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Interview with Juanita Garciagodoy, Class of 1974 and Professor of Hispanic Studies

Juanita Garciagodoy

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Oral History Project

Interview with: **Juanita Garciagodoy**
Class of 1974 and Professor of Hispanic Studies, 1983-2007

Date: **Tuesday, August 14th, 2007**

Place: Juanita Garciagodoy's home, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Interviewer: Laura Zeccardi, Class of 2007

Interview run time: 1:37:22 minutes

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Subjects

00:00	Coming to Macalester
03:47	First impressions of Mac
07:36	Dorm life
16:11	Campus life and events
20:28	Diversity at Mac, political activism
26:47	Major at Mac, courses, and faculty
35:15	Spanish Department
39:52	Administrators and president (while a student)
42:47	Post-graduation
45:01	Returning to Macalester to teach
50:34	Differences at Mac from student days
56:26	Teaching at Mac and relationships with faculty
1:01:25	State of the Spanish Department
1:04:30	Tenure system
1:09:44	Relations between faculty and administration
1:11:39	Research and Day of the Dead
1:18:34	Other teaching and writing
1:21:01	Student collaboration
1:25:06	Future plans

1:27:41 Changes at Macalester
1:31:13 Favorite memory

Interview with Juanita Garciagodoy

Laura Zeccardi, Interviewer

**August 14th, 2007
Home of Juanita Garciagodoy
Minneapolis, Minnesota**

[00:00]

LZ: My name is Laura Zeccardi, and I am a new graduate of Macalester College conducting interviews for the Macalester Oral History Project. Today is Tuesday, August 14th, 2007, and I'm interviewing Juanita Garciagodoy, Class of 1974, and Professor of Hispanic Studies, at her home. Well, I'll have you start by stating your name, and where you're originally from, and then what year you first came to Macalester.

JG: Okay. I'm Juanita Garciagodoy, from Mexico City, Mexico, because I know there are Mexico City's in the US. I arrived at Macalester in the fall of 1970 to do my BA degree.

LZ: How did you decide on Macalester? I guess, were you still living in Mexico before you came to Macalester?

JG: Yeah. It was easy. My mother's a Macalester alum—

LZ: Oh, okay.

JG: From the class of 1950, '51, I'm not sure. And she talked about Macalester a lot when I was a child. What I knew was that after primary school comes junior high school, then comes high school, then comes Macalester. So I was kind of guided in that direction. Fortunately, it was a fabulous fit for me as a student. And when I was a junior in high school, there were three schools I was interested in: Macalester, Reed, and Harvard. Radcliffe. Harvard was not accepting any applications from my high school. In fact, there used to be a process in which the students had to apply for an application, and, there was a—there were a bunch of years of total blackout for my high school. And I don't know what that was about, no one has ever told me but—so I didn't even get an application. And then my mother was very nervous about Reed, because she thought it was a hippie school, way too liberal, drugs, sex, rock and roll, and they were scared and wouldn't let me apply to Reed. And of course, because Macalester was familiar to her from her time there, she didn't realize that it was not that different from Reed. But that was to my advantage [laughs].

[02:32]

LZ: Had you visited Macalester before you—I guess, maybe talk about the admissions process at that point, and...

JG: I don't remember the admissions process. I remember having to take two sets of tests, SATs and something else, I don't remember. And a National Merit Scholar test; I was a finalist but not, I didn't get the National Merit Scholarship. I was binational at the time, Mexican and US, because of my American mother. So I don't really remember that much about the application. I did not visit Macalester before. But my family was good friends with an instructor from the

Spanish Department, whose name was Bob Dasset. He was a wonderful, kind of a Renaissance man kind of person. He died I think maybe four years ago or so. And he was lovely, and he always visited my family. In fact, it was because of Bob Dasset that my parents met. So I figured, I'm really a child of Macalester in very strange ways [laughter]. That most alums and instructors can't claim.

[03:47]

LZ: What was your first impression of, I guess, the campus and...what was running through your head when you first came to Macalester?

JG: I don't know, it just seemed norm—I was a very...I don't know how to explain what I was like as an eighteen year old. I was very much a romantic, and I was also very much of a space cadet. So I loved certain things, I loved Old Main. Which sadly, Laura, you don't know the way it used to be in its glory, but it was like some of the buildings at the University of Minnesota that haven't been all tarted up. Old Main used to be very important on the campus, and it had this wonderful smell of wood, the stairs creaked, and it smelled like the US to me. There are certain smells that to me invoke the United States, and I think it had to do with the smells of—or maybe some paints that were used, and the smell of old wood, because in Mexico, buildings aren't made of wood normally. So. My other impression—physical, you know, visual impression of the campus, came some weeks after I arrived, when it was fall. There was a moment when I was walking on the path that now leads from, say, Carnegie—the one that's between Carnegie and Old Main, and towards the chapel. I was walking down that path, and everything was yellow. It was so incredibly beautiful. All the trees were yellow from the leaves, and the ground was

carpeted with yellow. So there hadn't been one of those obnoxious storms that just tear off all the leaves and then they're all on the ground, and it's all bare branches above. And so I remember that. And the other impression that I had, I lived in Kirk Hall my first year, and my other impression was—or kind of cluster of impressions was from the winter. And I had never lived through a winter, although I'd visited the States during winters because my mother's family's from southern Minnesota. So when I was a child, and we used to have the long vacation in December and January, I guess, my family used to drive up to Minnesota to visit my grandfather and my mother's siblings. But I had never lived through a winter, and I remember in my room in Kirk Hall, there was frost on the inside of the window, and how bizarre and kind of alarming that was. And also, some of the beautiful things that happened, like waking up and finding that the branches were bristled with little bits of ice. So it didn't look transparent like ice, but it looked like frozen sticks of snow. So gorgeous. And the other one was I guess what's called an ice storm, where all the branches had little sleeves of ice, and it would all tinkle, and it was beautiful. I used to have very long hair, and sometimes, like if I had spent the night at a friend's dorm, and I'd be walking back to my dorm in the morning or walking to classes in the morning—at the time used to shower in the morning, so my hair would freeze and be clicking together [laughter]. It was very amusing. Also to realize that it didn't make me cold.

