

**New England Jesuit  
Oral History Program**



**Fr. John F. Foley, S.J.  
Volume 12**

© Society of Jesus of New England  
2006 All Rights Reserved

Editor: Richard W. Rousseau, S.J.  
Associate Editors: Paul C. Kenney, S.J.  
Thomas J. Sheehan, S.J.  
Assistant Editors:  
William J. Cullen, S.J.  
Joseph A. Paquet, S.J.

ISBN 1-60067-009-1

Distribution:

Oral History Program  
Campion Center  
319 Concord Road  
Weston, MA 02493-1398  
718-788-6800  
ohp@sjnen.org

Interview with Fr. John F. Foley, S.J.  
by Fr. Richard Rousseau, S.J.  
November 11, 2005

**RICHARD ROUSSEAU:** What I would like to do is start at the beginning. You were born in May 16, 1928?

**JOHN FOLEY:** Yes. In Mattapan.

**RR:** What parish were you in?

**JF:** St. Gregory's on Dorchester Avenue.

**RR:** Could you tell us a little bit about your life and your family? How many brothers and sisters did you have, and what that was life like for you growing up?

**JF:** We were two and two, two boys and two girls—a boy at the beginning and a boy at the end. I was the boy at the end. All the others were considerably older than I was.

**RR:** What was life like growing up?

**JF:** We lived in a three-decker at 108 River Street. My grandfather, John Fenton, died at an early

age. His wife, my grandmama, must have been a very intelligent woman. With the money she got from insurance, she built a three-decker house on River Street. She lived off the rent from the tenants on the second and third floors. I was born in a back bedroom on the second floor in the year of our Lord, 1928. I really just stayed there and lived the ordinary life of a Catholic boy. That was it.

RR: Were you active in St. Gregory's parish at all? Any kind of jobs you had there? What kind of influence did St. Gregory's have on your vocation?

JF: Monsignor Dolan, I remember him, and my opening address to him one Christmas day—the eighth grade sister had picked me to give it—"So swiftly sped into eternity, and once again..." I forget the rest.

RR: Did the Monsignor like the address?

JF: He better have, I tell you! I had it memorized.

RR: Do you have other strong memories of your childhood?

JF: When I was quite young, I remember the very first time I crossed the street by myself. Somehow I got hold of a nickel, and I went across the street to this store—I was going to call it a penny ante store. I bought a penny's worth of candy, and then I started to walk back. I walked a little bit down opposite my house, so I would not have as much to cross. As I was about to cross, these two boys about thirteen or four-

teen—I showed them my candy, how proud I was of it: “Hey, look at what I have!” The kids pretended to reach out to take it. They were not going to take my candy, boy! So I turned quickly and dashed right out into the street, to get across the street, but I never made it.

RR: What happened?

JF: A car hit me. It knocked me inside the space between the radiator and the bumper. My impression of it was that the whole side of my face fell down. They brought me into the house immediately, and applied face cloths to stem the flood of blood.

RR: How old were you when that accident happened?

JF: Six.

RR: You are lucky you survived.

JF: I broke the headlight with my face. There was a time when that was a very vivid memory. I had eight stitches, two stitches on one part of my face and six more on another. Dr. Draper took such good care of me that I never went to a hospital. He lived nearby and was a good man.

RR: There is no sign of it now. He must have really taken good care of you.

JF: Oh, yes. The poor man who hit me was innocent as can be. He stopped the car pretty fast, so it did not do more damage to me.

RR: After elementary school, you went to B.C. High?

JF: B.C. High School. We cheered: “Rah, rah, rah.”

RR: That was still on Harrison Avenue?

JF: Oh, yes.

RR: How were those years there?

JF: It was good. I can remember driving back and forth. We would be in the back of the street-car, and there would be smoking and everything. So I took out a pack of cigarettes and lit up a butt. They were amazed that I would smoke a cigarette.

RR: Did you keep smoking after that, or was that just for that moment, and that was it?

JF: I was addicted!

RR: Oh, no.

JF: Sure! I gave up smoking in 1975.

RR: So you took the MTA back and forth to class every day. I understand that the neighborhood was a little difficult in the afternoons, so they did not recommend students hanging around after school. You went back pretty quickly after classes finished?

JF: Oh, yes. When it was over, it was over.

RR: What kinds of memories do you have about being there, the classes and subjects that you took? Were there any particular subjects that you really liked?

JF: Public speaking.

RR: What did you do in it?

