

**New England Jesuit
Oral History Program**



**Fr. John F. Mullin, S.J.
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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 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 oral history is all about.

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May 2007

Interview with Fr. John F. Mullin, S.J.
By Fr. Richard W. Rousseau, S.J.,
April 16, 2007

EARLY YEARS

RICHARD ROUSSEAU: Welcome.

JOHN MULLIN: Thank you, Dick.

RR: Let's begin with your family and your father and mother. Where did they meet? Were they in the same town? Do know where your parents grew up?

JM: I know where my parents grew up. My mother, Katherine O'Keefe, grew up in Roxbury and moved with her family as a single woman to Brighton, Massachusetts. My father grew up in Somerville, Mass.

RR: And when they got married, where did they first settle down?

JM: They were married in 1929, and they first lived in an apartment on Dana Street in Cambridge briefly. And then, around the time of their first child, my sister Joan's birth, they moved to Alewife Brook Parkway, in north Cambridge.

RR: Oh, I see. They stayed around the Cambridge area generally.

JM: Well, for a few years, then they moved to north Lexington for a few years. Finally in 1937 they settled in

Arlington Heights, where I lived for fifteen years prior to entering the Jesuits at the age of seventeen.

RR: OK. Let's look at your father just for a moment. What kind of work did he do?

JM: He was a salesman, and his major activity was as a cement salesman for Universal Atlas Company and later for Glens Falls Portland Cement Company. He worked out of Boston; his area really was New England.

RR: Did he have any special things he liked to do in his life, special hobbies, or special things that would come to mind when you would think about him?

JM: He was not a man of hobbies. He had gone to Boston College High School, was a track star there and an excellent student. He won a track scholarship to the College of the Holy Cross, from which he graduated in 1921. While there, he went to the 1920 Olympics in Antwerp, Belgium, as an alternate. He was very proud of that. He had great love for Holy Cross College.

RR: OK.

JM: He was not at all handy. He had no hobbies. He was very much a people person.

RR: OK. It's very interesting that he was involved in the Olympics. Did he have any little stories connected with that that he would like to tell?

JM: He did. I actually have a diary that he wrote...

RR: Really?

JM: ...while he was over in Europe at the Olympics. And he talked about that and about the other races that he was in, too. He had his own mementoes from the Penn relay race, I believe, at the University of Pennsylvania. And as a young fellow at B.C. High he participated in the St. John's Prep, Danvers, invitational race. He was very close with his fellow track mates.

RR: Did some of this rub off on you? Did you get inter-

- ested in running?
- JM: I did not. My brother Bob did. The one sport I played was golf, but I was always very proud of my father's track activities.
- RR: Sure, it was quite a thing to go to the Olympics. All right. let's turn to your mother. Tell us a bit about her.
- JM: She was one of eight children, and she went to Girls' Latin School in Boston. Then for two years, I believe, she went to a secretarial school that became Emmanuel College, and then went to work. She met my father, I think, in the late twenties, and married him when she was probably twenty-eight years of age. She had a brother, a Jesuit priest, Fr. Leo O'Keefe. My father had a brother, Fr. John Mullin, after whom I was named, who was a priest of the Archdiocese of Boston.
- RR: I see.
- JM: So I had an uncle on each side who were priests.
- RR: That's really a nice thing for a family to have.
- JM: It certainly was. I came from a very religious family. I also came from a very happy family.
- RR: Good. So was your mother specially interested in cooking and that kind of thing?
- JM: She was. She was an excellent cook, an excellent housekeeper. But she was also an intellectual. She would read; my father was a very intelligent man and a great reader. They each had wonderful senses of humor. They were very happily married. My father had at our home the five-foot Harvard classics shelf. And he read all of those volumes at least once. He had all the copies of Dickens that he had read, I think, twice. He would also read aloud to us as children. And mother was a reader, too.
- RR: So they must have been interested, both of them, in your own education as time went on, of course.