[07:36]

LZ: What was dorm life, I guess, like for you living with a roommate, and kind of going from...I mean, I found that to be particularly—not difficult, but interesting transition.

JG: Yeah. It was really fun. I lived in Section 2 of Kirk Hall, and I lived in a suite for three students. One of them was a young woman called Ellen Alize [sp?] from Cambridge, Massachusetts. She was the daughter of scholars. I don't remember what her mother taught or where, but her dad was a professor at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. And she was a very interesting person, very different from me, and she and I shared a pair of—what are they called—bunk beds. Until she fell out of it one night in the middle of a nightmare, and then [laughs] we took the bunk bed's structure apart and put the two mattresses on the floor. There was not enough room for that, it was kind of uncomfortable, very strange, but, you know, it kept Ellen from killing herself [laughs] in another nightmare. It was very funny. And, the other little bedroom was occupied by Becky Knight from Appleton, Wisconsin. And she was a very original and cool person, and I wish you would interview her sometime for the archives, if you can find her. Becky Knight. And I think she took her husband's name—Giusti. G-I-U-S-T-I. But Becky was the first feminist I'd ever met, the first person I knew who was conscious of racial differences, because in Mexico I just didn't think about those things. We had these impressions of the US, and thought African Americans were cool, because they had cool music, and they dressed so—I mean, they dance, and we just liked a lot of the impressions that we got from them, about them, from the media. But we had no experience really of them in my high school. And I'd always been with Asian-Mexicans, Asian-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Mexicans, and so on. So, you know, differences in complexion and so on just didn't impress me very much. And I had no idea of the cultural differences, and kind of the history of sorrow, and prejudice and suffering that African Americans had in this country. So it was very interesting and educational for me to live with Becky in particular because she had a lot of African American friends. And, you know, I started to get to know them. At the time it seemed very

natural to me, but I understand it was the first year that pretty much the whole campus went into having gender balances in the dorms. There might have been a couple of dorms, or a couple of floors that were all women and all men, but we had a scattering of rooms of, you know, male/female. The boys who lived next door became very close friends, and it was as if we all occupied two suites. You know, if we—well, for whatever reasons we just kind of, everything was open, we didn't lock the doors. And, we were pretty crazy, we didn't like that the men's bathroom was the one next to our rooms, and the women's was downstairs, or the other way around, I don't remember, so we just took the signs down. And declared, you know, anybody can use whatever bathroom is closer to them. We were really very much a product of the '60s, so I remember shocking some of the older students [laughs], some of the graduating seniors, because the dorm was completely integrated. Because some of us would shower with our boyfriends or girlfriends, and yeah, there was a fair amount of—not streaking, but nudity. And this was a little—some of the older kids were a little taken aback, because they didn't expect this from freshmen. You know, as we were called at the time. And the dean was a bit alarmed, and ordered us to put the signs back on the bathroom doors, and to observe them. We put the signs back on, but didn't change our habits, so. Dorm life was a lot of fun. It was a little awkward at times because if a roommate wanted their privacy, then, you know, you had to make yourself scarce somehow, and that wasn't always entirely easy. But it was pretty easy, because everyone was cool about letting you spend the night on their couch, or whatever.

[12:43]

LZ: Did you live in the dorms, then, all four years that you were at Macalester?

JG: I did. My first year was in Kirk, and my other three years I was the native speaker and Resident Advisor of the Spanish House. The Spanish House at that time was a wonderful place that I think Macalester owns, but I don't know what it is now. It's on the corner of Summit and Snelling, across from Dayton Hall. Dayton, right? Dupre.

LZ: In that—yeah, in that area.

JG: It's right on the corner, and it was a spectacular house. We all had—most of us had roommates. I did not get along well with my first roommate and spent a lot of time with my friend Becky Knight, who lived in one of the college-owned off-campus houses on—I'm trying to remember now if it was on Vernon or Macalester Street. Maybe I'm—anyway, one or the other. They called it Guilt House. For arbitrary reasons, because I think they liked answering the phones saying “Guilt House!” I don't know why, but, it was a very crazy group and I spent a lot of time with them that year. But otherwise, it was fun and frustrating, because I couldn't do my job without the other students cooperating. And I felt bad that I couldn't enforce the “this is the Spanish House and we're speaking Spanish” policy that the department intended. So that frustrated me, and made me uncomfortable that I couldn't, you know, encourage students, because a lot of them really didn't want to speak Spanish. But that was basically my sophomore year, and the other two years, then, the house was inhabited by more majors, kids who had studied abroad, and who were very fluent in Spanish and were, you know, living in Spanish. That was a relaxed thing.

[14:56]

LZ: Did most kids live on campus at that time...?

JG: Most of my friends did, yeah. I had one friend who had an apartment, a woman from Wisconsin who is a published poet. Her name is Wendy Knox. Knox-Carr, I think that's—she hyphenated the name after one of her several marriages. And she had a truck, also; she was the only person I knew who owned a vehicle. Most of us, in fact, didn't explore the Twin Cities at all. I used to ride the bus occasionally into downtown St. Paul to buy tea. I don't know why I did. But I did not know the Twin Cities at all. Everything was on campus. We were pretty poor; I mean, most of us had scholarships, and financial aid that included work study, of course, and loans too... Nobody thought about it, nobody complained about it, but we didn't have money, so we didn't spend money. We just stayed on campus all our life and were, as far as I can tell, and certainly for me, perfectly happy there.