JF: My freshman year, I did not speak publicly. But then, the next year, when I was a sopho-

more, Mr. Johnny Butler, S.J., whom I had had as a freshman, moved with the whole class to sophomore year. He used to give us parts of the editorial to memorize as homework. He would have us stand up in front of the class and deliver them. He told me I was one of the six boys chosen to give a talk in the competition at the end of the year, even though I did not bother to sign up.

RR: How did you do?

JF: I won it. The third year, my chest went out, a lot of pride! I did not need to be told again. I signed right up for it. I thought that, having won it the year before, I would win again. But I got beat; I lost the contest for the third year. The winner had such a wonderful, interesting talk that I was on the edge of my seat as he spoke, it was that good!

RR: He must have been really good for you to remember it all these years.

JF: When I came to senior year, I won that. So that was the end of my career in public speaking.

RR: This is great.

JF: That is where my interest was, in public speaking. Some day, you may have the opportunity to hear me speak. I doubt it, though. I have given up speaking!

RR: You are speaking now!

JF: I am, indeed.

RR: You must have studied some languages, too,

at B.C. High, because you went on with studies in languages.

JF: I took German as my foreign language.

RR: Did you study Latin and Greek, as well as the classics?

JF: Yes. Later, as a scholastic, the provincial was very happy with me. During the first two years of regency I taught juniors at Cheverus High School. Instead of a third year I went to Fordham for Latin and Greek studies. Then one day I got a letter from provincial: "Dear Mr. Foley, unless you have serious reasons for not doing so, I have signed you up for theology at Innsbruck, Austria." I went there for four years.

RR: OK, great. Let us just back up a little bit. You went to Shadowbrook in 1945. How did you make that transition? At B.C. High, did you have a contact person that you talked to? How did you get interested in the Society of Jesus? Was there someone there that you spoke with, a vocation director, or somebody that spoke with you?

JF: Johnny Butler, the scholastic. We were kind of friendly.

RR: From there you spoke with somebody on the provincial level about entering the Society?

JF: I forget whom I talked to. You want to talk about my leaving the Society? I *exivit*-ed. Do you know the word *exivit*-ed?

RR: You left? I thought you entered?

JF: I left. I did both!

RR: You did both?

JF: Yes, I entered in June 1945, and I *exiivit*-ed at the end of August, the beginning of September.

RR: I did not realize that.

JF: Very few people realize it. I went home to see my brothers-in-law, who had just come back from the service, and served well. One of them got a Bronze Star.

RR: I did not know that you had entered, and then left, and then you came back.

JF: Yes, I left in 45. I re-entered in '46, in February.

RR: Do you have any memories of the novitiate or the juniorate at Shadowbrook, your being there, and the people there? Anything there that stands out?

JF: No, not much.

RR: You got your B.A., and then later on, your M.A. in philosophy, and then your M.A. in classics from Fordham, and then your S.T.L. in theology from Innsbruck. After Shadowbrook, you came here to Weston College for philosophy?

JF: Yes, three years.

RR: Any memories from that time at all?

JF: Just that I was beadle.

RR: Then you went to teach at Cheverus?

JF: "C-H-E-V-E-R-U-S, Cheverus! Cheverus! Team! Team! Team!" That was how we cheered

our teams on.

RR: You remember it well.

JF: I taught him [Paul Kenney, also present at the interview]. That is why he feels he can laugh at all my jokes. He would not dare take that freedom if I had not taught him!

RR: What did you teach the juniors at Cheverus?

JF: Latin and Greek.

RR: Anything you remember about regency at Cheverus, anything that stands out? Or later during studies at Fordham University?

JF: One thing that does stand out was Bill O'Halloran.

RR: What did he do?

JF: He was at Spellman Hall at Fordham with me. Whoever went down for the mail first brought it up and gave it to his pal. I remember the day that I got the letter from the provincial: "Dear Mr. Foley." So I told Bill O'Halloran, and he said, "John, I'm so sorry for you. I feel bad for you." I said, "Wait a minute, Bill. I have a letter here from the provincial that's for you." O'Halloran said, "Get out of here!" I was standing on the threshold of the room. I remember it so well—he took his hand and pushed it against my chest, and said, "Get out of here! I do not want anyone to be near me!" He no sooner shut the door than he opened it, and said, "Oh, John, come in! I cannot read the letter alone!" He read, "Dear Mr. O'Halloran, unless you have serious reasons

for not doing so, I am assigning you to Enghien for your theology.” O’Halloran said, “Oh, my God, John! Where’s Enghien? Is that in China?” I said, “No, it is in Belgium!”