- JM: They were, and they were very interested in the education of my siblings. I had a sister and three brothers.
- RR: All right. Tell us about them.
- JM: My sister, Joan, is still living; she's the eldest. She was an excellent student, and graduated with honors from high school and went to Emmanuel College, where she majored in chemistry and minored in German. She loved Emmanuel College.
- RR: I had three brothers. Dick, who died at the age of fifty, from his boyhood wanted to be an architect. He went to Boston College High School. He took a five-year architectural course at The Catholic University of America. Then he was an officer in the Navy for two years, and was stationed in Guam and New York City. Then he worked for Shepley Bullfinch, an old Yankee Boston architectural firm. He also worked for Sert, who once was the Dean of the Harvard School of Design, I believe, in Cambridge. Later he became a member of a firm in Harvard Square, Symmes, Maini & McKee. At the time of his death, he was a member of that firm. He really loved the work and was involved in, among other things, designing the building, which is the current headquarters, I believe, of the *New England Journal of Medicine* in Waltham, Massachusetts. He designed shopping malls, and so forth.
- RR: How about the second brother?
- JM: Bob, who also is deceased, went to B.C. High and then to the College of the Holy Cross. Like my father he participated in track and in golf. He became a salesman, a very successful salesman. Dan, my youngest brother, also went to Boston College High School, and he's still living. He was in the United States Coast Guard briefly after graduating from Holy Cross in 1964. He is a very successful realtor in

the Back Bay and on Beacon Hill in Boston.

RR: Well, that's quite an active family that seems to have done very well, had a good spirit, and gave you a lot of support.

JM: Yes. Very much so.

HOME PARISH

RR: Let me just turn to the local church. The family did move a little bit, so maybe you had more than one parish church that you grew up in.

JM: Yes, I was baptized in north Cambridge at the Immaculate Conception Church, now closed, but all my years from the age of two to seventeen I was at St. James Parish in Arlington Heights, which is now closed.

RR: I see.

JM: I made my First Holy Communion there and was confirmed there. It was actually a sleepy parish in a sense. However, there were two wonderful young diocesan priests there, Fr. Charles McCarthy and Fr. George Everard, who taught me how to serve Mass. They had a profound influence on me. I was an altar server, later the head altar boy. I was very devout. There was no parochial school in those days in St. James Parish, so I went to the public school. During the month of May and the month of October I would go to Mass daily, served Mass frequently, and got my family to say the family rosary. I was very religious.

RR: I see. So it sounds like you had a very healthy parish, even though it might have been, as you say, a little sleepy.

PARISH LIBRARY FOR CHILDREN

JM: It was. There was an interesting organization in the parish called Pro Parvulis.

RR: Tell us a bit about it.
JM: It was a book club for children, to which my sister and I belonged. This wonderful woman ran it, and one day we had as a speaker, I believe, the former Prime Minister of the Philippine Islands, and another time, Fr. Leo Shea, S.J., who was in Baghdad for many years as a missionary. But his sister was in the parish. He spoke to us. It was a lending library for children and it had Catholic books.
RR: It was run by the parish?
JM: It was. It was sponsored by the parish but it was run by one woman, Alice Leary, who was the sparkplug.

EDUCATION

RR: Now, you went to the public school there then. Which one was that?
JM: It was the Pierce School, which was right across from our home, for six years.
RR: Yes.
JM: I also went two years to Junior High West, and then I went to Boston College High School for four years, where my three brothers went, my father went, and my uncles went.
RR: Let's just take a quick look at that first grammar school. Did you find that a good school for you?
JM: Yes. My older sister and brother had gone there. We were right across the street from the school. My family was quite friendly with some of the teachers.
RR: Yes.
JM: One of the first grade teachers taught all of us and had been the bridesmaid at my aunt's wedding.
RR: Oh, nice.
JM: So that was a connection. And actually the principal of that school was a Miss Helen Enright, an outstanding woman. I can see her to this day, many, many years later, just a motherly, professional, attractive

woman. My impression was—I was just a boy—she ran a wonderful school. And I was involved in public speaking even as a kid. I remember standing on the stage.

RR: She encouraged you to speak that way.

JM: Yes. I remember reciting the “Gettysburg Address” in fourth grade and being in plays. And I loved study. My mother actually wrote a poem. In those days you used to have a little autograph book, and you would get people to sign it. My mother wrote this little verse:

Johnny is a serious boy.
He prefers a book to a funny toy.
He loves to study, read, and write,
And he says his prayers every night.

BOSTON COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

RR: [Laughter] Very nice. She had a kind of wit about her. Then you moved on to B.C. High. You went there the full four years.

JM: I did.

RR: Tell us a little bit about that experience in your life.