[16:11]

LZ: Were there kind of big, all-campus events that you—that people participated? I guess, kind of, what were weekend activities, and...

JG: I didn't know anything about that [laughs]. I was a bit of a loner. I had friends, but I was not—I was not a member of any clubs, I didn't do much athletic stuff except on my own, or a couple of—I took a couple of courses, the famous "Relaxation" course. You don't—?

[laughter] Yeah, we had a course in relaxation from the P.E. Department. It was very '60s

[laughter]. You would come in and lie on a mat, and you were given a towel to put at the nape of your neck. And you learned to relax, what they called progressive relaxation. So you would,

like, make an effort with muscle, different muscle groups, and then relax them all the way through the body. This lasted a semester. This was my athletic training at Macalester [laughs]. There was also yoga, and I had a—you know, there was a teacher who I'll talk about a little bit more because she was just a very important and wonderful human being. Beverly White used to teach yoga at her house. I fell in with a group of jocks my first year in the Spanish House, because that's who lived there, and they taught me to lift weights, and I did that for a while, but it didn't really take, and I didn't keep doing it. I admired them, because they were really strong. And I did some swimming, but that was about it. I started running, I think at the end of my senior year. But my group of friends were not athletic at all. And I was surprised to learn during my time at Macalester what Homecoming was. [background noise] I don't know what's beeping. I didn't know what it was, I had heard it, and I wasn't aware of it until, maybe I'd been there a couple of years. There was a football game involved, I had no idea that we had a football team. I just—I mean, really, I was quite oblivious of that kind of thing. So I don't remember campus events or annual things. We hung out together. We talked, we smoked dope a lot; it was the smell of home. And we played music. So when I was the head of the Spanish House, I did some activities that I really loved, and I've suggested again since I've been part of the Hispanic Studies Department, that nobody has taken up. Every Friday afternoon, we had something going on that was open to the campus. It was usually one of two things: either poetry readings, and people would read favorite poems, or poems that they had written, and just enjoyed that. Or, more frequent, singing sessions. So anybody who had a guitar—and that was really quite a few people—would bring their guitars over, and I would...ditto? You know what dittos are? It was a primitive form of photocopying. Things came out in purple ink, and as a member of the—you know, as a worker in the Spanish Department I had access to those machines and, you know, was

encouraged to use them that way, because it was for the department and the campus. So I would write out by hand on these sheets Mexican and Latin American songs, and put the chord sequences on them, and distribute them to the group. And we would sing. It was wonderful. It was really nice. And we would do that every Friday afternoon after classes for, I don't know, for a couple hours.

[20:28]

LZ: Was there a fair amount of diversity on campus, I guess maybe, in terms of racially but then also, I guess, geographically, because Macalester had traditionally been kind of a Midwestern college and...?

JG: Definitely geographically. And also in terms of ethnic diversity, and there were international students. Because I was an international student, I did hang out in the International Center, which used to be on Summit and Fry. I think that's now the president's house, isn't it?

LZ: It could be, I'm not sure which street is Fry.

JG: It's across from the dorms, just across Summit. That was a beautiful house, and so I had—not necessarily close friends, but we did hang out together some in the International Center, from a bunch of different countries. You know, from Asia, and Africa, from Europe; a few were from Europe. And there was good international diversity at the time.

[21:51]

LZ: You had said that you weren't, you yourself, politically active, but I mean, there were, I guess, the things that you witnessed, and I guess maybe, what you saw at Macalester with Vietnam protests, and also there was the EEO Program, I think was being kind of—

JG: They were important, and they definitely were something I was aware of. I didn't really know what the EEO Program was. I knew it stood for Expanded Educational Opportunities. I knew that there were a fair number of African American students on campus that did not really integrate well with the middle class African Americans that were also there. And there was one African American young man, in Kirk 2, and you know, we were friends, we used to sing together, he had a wonderful voice. He just had a beautiful voice, and he would take his guitar to the stairwell, which gave it a really good sound, and he would sing and it was—we all opened our doors when Dave Fennoy was singing, because he was superb. And that was really my first experience of the cultural differences between...I don't know what to call it. Maybe it's more of a class difference than—or, as much a class difference as it is a cultural, ethnic, racial difference. But there were kids that would not return my greeting. It was normally a very friendly campus, and people would meet each other's eyes on paths. And there seemed to be a, you know, a really kind of sad sense in a number of students that I'm pretty sure were in the EEO Program who really even preferred to be left alone. Who preferred not to converse so much with the other kids. And although I was an international student, and though I'm Mexican and all that, you know, look at me. So I didn't look like a minority to them, and therefore, you know, was not that appealing. And that was a strange experience for me, because my high school had been very homogeneous in terms of class. Very diverse in terms of, you know, the ethnic makeup of students, and it was quite international and so on, but I did not know African

Americans...actually at all, I can't remember one in my high school. So that was a new experience to me. A number of my friends were absolutely protesting the Vietnam War. I was really scared of knowing too much about it. Of knowing anything about it. I remember watching television and being, you know, just shocked and just so sad watching live footage of these young, young men carrying their dead or bleeding colleagues who were also—I mean, they were my age. I was so aware of that, and so it was just, it made such an impact on me that I didn't somehow have the preparation to deal with it. So I didn't. I didn't read the papers, I didn't watch it on TV, I didn't talk about it, except marginally. I was very much of a pacifist but without very much substance—except kind of, you know, philosophical ideas that I did think through, but not political ideas at all. I was very ignorant politically.

[25:58]

LZ: Were protests pretty common on campus? I guess, were there events that you kind of were right there on campus that weren't, you weren't really able to...?