RR: Were you happy about going to Innsbruck?

JF: Yes. In the end, Bill was delighted when he got to Enghien.

RR: You ran into some famous people there, for example Karl and Hugo Rahner. You mentioned a little bit about your memories of them.

JF: Yes.

RR: Anything else about studying theology in Innsbruck that stands out for you?

JF: Nothing that stands out. The mere fact of going over for four years was extraordinary at that time.

RR: Yes.

JF: They decided to send some of us to Europe to expand the Province. We were getting very closed, so they wanted to open it up. They said, “What’ll we do? Let’s send someone to France, someone to Spain, someone to Austria.” That is how they started to expand at that time, when the Province was narrowing.

RR: That continued for some time, sending people to Europe for studies. After theology, you came back and worked in the provincial offices as the secretary.

JF: Yes. My father had come over for my ordination in July 1958. In April 1959 he died.

RR: You were ordained over there?

JF: Yes. So, to give me a break, the provincial assigned me to his office for a year. Then sent me to tertianship. He said, since I had missed my class down at Pomfret, I could go to whatever tertianship I wanted to. So I had some good pals who were a year behind me that had gone out to Port Townsend, Washington for tertianship. So I made tertianship there.

RR: How was that out there? How did you like Port Townsend?

JF: “Oh, brother, I do not understand that!” The tertian master had been the chairman of the German department; he was just promoted to tertian instructor. We heard him say often, “Oh, I don’t know that!” For the thirty-day retreat he called a man down from Canada. But it did not bother me; I was with my pals from California as fellow tertians.

RR: I have heard Port Townsend was pretty beautiful, nature-wise.

JF: Nature-wise, yes. But it was really out there. You took two ferries to get there.

RR: Out in Puget Sound?

JF: Yes, out in Puget Sound. We had fun, though.

RR: Then you were assigned to Shadowbrook to teach Latin, Greek, and German to juniors?

JF: That is correct.

RR: How was that? Were you happy to be back at Shadowbrook?

JF: Oh yes. I was happy there. I enjoyed teaching the juniors.

RR: From there you went to your first principalship, I guess you would say, as principal of Cheverus.

JF: They decided to break up the studies at Lenox, and they sent me to Cheverus in April, a little early, to replace another Jesuit who had got sick, since he could not finish the semester. They doubled up on classes to cover the work load. I went to Cheverus as principal.

RR: Was that a good assignment for you? Did you like being there?

JF: I ran into the rector at Cheverus, and I said, "What's the story? Aren't the juniors more important than the class I would be teaching up there?" And Tommy Lannan, the rector, said, "*Ad altiora, pater*. For higher things, Father." That was the higher thing: I was going to be principal.

RR: That sounds great, but did that make you feel any better about going up there?

JF: Well, yes, it made me realize that there was a purpose other than just teaching. Later, while I was principal, there was a terrible event. See, some religious sisters in South Portland wanted to have a dance at their girls high school, and they did not have anyone for the girls to dance with. So they asked us if we would send some boys down. And we did, along with two of our scholastics. But one of our students had a nip or two, or three or four, before he went down. He threw up all over the floor. So that was

Friday.

RR: That was an unexpected challenge for you as principal to handle!

JF: Saturday I called their home, and I said, "Please come in Sunday. I want to talk to you about your son." So they came in, and I said, "He has been a bad boy." I told them what happened there. They said, "He disgraced us all." I said, "I'm suspending him for two weeks. He is to get his assignments from his classmates and to be responsible for them, but he cannot come to school." Two weeks. Get that straight: two weeks? You got it. But the two scholastics I had asked to go as prefects said I should have expelled him.

RR: They disagreed with your decision.

JF: They told the provincial staff member in charge of high schools that it was wrong, that it should not be allowed. The staff member told the provincial it was wrong, that it should not be allowed. So, they fired me. I was trying to do my best. I thought that was a good enough punishment, two weeks suspension, just at the end of the school year. Otherwise the parents were going to have to find a high school that would accept them. But that was the end of my principalship.

RR: Such an ending! Then you to Cranwell.

JF: Yes, John Borgo said, "Yes." He taught the same subjects, so he would teach up at Cheverus, and I would go to Cranwell.

RR: How was Cranwell?

JF: I was there seven years. I did all the normal things.

RR: Assistant principal first, then department chairman and teaching Latin, then prefect of discipline, then pastoral work, then teaching Latin and German, and then director of the social apostolate. Any memories from there that stand out?

JF: None in particular.