JM: Well, I had been able to take a year of Latin as an eighth grade student at Junior High West, so I had a great advantage, I think, looking back. I loved B.C. High. My first year I was not outstanding academically, but I did win the gold medal for Classics, and I won *ex aequo* the prize for mathematics for my section. Then I was invited to join the so-called ‘brain class’ or honors section. I can remember to this day the letter that Fr. D. Augustine Keane, the principal of the school, wrote to several freshmen inviting us to join this section, if we wanted; it was optional.

RR: Yes.

JM: Our teacher would be Fr. Francis Gilday—what a wonderful man! And, oh, I felt like a million bucks

when I got this letter. I said yes. As a result I stayed with those students second, third, and fourth year in the same home room.

RR: Three years.

JM: So my classmates and I did not know a lot of the other students in the year. We became very close with one another.

RR: I can imagine.

JM: Great experience, and many of those young men, including myself, applied for the seminary, either religious orders like the Jesuits, or the diocesan seminary. Not all of them stayed in the seminary, not all of them stayed in the priesthood. Nevertheless, it was a tribute to the example of Fr. Gilday in many ways, I feel.

RR: What kind of a man was he?

JM: He was a humble man. He was a zealous man. And he was very real. He was an unusual man. He chose to be a chaplain full-time, as far as I could tell, at Boston City Hospital, while teaching us Latin, Greek, and English.

RR: At the same time?

JM: Yes. And he loved that work. He had been a missionary in Jamaica.

RR: Of course, at that time, Boston City Hospital and B.C. High were across the street from each other, so that makes it a little bit more plausible.

JM: Yes. But he would tell us about the different cases that he had. He made Caesar's *Gallic Wars* come alive. He was impressive, very impressive. He was just filled with zeal—very saintly obviously.

VOCATION

RR: You have already said a little bit about this. Just give us a feel for how your vocation emerged out of this whole context, his influence or other things that

- happened to you at the time.
- JM: Well, to be honest, I felt in the fourth grade I wanted to be a priest.
- RR: Yes.
- JM: I was very close to my diocesan priest uncle, Fr. John Mullin. Every Sunday afternoon the family would go to my aunt's house. My aunt was single, and Fr. Mullin would come after Sunday Masses and visit in Arlington Center, where my aunt lived with her brother, who was also single. Grandfather was living in those early days. So I saw a great deal of him. I loved serving on the altar, and even, like many other priests when they were young, playing priest, you know, at home sometimes. So I mean that's all I wanted, really.
- RR: So there's a natural development in your life.
- JM: There was. When I got to Boston College High School, sophomore year I thought to myself, 'I still want to be a priest, but I'd like to be a priest like my other uncle, Fr. Leo O'Keefe.' I thought I would like community life. In those days I thought I would like to write for *America* magazine. So I still wanted to be a priest, but a religious order priest, the Jesuits.
- RR: Yes.
- JM: But really, looking back now fifty-five years from the time I entered, although it has not always been easy, as I look back, it has been a straight shot. Oh, there were times, even early, you know, in the seminary, even in the novitiate once, of thinking of leaving and mentioning that to the Novice Director at the time, Fr. Post, whom I admired enormously. And then the times, in theology, of doubt, maybe. But in general, I talked it over with people. I could be mistaken, but I doubt it. I think I am where I am supposed to be.
- RR: Yes.

JM: It has been a straight shot in God's mercy.
RR: You felt very much at home.
JM: Very much so.
RR: Yes, yes.

SHADOWBROOK

JM: Fr. Leo Pollard took me, Fr. Edward O'Flaherty, my high school classmate, and a couple of others to Shadowbrook to visit. We had been accepted, this is to say, a month before I entered. This was in June 1952, a beautiful day, a sunny day, and I was interiorly so excited as we drove down the hill to the old Shadowbrook. We saw the beautiful green lawn, and I figured it was right after lunch. The juniors were all out playing croquet.

RR: And that great view!

JM: Yes, that's right. The very name, Shadowbrook, entranced me. I have always liked poetry.

RR: Right, right.

JM: It is a beautiful sounding name, Shadowbrook; it entranced me, let alone the place.

RR: Yes. Well tell us a little more about the Shadowbrook period, when you did actually enter and your experiences there at Shadowbrook.