JG: I don't remember them. There were. And I don't know how I wasn't aware of sit-ins, protests, I mean, lots of disruptions of classes. I didn't know about them. I was quite studious, I loved my coursework; I mean, I was really very passionate about my coursework. And I wrote poetry, and I sang songs, and I was as close to being a hippie as I could imagine from my kind of bourgeois Mexico City ideas. It was great. It was great. Very goofy, but that's—that's how I was.

[26:47]

LZ: What was your major at Macalester, did you...?

JG: I had a double major. When I arrived, I had decided that I wanted to learn to be a teacher because my most beloved people in my life were teachers. I loved my high school. It was really a wonderful school. And I adored my teachers there and I wanted to be a teacher like them. And that was—that only increased at Macalester, because I also there had superb teachers who were very inspiring. And it was one of my romantic ideals to be a teacher; you know, if I couldn't be like them, still somehow to be—to approach their vicinity or something, is what I wanted. But I dropped out of the education program very soon because I found it boring. And then I took a course from Calvin Roetzl in the Religious Studies Department. I took—and I got turned on. I was so excited. I took courses from Calvin, from Dr. Yahya Armajani, who was Iranian and a wonderful human being, *so* inspiring. And from David White. And they just lit up my intellectual life in a new and wonderful way. And I, you know, became a passionate student of religions. Non-Christian religions, of early Christianity, of apocryphal Christianity. I took great, great courses from those three people. And then when I was—I was still thinking about teaching as a career, I learned that you had, you couldn't be certified to teach high school in religion, what they called religion at the time. So I did a double major with Spanish. It was not a stellar department at the time. I think there were, you know, some scholars who were serious in their own work, but somehow that didn't communicate to the students. And I...you know, I was secretly disrespectful. I always behaved pretty well in class, but I was not impressed by some of my Spanish Department teachers. Again, being from Mexico City, in some ways I had a certain worldly knowledge and some sophistication, and in other ways I was totally provincial. And I thought it was really funny to have a Spanish professor who spoke with the Spanish 'th' instead

of ‘c’s’ and ‘z’s,’ because we don’t do that in Latin America, *but* a very heavy American accent. I just thought that was so funny, and it was hard for me to take that person seriously. I regret it a little bit, because I mean, he was a serious scholar in his own right, but he didn’t communicate that somehow. He would read—he had us read books, we would read books, and I was very diligent, I did all my homework, and all my readings. And then he would ask, “No es así, Señorita Laura?” Oh no, he’d use your last name. “No es así, Señorita Garcíagodoy?” [laughter] “Isn’t that so?” And I would say, “No.” And I would disagree with him. And sometimes he would ask me to elaborate on why I disagreed with a point he just made, and sometimes he wouldn’t. And so I was pretty—it was not a great department at the time. It’s wonderful now. But religious studies, and philosophy; and Dr. Armajani was a historian. But the first course I took from him was “Non-Christian Religions”...were tremendously inspiring. And I feel like Calvin in particular taught me to be a scholar. And although I am not sure I ever got an A in a class of his, I learned a lot. That eventually—I mean, it was like he placed the seeds, and they didn’t flourish, or I wasn’t very swift in some ways, but I feel like now the good writing that I do and the good scholarship that I do had its seeds—some of them really in high school, too, because those teachers were very determined to help us write and reason—but came from those people. And I have to tell you one wonderful thing—two wonderful things about Dr. Armajani. In the “Non-Christian Religions” course, he introduced each religion as though he were a proponent of it. And as the semester wore on, we would—you know, the kids in the classroom would just be hanging around afterwards and say, “*So, what do you think he is?*” “He’s got to—he’s obviously Hindu.” “No, I don’t think so, I think he’s got to be Muslim, because, you know, plus he’s from Iran, and...” “*No, I think...*” So, we would go on and on with these discussions, and trying to think of things he had said that revealed really what his

religion was, and he wasn't going to tell us until the last day of class. And then he revealed he was a Presbyterian [laughter]. And it blew our minds, because we did not expect that at all. It was very—but he was so effective. And also, he gave lectures that were so beautiful, that on probably two occasions I remember the class applauding him at the end of the lecture. It was just so beautiful and moving, how he spoke. Very sweet. He was a very special person to me.

[32:58]

LZ: Were classes pretty rigorous, or did that kind of vary from professor to professor?

JG: It varied from professor to professor, and from department to department. There were ways in which Macalester was very much into the '60s, and giving students what I feel now was too much freedom to decide. I feel like I wish I had gotten a better education in Spanish literature than I did. It seemed, I don't know, the courses were—or the sequences were not structured together. You just had to take a certain number of credits. Religious Studies was a very rigorous department, very strong, and I learned a tremendous amount there. And Philosophy, I only took courses from David White, there were a number of us who did that. We were groupies in a sense, and he taught us great philosophical literature, always from eastern traditions. Chinese philosophy, and Indian philosophy, and, you know, I learned a lot from him. But the Spanish Department was not very strong. There was one professor there who was untenured, and I don't even know if he had a Ph.D.; not a lot of people did. His name was Gary Kester. And he was a very shy fellow. Possibly—I don't know. He was a very shy fellow, and seemed a little bit marginal, he did not seem integrated well into the department that seemed like they were all friends among themselves, but not with Gary. And he did sponsor a couple of independent

studies for me in the Spanish Department, which were great. Because I did a poetry writing thing, and something else that I've forgotten now, but he was—I mean, he at least allowed me to do some things that I felt interested in that...and I kind of challenged myself to do some things, but again, I had a lot of freedom.

[35:15]

LZ: I imagine you had probably a more unique kind of experience in the Spanish Department seeing as you, you know, weren't taking, you know, Spanish I and Spanish II. I guess, were most of your classes literature-orientated or I guess maybe...?

