I have been in Manchester, as chaplain of the VA hospital, and also chaplain at three nursing homes.

RR: So you've kind of settled into that kind of work pretty well then?

WH: I hope so.

RR: Tell us something about what kind of a place the VA hospital is.

**WH:** Well, the VA Hospital is in transition. Actually, the VA hospitals in New Hampshire and Alaska don't qualify as hospitals. They're not nursing homes, they're not hospitals.

**RR:** How so?

**WH:** They don't have cardiac care or intensive care. They don't have the requisite emergency room. They lack the level of medical staffing required for hospital accreditation. The daily newspaper has been covering this question, so that's become a big issue. It's hard to know how to resolve the issue. You've got wounded soldiers coming from Iraq. In New Hampshire there is an emphasis on the osteopathic needs of the patients for replacement legs, hips, and arms, for instance.

**RR:** Right.

**WH:** And they are also focusing on palliative care. There's a lot of concern, even money going, to have different places that people can go to that serve people my age or older, or just coming back from serious hospitalization. There are different setups to suit patients' various needs—a farm area, a halfway house, and so on. They are experimenting to find the best match.

**RR:** I see.

**WH:** The federal government is getting into that area. Sometimes I compare the situation with the approach to health care found in the Society or in the diocese. Sometimes the comparison comes out good, and they really do well. Their difficulty is that there are different agencies involved, so things don't get done that ought to be done and other things are done foolishly. A lot of money is appropriated and nobody's quite sure for what. And each state has its hospital, whether that should be is questionable. The state also has a home for the veterans; they're two different

things, the home and the hospital.

RR: Oh, I see.

WH: And, at least in New Hampshire, the pastoral care does not always cover all the needs. I was dumbfounded, for example, when the priest with the responsibility for both a parish and the state hospital took a leave of absence. The diocesan administration was taking care of the parish for over six months, and yet didn't take on the duties at the NH state veterans' hospital.

RR: Oh, my.

WH: Nor did they go to the home for the veterans. That caused all kinds of difficulty. It later worked out, but the state and the federal government differed in how they would provide a chaplain in these places.

RR: Oh, I see.

WH: The state didn't want to pay any money.

RR: Oh.

WH: But the VA hospital has concerns of its own.

RR: I see.

WH: And then as to the nursing homes, with the hospice care, my estimation is there are too many nursing homes, and so they're feeling the pinch.

RR: Oh, I see. You think they should coordinate?

WH: Yes.

RR: And it would make it easier if they could share.

WH: Well, I would go along on that on one thing. The VA didn't do it, but they seriously considered taking over the top floor of the Catholic Medical Center to have it for the veterans. That way the veterans would get hospital care.

RR: I see.

WH: They have three different places that the veterans go to. For the heart, they go to Catholic Medical Center. For cancer and the like, they go to the Elliot, an

acute care facility—really, that’s the hospital for Manchester. Then the teaching hospital in Concord is associated with Dartmouth Medical in Hanover. And so when there are complications, especially psychological ones, they tend to go up there to Dartmouth.

RR: I see. Is there much competition in that sense among the hospitals?

WH: It’s so hard to evaluate. Yes, there is competition.

RR: Right.

WH: And I know Dartmouth has Mary Hitchcock Hospital with a clinic in Concord, but they ought to do something like the Lahey Clinic in Burlington, Massachusetts.

RR: Yes.

WH: And, of course, it is smaller. The difficulty is that the Elliot and the Catholic Medical Center were under one umbrella, when I started working in Manchester.

RR: Oh?

WH: Then the diocese had to step in, because it was common knowledge they were doing abortions at the Elliot.

RR: Oh.

WH: And that required a different set-up.

RR: Did they separate then?

WH: Yes. But the nuns do not control the hospital now, neither does the diocese; you have the trustee set-up for the Catholic Medical Center, something like we would have in our schools.

DAYS OFF

RR: I understand that you come down from Manchester to Boston to spend your days off at your community at BC High.

WH: Well, I sure do appreciate them now, because I'm getting older and I figure to get away from the beeper. Otherwise you don't feel quite as relaxed. I'm getting to the age now that, if I get to Boston, I don't feel I've got to have that thing on.

#### FIGURING OUT PUZZLES

RR: Do you have hobbies?

WH: I enjoy making puzzles.

RR: Did you learn to entertain yourself with puzzles because of your health?