JM: Well, I was very happy there. However, there were some times of desolation; there was a certain loneliness on visiting day when my family left. Then I think the monotony of the life, although I like routine, got to me at times. I talked it over with the Novice Director one day. I thought maybe I should leave. Fr. Post said to me, "Look at the crucifix. Ask yourself, 'Is there any selfishness there?'" Well, that did it. I'm here today.

RR: Yes. That was a very nice way of putting it, right?

JM: It was. It worked.

NOVITIATE

RR: And so during the novitiate years, anything unusual happen?

JM: Well, I gave myself to the Long Retreat.

RR: Oh, you did.

JM: Very much. I loved the country. I loved the food there. I was young. I had just turned seventeen. I came from a happy family, and in a way an old-fashioned family, in the sense of authority. Vertical. My father had wonderful qualities, but he did have a quick temper. My father was a somewhat impatient man, and so when I entered I bought the whole package. I bought it completely. I was in the Society a few years before I ever heard the term from a fellow Jesuit scholastic, active obedience. I had never heard that term. I always thought obedience was passive obedience.

RR: Yes.

JM: That was an eye-opener, a good eye-opener for me.

RR: Yes.

JM: But then I gave myself to the studies, too, and I loved them, Latin, Greek, and English. I had done well at B. C. High, and I was good at languages. Now, although it was also true that I tended to be too much of an introvert and a worrier, I think my peers would remember me as a very happy person. But I think I could have been even happier, more at peace if I had worried less and studied harder. Actually that certainly was true at Weston. I feel that when I was in philosophy, I should have thrown myself more into the books. Certainly I think any psychological problems I might have had were bogus. I think they would have evanesced...

RR: Right.

JM: ...had I just thrown myself into the studies in philosophy.

RR: Get more into it so it occupied...
JM: ...yourself.
RR: Right. Focusing on something outside yourself.
JM: Which was what I was supposed to be focusing on.

PHILOSOPHY AT WESTON

RR: Right. Exactly. So, did you find the experience of the philosophy period and the theology period otherwise fruitful for you?
JM: Yes. Yes. Unlike many of my peers, I loved Weston College. I really did. I think that in some ways that maybe this is not a compliment for someone who is supposed to be a “contemplative in action.” But I think I had a seminary personality. I liked the quiet, I liked routine, I liked the country, and I loved the study. I loved metaphysics, which I think some people didn’t care for at all.
RR: No.
JM: And I thought not all the teachers were excellent, but some of them were. I always felt and still feel that one can profit a great deal even from a poor teacher, you know, if one wants to, one can learn.
RR: Right. You can teach yourself to a certain extent.
JM: That’s right. And there are insights that other teachers have, too. Weston’s top teachers had some insights. You could learn from the books.
RR: Right. You could put all the pieces together, and it turns out to be fruitful for you.
JM: And you can learn, too, from discussions with others after the classes.
RR: Right, right, right.
JM: And I had no trouble, and enjoyed thoroughly, when we had to write in Latin or talk in Latin. When we did that oral exam in Latin, I could do it because of a good background, because of having taught Latin as a regent, and even now I try to read Latin.

THEOLOGY DURING VATICAN II

RR: All right. Tell us a bit about the last part of the theology period, when you were preparing to be ordained, and the things that happened to you with regard to your ordination.

JM: The class I was with in theology was a wonderful class. We got along very well. Six or seven outstanding people from other provinces were with us. I have remained friends with several of those people, close friends to this day. We had a reunion just last year. So there was a great bond among us. Actually I was studying theology '62 to '66, so therefore they were exciting years. I mean, we had people like Hans Küng, Cardinal Bea, Fr. Rahner. Actually they all spoke to us. They were all here at Weston, maybe because they were giving talks at Boston College as well.

RR: Yes.

JM: And then there was the famous institute that Bill Watters of the Maryland Province, a good friend of mine, conducted during that time about renewal of the theological education in seminaries. It was very well organized and very interesting.

SHADOWBROOK FIRE

RR: One think that I think I skipped over is, if I understand, that you were involved in the fire at Shadowbrook.

JM: I was.

RR: Could you tell just a bit about that?