JG: They were all—I took only literature. I took only literature courses, and those courses were all taught by one person. The department was quite hierarchical in that sense, and there was one professor who taught Portuguese, but it never occurred to me to take Portuguese. Nobody told me that was a cool thing to do, and it just didn't, I don't know, dawn on me that it was. And all the language courses were taught by people that I'm guessing didn't have Ph.D.'s. There might have been one other person with a Ph.D. in the department, but not many. I took them all from one person. And, what was the beginning of that question?

[36:13]

LZ: I guess just maybe what types of courses within the Spanish Department did you...

JG: Ugh, they were boring. Man, we talked—we read basically nineteenth century, late nineteenth century, early twentieth century literature. There was one author that I kind of liked.

Miguel de Unamuno was a very important Spanish author. And I liked his books; he was sort of an existentialist in a way, and, he was an important figure. But I didn't like the way that they were not discussed in class. So I would discuss them with other students. My fellow students tended to be—a number of them were majors, and their Spanish was pretty good. I don't remember writing papers. I remember writing one, I had to write—I think they, it was even called a “book review” of a little dinky book called *El trovador*. And I remember talking to Bob Dasset in the Spanish Department. I said, “You know, when I was in high school I was told that to write a little book critique, I should say something good about the book, say something bad about it, and then come to a conclusion. *I find nothing good to say about this piece!* It's so boring! It's so trivial!” And he said, “Well, maybe I can help.” He said, “Your professor is a great opera fan. And this book was the basis for a really important opera by Verdi, *Il trovatore*. So think about that, and see if you can...” So, I duly, you know, went over to the library, checked out these LPs of *Il trovatore*, took them to my room, and I guess it was my roommate who had a turntable system, and I listened to them. And what was so much fun is that I thought I could read the Italian libretto. I'd never tried that before, but it was really cool. I had never listened to opera, although my paternal grandfather listened to opera, but everybody thought he was weird to do that. Sunday afternoons he would go in his room and play opera and nobody would accompany him. And so, I finished my little paper by saying, “The one good thing I can say about *El trovador* is that it gave rise Verdi's famous opera.” So that got me my A, and that was that.

[38:45]

LZ: Was the library in Weyerhaeuser at that point?

JG: Yes. It was a wonderful place. It smelled like a library. I loved the library. I spent a lot of time there.

LZ: And the—the Spanish Department, where would that have been located?

JG: It was in Janet Wallace.

LZ: Oh, it was?

JG: Yep. Janet Wallace was pretty new. The Spanish Department was in... basically where that suite of offices is now occupied by Leland Guyer and David Sunderland and Susana Blanco-Iglesias. And was just occupied by Fabiola [Franco], who just retired. So that whole group of offices was the Spanish Department. It was really small. And the English Department was down the hall. And I made friends with the English professors when I came back as a professor later.

[39:38]

LZ: Were there a fair amount of students within the Spanish Department? I guess, it seems that—it's a pretty big major now, I think, but...

JG: I don't think so. I don't know. I don't know. But I don't think so.

[39:52]

LZ: One thing we haven't talked about: as a student, were you aware of, I guess, the administrators, and the president, I guess, in particular? Did you have an image of him, I guess, or was that—

JG: No. He was totally irrelevant to me. My professors were very relevant, and I was conscious of them. I imprinted on some of them, I guess, like a big duckling or something. But no. I met—I remember meeting John B. Davis, who I think became president—or there was a search for him in my senior year. And I don't know, he made an impression on me because he seemed like a real intellectual. And he was from Harvard, and I was just going to Harvard to do my master's degree. And I mean, I had a couple of conversations with him, but I don't remember President Flemming. I don't remember President Robinson; there's sort of a visual image I have of President Robinson. The deans were relevant. We had a dean of housing. And we broke a lot of rules. I especially was—I didn't understand that rules were to be honored. I was not raised by my father to honor rules except his, and in the Spanish House I had a cat, which was against the rules, and the dean of housing would write me—like, you know, I was in charge, so it was really an egregious thing to do, but there it was. He would send me a memo saying, or call me, and say, "Garcia Godoy? Have you gotten rid of that cat yet?" "No, sir, but I'm going to." "Get rid of it!" "Yes, sir, I will." And that was that until he called me again. "Have you gotten rid of that cat?" I said, "No, sir, I haven't gotten rid of the cat." [laughter] He said, "Get rid of that cat!" "Yes sir, I will!" And I graduated with a cat, still. I also lived in the attic, which was off-limits because it didn't have a fire escape. It was a *wonderful* room! It was the—oh, it was the coolest room! And I was tired of having roommates, and in fact my room was in a little hall between—let's see, it was between the hall and another bedroom. So the people who lived in the

bedroom behind my room always had to go through my room to get to the bathroom, to get out of the, you know, house to do anything. So I didn't like that. And I just moved in the attic against the rules. And claimed that it wasn't true, I claimed, you know, "Well, I keep a bed there, because I need it sometimes, and I study there because it's very quiet, but I don't sleep there regularly." It was just—it wasn't true.

[42:47]

LZ: So, did you—I guess, how did you decide what you were going to do after graduation?

JG: Calvin Roetzel called me in, and said, "Are you thinking about graduate school? You should think about graduate school." I said, "Okay, help me think!" He said, "Well, you should either go to University of Chicago Divinity School, because they have a very strong program in history of religions, or Harvard Divinity School." So I visited both of them. I didn't like Chicago, it was *way* too serious for me. I was told later by an alumna, a friend of mine who had been my student, that the kids at University of Chicago say, "This is where fun goes to die." They had a t-shirt or something that was inscribed like that. And I didn't hear anybody say that, but it felt like that to me. It was way more serious than I could handle, whereas Harvard Divinity School was friendly, laid back, it seemed much more like Macalester. So, I applied there, and somehow was accepted.

[43:53]

LZ: Before he had kind of put this idea in your head, did you have—were you, you know, just going to graduate and see where things took you, kind of?