RR: You were there when they closed Cranwell?

JF: I was there when they closed Cranwell. I spent a year at B.C. High teaching Latin. Then I was sent as rector of Bishop Connolly High School in Fall River. I was rector there for about six years.

RR: What was that like for you when Cranwell closed? It must have been a tremendous loss to the Province. I know each time that we have had to close a school, it has been a big shock for people.

JF: Ray Swords, the president of Cranwell, sent a letter to all the parents saying: "We're in dire straits. We do not have enough enrollment to cover the bills, and so, unless you volunteer so much money, we'll have to close it." They did not get enough money, so they closed it. That is how they closed it.

RR: Then everybody had to find other assignments?

JF: Oh, yes.

RR: How was that year at B.C. High teaching

Latin?

JF: That was nice; I enjoyed the year. I had my dog, Jug, and that was happy. [Jug is detention after school.]

RR: You brought him to Connolly, too?

JF: Yes. He was a nice dog. I liked him.

RR: He was a big dog?

JF: A gorgeous Golden Retriever. Some day when you are walking by my room, come in and see the picture of Jug. That was his name, Jug, "Justice Under God."

RR: OK, Jug.

JF: "Justice Under God," because, while I was prefect of a Cranwell dormitory with eight kids, we were sitting around and we were asking, "Well, what'll we call the dog?" They said, "We'll call him Jug. Why don't you call him Jug? That would be nice." I said, "OK, let's call him Jug," This was great for the students, because Bob Farrell sent those kids one afternoon to jug, to clean up the snow and brush it aside. Instead of going to discipline, they went to the dog, and said, "Hi Jug!" So they went to Jug!

RR: Ha, ha!

JF: That did not last long.

RR: How did things go at Bishop Connolly High School?

JF: Oh, that was pretty good.

RR: Were you there when all the different schools were merging into one?

JF: Yes. We were the chief ones. The principal was a Jesuit.

RR: They all had to learn to get along with one another, the different faculty and administrators from the various schools?

JF: Yes. That is the way that went. When my six years were up as rector, the provincial sent me to Cheverus as rector. I lasted there five years, and then I said, "I can't take any more; I've got to get out of this." I asked the provincial if I could get out of the job early, and he said, "Sure, go ahead."

RR: How come? Why were you feeling like it was time to get out?

JF: I do not know, really. Why did I want to get out?

RR: Was it tiring?

JF: I wanted a break from responsibility, I think, was what it was.

RR: You were pretty heavily involved in administration for several years, from 1966 all the way up to 1987, being principal and rector. So then you got a sabbatical?

JF: Yes, I got a sabbatical and went out to my pals in California again.

RR: Was that good, out there?

JF: Yes, that was nice. I thought it was pretty good. That was not bad at all.

RR: In the second part of your sabbatical, you were in Santa Fe, New Mexico?

JF: Yes. It was a good group. There were women

in the group, and mostly men, brothers. We had a good time and a profitable time. We did not waste our time. When it was over, they sent me to Eastern Point Retreat House as the superior. I was there six years.

RR: How about memories from that time? I have brought you up there before, so it is a place that I know you liked to go to. You liked looking out at the water.

JF: Yes, I love the sea. There it was. It was gorgeous. I was very lucky to have that job; it was really good.

RR: You enjoyed being out there?

JF: Yes.

RR: Right. You did some retreat ministry, too?

JF: Oh, yes! I gave thirty-day retreats, and eight-day retreats, and weekend retreats, and day retreats, and half-hour retreats. Well, not half-hour retreats, exactly.

RR: You were doing some of that even before you got there, because I made a retreat with you at Cheverus, when you were rector up there.

JF: You made a retreat with me?

RR: Yes, with you. With you up there, so you were giving some retreats up there, too, individual retreats.

JF: Holy mackerel! Imagine, forgetting that! Wow! Oh, sure.

RR: In '94 you came to Campion Center. They put you back in the saddle again.

JF: Yes, exactly.

RR: Minister out here.

JF: For two or three years.

RR: Then your health problems started to come on?

JF: Yes. I finally realized that I had started to deteriorate to what you see in front of you now.

RR: Looking back on all this time, are there any conclusions or any kind of wisdom you could give us, from your experience in the Society, and your experience of your vocation? Is there anything that you have come to learn or understand through all of this time, and all through the time of your illness?

JF: Do not take any of your students to a girls' school, and let them throw up on the !#\* floor!

RR: OK!

JF: Biggest lesson I learned!

RR: OK!