JM: Well, I was a rhetorician March 10, 1956, and I was sleeping in the dorm, heavily, and hearing Bro. Bill Frost calling out, "Everybody out!" I sleepily was walking out, but the man in the bed next to me was still asleep. I started to go back and wake him, and I panicked because of the smoke. So I didn't wake him. Now, thank God he heard somebody and got out.

But I was so upset by that that I actually confessed that a few nights later, because I felt I should have gone back to save him. He was a very heavy sleeper, and he is still a fine Jesuit priest in this Province today, thank God. I recall going downstairs to the beautiful sacristy off the main chapel, and my first cousin, Fr. Neil O'Keefe, was a first year novice, and even though there was a fire on, because of grades, I chose not to speak with him. It seems crazy, looking back. I recall walking outside, walking by the place where Fr. Post was in a pick-up truck—his back had been broken—not making a sound, as I was walking by. And I remember the buses coming over from Cranwell School, taking us to the Red Lion Inn, and going to bed. And then I remember the next morning breakfast there in the hotel. And in a sense, I think I was too young to reflect on the tragedy that had occurred. I was aware, I believe, that four people had died, but when one is young, one's emotions aren't as deep as when one is older.

RR: Right.

JM: And then I lost my glasses. A Red Cross lady organized the clothing pick-up. I needed a black suit. I didn't have my glasses. I picked out a suit that seemed to fit, but as I rode—I was sent to Wernersville, Pennsylvania—the sunlight on the bus showed I had chosen a blue suit rather than a black suit.

RR: [Laughter]

JM: Wernersville was wonderful. I was three months there. We had never had a villa house at Shadowbrook. We did there. We had a wonderful time. We played golf; I won a prize in golf. The pace was slower there. We had little cubicles. I made fast friends with some of the men there, with whom I am friendly to this day. I was just there three months, but in general it seemed like a warmer, less institu-

tional, less cold atmosphere.

RR: The Maryland Province is a very welcoming kind of province anyway. Right.

JM: That's right. The Gentlemen of Maryland.

THE ROAD TO CHAPLAINCY

RR: All right. Well, as we look at your overall record here, it seems to divide itself up, that is, after you finished the course and started to go out to work in a ministry of some kind. But it seems to divide itself up into two kinds of things. One is your teaching English literature and the other is being a chaplain for a number of years. Why don't we just take two things and you can enlarge on both? We can start with the first and go through whatever you want to say about teaching, and so on, and then we can move on to the larger picture, which is your years of being a chaplain. So, why don't we start with your teaching of English literature, how you got involved with that, how you liked that, and so on. Tell us a little about that.

JM: We didn't mention my regency.

RR: Oh, I'm sorry. Right.

JM: For regency, in 1959 I was sent to Boston College High School to teach Latin, Greek, English, and religion in home room sections for two years. I enjoyed that. Then I was sent to The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., to study for a master's in English literature, which I got a w years later. I completed my work there. After tertianship at Pomfret, Connecticut, I was sent to Bishop Connolly High School, the second year of that school, to teach English and religion; I was there three years, 1967-1970. I was sent to Round Hills Centre for Renewal as assistant minister and retreat giver during 1970-1971. That was a kind of transitional year. Then I

was asked to go to Fairfield University; they needed a sub-minister in the Jesuit community; I was that for about a year and a half. Then I taught English at Fairfield Prep. In 1975 I was sent to Gloucester as minister of the house and gave some retreats. In 1976 I was sent to the provincial residence at 418 Beacon Street as minister of the house and as editor of the *New England Province News*. That was '76-'78. Thus, there were several positions, which I did not hold for a long time, from the time of my ordination until 1978, when I was curious about Clinical Pastoral Education.

RR: CPE?

CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION

JM: Yes. I asked to take a course in that, which I did, and I liked it. I was sent to do more Clinical Pastoral Education at University Hospital in Boston—and that was a part-time position—and at the same time part-time as a chaplain at Boston City Hospital. I also helped a couple of days a week, weekdays, at St. John the Baptist Parish in Peabody, Mass. Actually those were happy years and good years, and that's how I got into hospital work. I asked for CPE, not really intending to become a chaplain, and I really didn't want to be in the chaplaincy full-time. But I was to be a chaplain full-time, and became one. In 1981, Boston City Hospital, which had paid for three Jesuit priests, was cutting back on their salary. The superior felt that there would be only enough money to support two part-time Jesuit chaplains, not three. Because I had had four units of Clinical Pastoral Education, he felt that I was most qualified to get a full-time chaplaincy position elsewhere. I applied for two. One, Mercy Hospital, Springfield, Mass. as a Catholic chaplain, the other Dartmouth-Hitchcock

Medical Center, Lebanon, New Hampshire. I was accepted at both, but really wanted to go to Dartmouth and did. Those have been my happiest years. I have been up there almost twenty-six years.