JG: Yep. Yeah, I imagined I would go back to Mexico, I was hoping to teach at the high school where I graduated, because it was a wonderful school. It was like—that little school was like paradise, in a way. It was very creative, and very—so I really wanted to go back and teach there.

[44:21]

LZ: Did you have other friends that went on to graduate school? I guess I'm wondering if that was kind of a typical thing to do or at that time was...

JG: From the Religious Studies Department a lot of us went on to graduate school. A lot of us went on to doctorates, in fact. A lot. Among my friends, many went on to further degrees. One of my very close friends went on to medical school, maybe at Harvard? Yeah. A lot of kids went on to graduate school.

[45:01]

LZ: Well, maybe we could talk about, kind of, the path after Mac, and then, how you came back to Macalester.

JG: Yeah. When my husband and I were ready to be living together, and to get married, I was living in Mexico City and he was living in a wonderful little town about four hours by car north of Mexico City. San Miguel de Allende, in the state of Guanajuato. And to me it was really obvious what he should do. I was teaching at the American high school, which had been my dream. I loved it. I had great students, and I had wonderful colleagues, and I felt like I, you

know, I had totally made it, because I was among these just giants of intellect. And they were just great people to be with. And as a faculty member I could get reduced or free—I'm not sure anymore—tuition for my husband's children by previous marriage. He's ten years older than I am, so he had a life before Juanita. And I said, you know, it was obvious. He should come back to Mexico City with his children, and, you know, live in Mexico City, and that would be great. And one day he said to me—he grew up in Mexico City, by the way. He was born in the US but he grew up in Mexico City. He was the child of Catalan parents. But he had left Mexico City very purposefully, because it was too big, too crowded. And one day he said to me, “The thought of coming back to the city to live makes me sick.” And that really—it made me mad. I think it was the first time I was ever angry at him, and I just burst out, “So what do you want to do, live in the States?” And I said it *totally* full of sarcasm, because it was like, saying, “What, do you want to go to Siberia?” And he just paused and said, “I think I would.” He's a writer of fiction. He writes totally in English, he always had, and he felt like he would like to be immersed in a country of the English language, and the American culture. Which is what he was, you know, kind of writing about in a very screwy way because he didn't live in the US. So then I said, “All right. So we will either live in the Twin Cities, or in Cambridge and Boston.” Because I had groups of friends there. And he thought about it for a couple of days and said, “Well, let's go to Minnesota. Because I understand the Twin Cities are a good place to raise children,” and his kids were going to stay with us, and so we came here. And after about a year, I was in touch with Macalester everybody, because it drew me very much, and I was—I really loved my professors very much. And the head of the Spanish Department called me and said, “We need somebody to teach a language course.” And he had some very nice kind of low-key compliment. I don't remember how he said it, but he said, “We need a good person to teach.”

Or, “We need a person to teach a good course, would you be willing to do it?” I said, “Are you kidding? I’d love to!” And that was in 1983. Two years after we’d arrived here to live. And I taught an elementary Spanish course, and never left, until the end of last semester.

[48:37]

LZ: What had you been doing in those two years in the Twin Cities? Had you planned on going back to teach, or...?

JG: Yes. I had, in fact, begun once again to be certified to teach high school. Because still, I loved that so much. I loved teaching. And I was in that program at Mac. I was trying to certify in both Spanish and English, so I took a number of literature courses in the English Department. Those were really fun. And pedagogy courses and all that. And I was proofreading at, what was it called, West? No, was it West? Mason. It was Mason Publishing Company. Past—well, now it’s part of downtown St. Paul. My friend Becky Knight worked there, she was a copy editor. And she told me, you know, “Try this. We need a proofreader.” So I learned to do that, and it was, you know, it was just a little money, and I was writing poetry. I had intended to take kind of a sabbatical, to write for a year without working, between teaching at the American high school and living with my husband in San Miguel. But that’s what happened, because before that, he decided he wanted to come to the States to work. His children really needed better schools than were available in San Miguel, they were pretty dinky. So I did some of that, it was just kind of random. I taught some Spanish classes individually to people who wanted them, and...I wrote a lot. I wrote a lot of poetry, I did publish some poems; quite a few, actually, in various literary magazines.

[50:24]

LZ: Had you kept up your interest in the religious studies area?

JG: I never stopped reading those things. I was very interested, but I didn't know what to do with it.

[50:34]

LZ: Kind of a tricky thing to use. So, what was my question, I don't remember—oh, I know. So I guess it had been, I guess, not quite ten years since you had graduated from Macalester, and what was that like coming back to the college? And, were there things that stood out to you as being noticeably different or...?

JG: I wish I could remember more clearly, but one of my first strange impressions was in my first two or three years of being there, the difference in the student body, Laura. When I left Mac, in my years as a student at Macalester...it was very much of a hippie school in a lot of ways, but also, especially in the Religious Studies Department, kids were really serious scholars. I mean, I had *wonderful*, inspiring classmates who were very, very strong intellectually and academically. When I went back to teach, I found a *huge* number of students who were—who had zero idealism. All they wanted to do was graduate and get jobs that would make them a lot of money. This was a real shock to me. And they did not seem like typical of the Macalester that I had known before. And there were some bad years there. And I understand that we really needed students who could pay their way, so they tended to be fairly wealthy. There were lots of

international students that came from Malaysia. They were very conservative. They were...you know, I'm sure there were ways to get to know them, where they would reveal how interesting they were, but in the classroom, they tended to be very quiet, they would respond to questions, they were very well-prepared, but they were not excited. They didn't come with ideas about readings, and things like that. So, it was a very disappointing time, and not really very much fun. Except the life with colleagues and that kind of thing was very satisfying. A few years later, things changed around again, and little by little, the way I see it, Macalester recovered its personality. And the Admissions Office just brought us better and better and more wonderful students until it was completely recognizable. And right now, I mean, I don't know what differences you would find. I mean, if you did sort of time travel, I think you would feel completely at home in the Macalester that I experienced as a student, and if I were a student now, I would feel completely at home, you know, with the students that are here now. Kids now are much more—well, I don't know. I lived in a bubble when I was a student. I really did. So it's very hard, and it would be completely irresponsible for me to generalize about my classmates. I knew a little group of people. But my sense now, and one of the things that I have really treasured and always will about my years teaching at Macalester, is that the students for many, many years have been serious academically, but always with a sense of the life outside of books. So with a great sense of fun, with a good social life, good healthy social life, strong physically—you know, not a hundred percent, but it seems to me that most of my students in the last years have had some kind of athletic activity, whether it was organized or not. So they're healthier, and they seem to have this wonderful social consciousness that's just so honorable, and so lovable and laudable today. I just admire the students so much.