JF: No, I cannot—you can see yourself, there is so much there. Nothing just stands out, not much..

RR: I noticed, though, sometimes you speak about things that were difficult, as when you were being sent up to Cheverus for that first time. But then you spoke with somebody, and that one conversation changed your perspective. It changed your experience of what was going on. It sounds like that has happened over and over again throughout the course of your life. Perhaps at first, something seemed like a disaster, but then over time it starts to change a little bit. Like right now. I know that there is

a lot of difficulty with being ill all the time, but you seem to be at peace, relatively at peace, as you are talking now. It does not take up all of your attention, all of who you are, the illness part. You are still able to speak from what you remember, and what you believe about yourself and about the Society.

JF: I would say that is accurate.

RR: That is no small achievement, because there are some people that can just get completely overwhelmed by what is going on with them, and they cannot be more than just a sick person, and that is it. They almost seem to forget who they are.

JF: Well, Jug got me all through it. It is to his credit that those things are true which you just have mentioned.

RR: Probably your spiritual life, I suspect, too, has had a little bit to do with it!

JF: I loved him more than anybody in the world!

RR: How old did he live to be?

JF: Unfortunately, just nine years.

RR: Oh, what happened?

JF: I do not know. I mean, it was a natural death.

RR: The doctors could not say what it was?

JF: Well, we never did contact the doctors. The first indication I had, he was staggering walking away from the house. I picked him up and put him next to the house. But, as soon as I put him down, he got up and started to walk to the woods again. He wanted to get away

from me, and everything, and die in peace, I thought.

RR: Oh.

JF: So, that was that.

RR: That is sad.

JF: I think I took us astray when I talked about Jug the last time.

RR: Was it at Connolly that happened? Is that where he died?

JF: Yes.

RR: All right. Are there any other comments that you would like to make about anything?

JF: I have made perhaps too many comments about everything!

RR: You have done well. Thank you.

JF: You are very welcome.

**Rev. John F. Foley, S.J.**

**Born: May 16, 1928, Dorchester,  
Massachusetts**

**Entered: February 1, 1946, Shadowbrook,  
Lenox, Massachusetts**

**Ordained: July 26, 1958, Innsbruck, Austria**

**Final Vows: November 5, 1979, Bishop Connolly  
High School, Fall River,  
Massachusetts**

**1941 Boston, Massachusetts: Boston College  
High School - Student**

**1945 Lenox, Massachusetts: Shadowbrook -  
Novitiate (June-August)**

**1946 Lenox, Massachusetts: Shadowbrook -  
Novitiate, juniorate**

**1949 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College -  
Studied philosophy**

**1952 Portland, Maine: Cheverus High School -  
Taught third year**

**1954 Bronx, New York: Fordham University -  
Studied Latin and Greek**

- 1955 Innsbruck, Tyrol, Austria: Studied theology
- 1959 Boston, Massachusetts: Provincial office - Secretary to provincial
- 1960 Port Townsend, Washington: Manresa - Tertianship
- 1961 Lenox, Massachusetts: Shadowbrook - Taught Latin and Greek to juniors
- 1966 Portland, Maine: Cheverus High School - Principal
- 1969 Lenox, Massachusetts: Cranwell Preparatory School - Assistant Principal (1969-71), department chairman and teacher of Latin (1970-71), prefect of discipline (1971-72), pastoral work (1972-75), teacher of Latin (1973-75), director of social apostolate
- 1975 Boston, Massachusetts: Boston College High School - Teacher of Latin
- 1976 Fall River, Massachusetts: Bishop Connolly High School - Rector, taught Latin (1976-78), taught religious education
- 1982 Portland, Maine: Cheverus High School - Rector, taught Latin

- 1987 Oakland, California: Holy Name College / Institute of Culture and Creation Spirituality (fall); Santa Fe, New Mexico, Center for Christian Studies (spring) - Sabbatical
- 1988 Gloucester, Massachusetts: Eastern Point Retreat House - Superior, retreat ministry
- 1994 Weston, Massachusetts: Campion Center, Assistant rector, minister
- 1997 Framingham, Massachusetts: Saint Patrick Manor - Chaplain
- 2001 Weston, Massachusetts: Campion Health Center - Praying for the Church and the Society

#### Degrees

- 1951 Bachelor of Arts, Philosophy/Classics, Weston College-Boston College
- 1952 Master of Arts, Philosophy, Weston College-Boston College
- 1962 Master of Arts, Classics, Fordham University
- 1959 Licentiate in Sacred Theology, Innsbruck, Austria