TEACHING

RR: All right. Well, that's a wonderful overview. It gives us a real insight into what you have been doing. Could we go back and elaborate now on some of those areas? Let's just say a little more about your teaching. You taught English on two different occasions.

JM: I taught English as a regent at B.C. High, as a young priest at Bishop Connolly High School, as a young priest at Fairfield Prep—three different places.

RR: But it didn't appeal to you as strongly as some of these other ministries.

JM: Well, it didn't. To be frank about it, I feel I did not work hard enough at it. I very much liked being connected with the Jesuit institution. I would go to the games. I would get to know the students. I liked that part very much. I liked the kids very much. But I did not work as hard at preparing classes, correcting papers, as I should have.

CHOOSING A HOSPITAL

RR: That's understandable. That's the way you developed and the direction you were going, and so on. You were obviously moving onto other things, so that's perfectly normal. So that brings us into this broader picture of your being a chaplain, and I'm sure that there were some insights into those years that you had there as a chaplain that would be most interesting to hear about. Some of the things that you noticed that priests were able to do for people, the problems that people were having, how you were able to deal with them—all this kind of thing. If you could

give us some samples or examples or ideas of how that went for you over those years.

JM: Well, one thing that appealed to me about taking the job at Mary Hitchcock, as a private teaching hospital versus a Catholic hospital, was that I was the first full-time priest chaplain there. There was a wonderful Protestant chaplain who hired me. There I would be able to help set up the Catholic ministry. Mercy Hospital, the other option, was all set up: for instance, there was daily Mass there. The head chaplain at Mary Hitchcock and I chose—I was the only priest—not to have daily Mass. We were sure we would not get many people at it, and, if on occasion I wanted to do a funeral outside, I would not want to schedule the hospital Mass and then cancel it. I would have had to fit into a very Catholic organization, a fine organization, at Mercy, with its own fine schedule. But this way I could shape the chaplaincy at Mary Hitchcock the way I wished.

RR: Right.

JM: It was an Ivy League teaching hospital, which Mercy Hospital is not. And it struck me that it would be appropriate for a Jesuit priest—I hope it doesn't sound snobbish—to be a chaplain at the Dartmouth Medical School's teaching hospital, fourth oldest school in the United States of America. The area appealed to me very much, and I threw myself into the community there. I was invited to join a group called the Hanover Roundtable, a discussion group that met once a month, with which until just now I have been very active. Recently I had joined two different groups of men who meet for breakfast once a week. And then somebody came to me and asked for a Latin Mass, and I had a little Latin class after that, and then we'd go off to breakfast.

RR: I see.

WORKING AT DARTMOUTH MEDICAL CENTER

JM: I have been very involved in ecumenical things. It's defunct now, but there was a Lutheran pastors/Roman Catholic priests dialog group to which I belonged.

RR: You really kept busy.

JM: But I made a point of making the Jesuit order known there.

RR: You certainly did.

JM: I lived at a rectory and had no duties. They were LaSalette priests, and they were wonderful to me. But I'm not a member of their religious family, they're not a member of mine.

RR: Of course.

JM: So we worked out a schedule whereby I worked ten days straight and got four days off, and came to Boston College, which is my community. That really has saved me all these years.

RR: I can imagine.

JM: For fourteen years there was a terrific LaSalette priest who was with me. When he was transferred to Rome, a diocesan priest from Nigeria, who has worked out very well, came as the other full-time Catholic chaplain.

RR: A smooth transition.

JM: The hospital now has, I think, eight chaplains: six are full-time, and two are part-time by choice, plus the full-time secretary. The Dartmouth Medical Center very much financially and in other ways fully supports chaplaincy.

RR: Indeed.

JM: Beautiful new facility in a beautiful area, a very cultural area.

A CHAPLAIN'S LIFE

RR: Now, all of us, of course, know about chaplains, but

I'd don't think too many know exactly what a chaplain does. Could you outline or spell out what would be a typical thing that as a chaplain you would do on a day-to-day basis?