[54:49]

LZ: This is slightly off topic, but I was—it seems that, because your mom was a graduate in the ‘50s, did she visit Macalester while you were there? And I guess was that, maybe for her, was that change in the college bigger than when—for you, I guess, in your experience?

JG: It would be worthwhile for you to ask her [laughter]. It probably would, because I don’t know. She—my feeling is that my mom has always really loved Macalester, and that she has a very romantic sense about Mac and always has. My feeling is that she has always seen it in the best possible light, and that she has never allowed herself to see some things that might not have agreed with, you know, the way she would like Macalester to be. But I haven’t explored that topic with her. I’ve never really asked her. It never occurred to me, frankly, and maybe I—maybe I’d prefer even not to have that, because it’d be touching on things that she doesn’t really approve of my particular life and ways of being and thinking, and so on.

LZ: I was just curious, I think...

JG: Yeah. No, it’s a great question. But you know, I was thinking about that, in fact, as I thought about the interview, that it might be kind of an interesting thing in your archives. To have some—a session with somebody like my mom.

[56:26]

LZ: Oh, definitely. So you came back to teach the one course, and then did it just—was there ever kind of a formal hiring process in which you—

JG: No.

LZ: Or did you just kind of increasingly add classes?

JG: Yeah, it just snowballed. They couldn't get rid of me. Well, they liked me, obviously; I served the department satisfactorily enough. And it was a great department because they allowed me, eventually, to propose and teach a full range of courses. So although I've always taught language, and I've really liked that for the most part, I've also taught upper division courses and courses in my particular fields of passion, as that has developed and changed over the years. So, that was—it was a very satisfying thing to do. And I feel like probably in the last, I don't know, seven or eight years, I've become a better scholar. Partly because of participating in international conferences. And I don't know, I feel like I've just become a more serious scholar than I was at the beginning when all I was interested in was teaching. All I was interested in was teaching. But eventually I got a Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota, and, you know, that also helped me to become more professional in my scholarship.

[57:59]

LZ: What was it like returning, and obviously some of those professors you had had as a student were still there, and I guess, that relationship between professors that you had really admired when you were a student?

JG: It was great. They were always very friendly. The only one with whom I felt a certain amount of formality was Dr. Armajani. And I was never comfortable calling him by his first name, although he asked to be called Yahya; I couldn't deal with it. He was always Dr. Armajani. And there was something so royal about him and sort of stately. And I recognized that from my upbringing in Mexico. Whereas the Americans were more folksy, and it was easy. I mean, they were—I don't know, something about their attitude was easy. It was easy from the time I was a student to call them by first name. And they were my friends. Calvin Roetzel became an important friend, and still is. And he obliged me to take one US—one English literature, English language literature course as a student. He said, "You've got to take a course from Robert Warde." And I said, "Calvin, I've been taking literature courses! I've got another major in literature. What's the difference?" English, Spanish, you know. I wanted to take yet another course in Religious Studies. He said, "Just do it." So I, you know, signed up for a course from Robert Warde. On whom everybody, *everybody* had a crush. Everybody.

LZ: [laughter] I interviewed him last week, so this is funny.

JG: Right. He knows this. Everybody had a crush on Robert Warde. And it was part of my resistance. I didn't want to join that crowd. I thought it was, eh, kind of—you know, not because of him, obviously. There was something really yucky about the groupie thing and the [sighs, swooning] pitter-patter. It was just so silly and awful. One of my good friends was something like this, so it was just weird to me. But I fell in love with him. Intellectually. I mean, he was amazing! He was a wonderful professor. We read marvelous poetry. It was a course on Victorian literature. We did not read fiction. We read some essays, and mostly

poetry, and I was totally turned on. And to this day I thanked Calvin for forcing me to take that course. And I don't know, Robert was so lovely. Sometime during my senior year, he invited me and the young man who was my boyfriend at the time, a kid from Venezuela, to dinner at his house. And I met his wife Susan, who was so beautiful and so gracious and just wonderful. And we somehow became friends. And every time I came back to the Twin Cities I would see Robert, sometimes Robert and Susan, I would see Calvin, I would see David White and Beverly, whom I really adored. And Robert and Susan are good friends. We're going to have dinner at their house tonight. I married their daughter—I officiated the wedding of their daughter, about a month ago.

[1:01:25] [Note: tape change]

LZ: I guess I want to talk to you about the state of the Spanish Department when you came in, and what things have changed. Because was it called—I guess, because now it's Hispanic Studies. Was it Hispanic Studies then? Had it switched over, I guess?