WH: Oh, yes, because I had to have some melanoma taken care of. But as a child I also got an awful dose of poison oak. I should've gone to the hospital, but we didn't believe in it. I had my arms up over my head; it was the only thing I could do.

#### HIS APPROACH TO PROBLEMS

RR: Could you explain your preference for thinking analytically versus the memorative method of learning? Did that come up just in theology, or has it been a characteristic of your whole life? And has it been a source of strength or trouble?

WH: Well, I'll take the last first. Yes, I think strength; it was trouble too. I was persistent, hopefully not obstinate, when I got into confrontation.

RR: OK, would you say yours is a Vermonter's character—"the independent thinker."

WH: Yes.

#### BRIDGE-BUILDER

RR: And so, given that personal strength, could you say that over the years you've been a kind of bridge-builder between different groups? You were an independent Vermonter studying in French-speaking

Montreal. You were working in parishes, but you were a Jesuit. You saw all the differences and the tensions, and yet remained your independent self. Might I ask, what has been the role of prayer in integrating this?

WH: Well, it's very, very high. Yes, I do the Bible every day, and I keep memorizing the psalms. I memorize parts of the Bible, except for the long genealogies and numbers. So you get a real feel for the Bible, as well as you can.

RR: Sure.

#### GOD'S PROVIDENCE

RR: As you look back on your life and what's happened as a Jesuit, do you feel that at times there's been a kind of providential guidance in your life? A guidance that has led you in ways that have worked out very well, or drawn you to do important things for other people, and to accomplish what has also been a help to you personally? Do you feel that's the kind of atmosphere in which you've been working?

WH: I'd like to say "Amen" to that. The Lord's always there to help. And we all have both the cross and the joyful season, the Christmas season. I have felt, overall, joyful, and felt God's support, even when things didn't go well. The strength of God was there; I have never gone for psychological care. It hasn't been mentioned, either by superiors, nor on my part.

RR: So it has worked out? Somehow it all works out, right?

WH: That's it.

RR: Yes, right.

WH: Thank the Lord and praise him!

RR: All right.

Our Father,  
Who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.  
Amen.

**Fr. William J. Hamilton, S.J.**

**Born:** April 1, 1930, Proctor, Vermont  
**Entered:** November 25, 1952, Lenox, Massachusetts,  
St. Stanislaus Novitiate / Shadowbrook  
**Ordained:** June 15, 1963, Weston, Massachusetts,  
Weston College  
**Final Vows:** June 6, 1989, Weston, Massachusetts,  
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1948 Washington, DC: Georgetown University - Studied  
AB Greek  
1950 Montreal, Canada: Séminaire de Philosophie -  
Studied philosophy  
1952 Lenox, Massachusetts: St. Stanislaus Novitiate /  
Shadowbrook - Novitiate, juniorate  
1955 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College - Studied  
philosophy  
1957 Portland, Maine: Cheverus High School - Taught  
chemistry, French  
1959 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College - Studied  
theology  
1963 Pomfret, Connecticut: St. Robert's Hall -  
Tertianship  
1964 Bronx, New York: Fordham University - Studied  
mathematics  
1964 Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts: St. Ignatius Church -  
February 1965-June 1965 Pastoral ministry  
1965 Portland, Maine: Cheverus High School - Taught  
mathematics  
1967 Pomfret, Connecticut: St. Robert's Hall - Local  
apostolate  
1972 Auburndale, Massachusetts: Corpus Christi Church  
- Pastoral ministry

- 1976 Concord, New Hampshire: St. Peter's Church -  
Pastoral ministry
- 1977 Dorchester, Massachusetts: St. Brendan's Church -  
Pastoral ministry
- 1978 Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Immaculate  
Conception Church - Pastoral ministry
- 1985 Rome, Italy: Gregorian University - Studied  
theology
- 1986 Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Hospital chaplain
- 1988 Boston, Massachusetts: Jesuit Urban Center -  
Chaplain at University Hospital
- 1989 Lynnfield, Massachusetts: Our Lady of the  
Assumption Church - Assistant pastor
- 1990 Dedham, Massachusetts: St. Mary's Church -  
Assistant pastor
- 1996 Manchester, New Hampshire: Catholic Medical  
Center - Chaplain
- 1998-Manchester, New Hampshire: Veterans  
Administration & Elliot Hospitals - Chaplain

### Degrees

- 1951 Bachelor of Arts, Philosophy, University of  
Montreal
- 1957 Master of Arts, Philosophy, Weston College-Boston  
College
- 1963 Bachelor of Divinity, Theology, Weston College

AMDG