JM: We had the list of all the new patients. Now there are HIPAA [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996] rules, which very much restrict broadcasting information. We are allowed as chaplains to get the list. We get the list by religion. And so for new patients that are seriously ill or Roman Catholics who just come in, we try to see them.

RR: Right.

JM: We try to see Roman Catholic patients who are having serious surgery, not minor surgery. We try to see anyone who wants to see us. We do not make it a policy, as in some Catholic hospitals, of seeing every single Catholic patient that comes in. We try to have longer, more in-depth, more CPE-oriented or -based visits. We have Eucharistic Ministers. There are several other chaplains—some of them happen to be Catholic—but they function in a neutral capacity, in other words, they see anyone. These are lay people that are trained in CPE, and they happen to be Catholic, but they are not Catholic chaplains as such.

RR: OK.

JM: But we are on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days straight, because the inpatients may be 350 and because it is not in a city. We don't get a lot of night calls, but it is possible we would be called at night. Then we have three days off. We are supposed to work 8:00 to 5:00. I would work for ten days straight and get my four days off, and go down to Boston College, and the other priest chaplain would take my place. We overlapped some days. Sundays we'd overlap, and other days he'd be there alone, other days I would be there alone.

- RR: Right.
- JM: In many ways it is a sacramental ministry—Eucharist, Confession, emergency Baptisms, Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. There is also ministry to families, to staff, counseling.
- RR: Would you sometimes be called off campus for various things that might happen around the town?
- JM: Yes, sometimes you would be called. Nursing homes would call when someone was dying or sometimes when they couldn't get a local priest. You would at times get called out to the rural areas. You sometimes do funerals off campus.
- RR: OK. Well, that certainly is a very rich kind of ministry to be involved in. You are meeting and doing things for people in all areas of their life and when they need you most. A chaplain can have an impact in a way that otherwise you wouldn't be able to. I'm sure it must be rewarding in that sense.
- JM: Very rewarding. Fr. Nadeau, the LaSalette priest I was with for fourteen years, and I used to say that, in a sense, we deal with people who are at the ocean when there are waves and the surf is pounding. We do not deal with people when the sea is calm. We see people naked before us. They are terrified that they or their loved ones are dying. So we see them at crisis points. We see them at the junction of life and death. So it is very different from what there seems to be in some parishes—very pedestrian activities or conflicts between two parties, such as picayune, internecine, inter-family jealousies, for example, when the pastor is friendly with this family but not with that.
- RR: Right, right.
- JM: None of that. We also have a policy of not living over the store. We don't live in the hospital.
- RR: Oh, I see.
- JM: It was a great blessing.

RR: Yes, yes. Well, now this obviously has been, as you have been just describing, a high level of emotional involvement. You are pouring out to them, as it were, in that kind of situation. How does that affect you, say, over time, day after day, month after month, year after year as you're dealing such crises all the time? How does that affect you personally?

JM: Well, it's wearing, I think. On the other hand, it is the exact opposite of being Rosie the Riveter in World War II. Because you are dealing with people, it's always interesting. You are dealing with people in crisis situations and you're helpful. You know God uses you and are sure of that. It's very satisfying. Yet, to my amazement many people mistakenly thought I had just walked in off the street to do this work. They did not realize that I was getting an excellent salary. This is my job; my doing this is a question of the virtue of justice, not of the virtue of charity. Now, it's also true that, as one gets older, I wondered how much longer I could stand it. I deliberately exercise, and I try to be in good shape, and was, until I got ill recently. I also got to know the medical students and the residents, and became very friendly with some of them. There's something about being around young people that is energizing and rejuvenating, which was very much the case. Also there is, with the nurses, with the doctors, with the staff, there's a human element there, because you are taking care of people who are very sick. There is a certain warmth and humanity about it, for all the technology we have today.

GOD IS MY ROCK

RR: We're approaching the end, believe it or not. Could you tell us something about the time you were dealing with the *Province News*?

- JM: Well, I was the editor many years ago. But for several years I have been the reporter for the Boston College community. I have been writing that for maybe fifteen years.
- RR: With a little touch of wit, and so on.
- JM: Yes.
- RR: [Laughter] That's good. As you look back over your years, could you tell us how you feel that God's providence, in a sense, has been with you? I mean, when things sometime happen unexpectedly and develop in ways that are very helpful, but in the long run things seem to turn out well, because there seems to be something guiding you as you go along in your life as a priest? Could you say anything about that in your life?
- JM: Very much so. I chose and asked the provincial to make CPE, and the answer was yes. Then the provincial later asked me to become a chaplain, and I did not want that at all. I was a younger Jesuit priest. But I thought that was for those who had failed at high school teaching and thought that active alcoholics were sometimes chaplains at hospitals. I thought to myself, "This is the end of the road." That image was with me. But in reality, though I didn't want to do it, the provincial assigned me to that, and he did me a terrific favor. It really was God's providence.
- RR: Right.
- JM: Some years back I read something that St. Albert the Great had written, which has been my particular examen for several years, and this is it: "Commit every particle of your being in all things, down to the smallest details of your life, eagerly and with perfect trust to the most sure and unfailing providence of God." Again, "Commit every particle of your being in all things, down to the smallest details of

your life, eagerly and with perfect trust to the most sure” — and when I think of that, I think of the rocks at Gloucester, two million years old, God is my rock, God is a rock — “to the most sure and un-failing” — When I think of that, I think of a fountain that never stops — “to the most sure and un-failing providence of God.”

RR: Right.

JM: And I have no doubt that all of my life has been under the loving providence of God. And in many ways, I have felt all my life that I have had a protected life, in the best sense. I’ve been spared all sorts of things and watched over.

RR: Well, that is, I think, a wonderful summary of your life and of all the things you have done. We’re just about at the end, so I want to thank you for all that you have said and told us.

JM: You are welcome, Dick.

Fr. John F. Mullin, S.J.

Born: March 3, 1935. Somerville, Massachusetts
Entered: July 30, 1952, Lenox, Massachusetts,
Novitiate of St. Stanislaus Kostka/
Shadowbrook
Ordained: June 12, 1965, Weston, Massachusetts,
Weston College
Final Vows: June 6, 1987, Boston College, Chestnut Hill,
Massachusetts

1948 Boston, Massachusetts: Boston College High
School - Student
1952 Lenox, Massachusetts: Novitiate of St. Stanislaus
Kostka/Shadowbrook - Novitiate, Juniorate [to
March 10, 1956]
1952 Wernersville, Pennsylvania: Novitiate of St. Isaac
Jogues - Juniorate [March-June 1956]
1956 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College - Stud-
ied philosophy
1959 Boston, Massachusetts: Boston College High
School - Taught third year: Latin, Greek, En-
glish, religion
1961 Washington, District of Columbia: Catholic
University - Studied English
1962 Weston, Massachusetts: Weston College -
Studied theology
1966 Pomfret, Connecticut: St. Robert's Hall -
Tertiaship
1967 Fall River, Massachusetts: Bishop Connolly High
School - Taught English
1970 South Dartmouth, Massachusetts: Round Hills
Centre for Renewal - Retreat ministry, assistant
minister

- 1971 Fairfield, Connecticut: Fairfield University -
Subminister [1971-1974], taught English at
Fairfield College Preparatory School [1974-1975]
- 1975 Gloucester, Massachusetts: Gonzaga Eastern
Point Retreat House - Minister, retreat ministry
- 1976 Boston, Massachusetts: Campbell House -
Minister; editor of *Province News* [1976-78]
University Hospital - Studied Clinical
Pastoral Education [1978-1981], part-
time chaplain at Boston City Hospital
- 1981 Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth-
Hitchcock Medical Center - Chaplain; *Province
News* reporter for the Boston College Jesuit
community
- 1990-1 Sabbatical:
Europe: [October-November]
Manchester, New Hampshire: St. Anselm
Abbey [November-December]
Berkeley, California: Jesuit School of
Theology at Berkeley [February-June]
- 2007 Weston, Massachusetts: Campion Health Center
- Praying for the Church and the Society

Degrees

- 1958 Bachelor of Arts, English, Philosophy, Weston
College-Boston College
- 1959 Master of Arts, Philosophy, Weston College-
Boston College
- 1959 Licentiate in Philosophy, Weston College-Boston
College
- 1966 Licentiate in Sacred Theology, Weston College
- 1968 Master of Arts, English, Catholic University