JG: That's a new title. The Hispanic Studies Department changed its name, I'm thinking, like three years ago? At the most. We were called the Spanish Department all the time. When I arrived it was still pretty scattered, but during my time Leland Guyer was tenured, Fabiola Franco was tenured...maybe she was already tenured when I arrived. David Sunderland was already teaching there. And during my time of teaching in the Spanish Department, Hispanic Studies Department, it has become so strong and so serious academically that it's wonderful. Whereas when I was a student, it was not strong really at all. Now the professors are really fine scholars, and fine teachers. And maybe the proof is how many students hang out there. Like I

mean really, our department office seems to collect students. I wish we had the kinds of meeting spaces that Olin-Rice has. You know, because those are very pleasant. But even as unpleasant as they are, with florescent, ugly lights and so on, the students are attracted. And I think it's because the professors are very, very devoted to the students. We love and honor our students, and respect them really deeply, and also, I think, challenge them in very responsible ways, you know, to flourish as young scholars, too. So it has completely changed, and I love what has happened. And now, even among the ranks of the untenurable like me, we have so many Ph.D.'s, and ABDs: the "All But Dissertation" people, who have—who completed their doctoral studies until they hit a block. That were mostly due to one particular professor at the University of Minnesota—happily, retired at this point—but he had this enormous kind of backlog of students who didn't finish their dissertations because he was a very problematic and difficult person. But it means that even among the marginal ranks, it's a very professional department.

[1:04:30]

LZ: You say on tenure, well, does—I mean, Macalester obviously hasn't given you tenure, didn't give you tenure—was that just because the dissertation wasn't completed?

JG: Oh no, I have a Ph.D. No, I...

LZ: Oh, okay. So then—that seems odd.

JG: That's the system. The college system is—and has become much more professional since I was a student. When I was a student, I think a department could decide—I don't know. I think

they could just decide to hire somebody, and I don't know how the tenure process worked. But now there has to be a national search. Among the people who applied for the position, you invite a few to the campus, three or four, interview them, see how they perform before a group of students in one or two classes, have them interviewed by a whole committee, plus some of the administrators, and then decided to invite them to the—to join the ranks of faculty. And then between, I don't know, four, seven years later, they may become tenured. It depends on the person, because some of them are hired at a higher level, too. Many of us in the language departments—and in other parts of the college too, I'm sure, but certainly in language departments—were hired because they had more sections of language, in particular, than they had people to teach them. So there was never a search process for any of us, they hired us because we were convenient, and in town for whatever reason. And they keep us coming back, either because they just need us, or because somehow we are compatible, and are found to be, you know, of good quality. And we never entered that competition for the tenure position. And there's sort of an ecology of—where each department is allowed a certain number of tenured positions, and then it means there's a whole process to determine that. And there's a lot of untenurable people, who are teaching courses because we need more people heading up the language classes or other classes.

[1:06:68]

LZ: Did that ever bother you, I guess? I mean...

JG: Yeah, off and on, it did. Off and on it bothered me, and at different times in my teaching career there, it felt...it rankled. It felt to me that there was a real hierarchy that seemed unfair.

Because I felt like I was pretty much doing the work of tenure professors. Admittedly, I did not serve on as many committees as others did, but that changed in my time as I became a little more cynical about it and said, “Let the tenured people do it.” You know, I’d rather be running in the afternoon than coming back or staying on campus for another meeting. It felt really bad at times when we would seek funds that ostensibly were available to all faculty, but one time I remember there was a pocket of money that could back you up for participation in conferences. And one year, I spent a lot of money on an international conference, and a huge amount of time, because I organized a whole section of the conference on death and culture. It was wonderful. It was in Mexico; not in Mexico City, in the state of Puebla, in the capital city, which is also called Puebla. And I applied for more money than my travel and research grant allowed me, you know, to help defray those costs, and I was told by the person who held the purse strings—I actually, I contacted him before, and I said, “Is it even worth me applying for this? Because I’ve never received any of this money.” And he said, “Actually there is; very few people have applied this year. So apply.” I did. And maybe two days later, up came this notice to all the campus faculties saying, “I’m extending the deadline for application to these funds, because very few people have applied.” And so I didn’t get any funds. Because they go first to junior faculty, and then to tenured, and so on and so forth. So some things like that had happened that made me feel kind of, a little bitter. And I think it’s something that kind of wore at part of my consciousness. So as much as I loved teaching, and loved being with students, and having conversations with colleagues, it kind of—I felt like, okay, that’s...I’m tired of this.

[1:09:44]

LZ: As a professor, what, maybe, personally but also kind of as a whole, has been the relationship between the administration and the faculty at Macalester?

JG: Well, I think there are a lot of differences for individuals. I felt close to and supported by Mike McPherson. He seems so personable and he always knew me, he always recognized me. Before him, Bob Gavin recognized me too, and, you know, we'd have occasional little conversations; you know, nothing serious, I never really dealt with anything. With our current president, I've introduced myself or been introduced to him three or four times, and it's always—I always get the impression that he's never seen me on the planet before. And I—you know, he's new on the campus, it's not like he was hired internally, but so was Mike, he was totally new too. So I've never really had anything to do with him. Some administration...our provost Diane Michelfelder I think is wonderful, and warm, and serious. And I think she has very, very both intelligent and wise ways of bridging faculty-administrative relationships, and bringing in concerns with students with both scholarship, teaching, and also committee work that I think are admirable and great. So I, you know, I think depending on what part of the administration you're looking at, that... We have a saying in Spanish that "everybody describes the carnival according to their experience." So I'd say you'd have to think of it that way, too.

[1:11:39]

LZ: One thing I really wanted to talk to you about was kind of your personal research, and publications, but then also your kind of bringing Day of the Dead to Macalester campus because that's become a bigger thing, I know, in the last couple years.

JG: At one point—I don't know how long after my book came out, but two or three years after my book came out. This must have been...when could this have been? The mid-'90s? I should be able to look this up, but I don't remember offhand. I got a call from someone in the Office of Multicultural Affairs. And she said to me, "Can we meet and talk about the Days of the Dead?" I said sure! So I had lunch with Elena—I forgot her last name. She was just a wonderful woman, with this beautiful personal warmth, and very curious and interested and interesting. And we went out for lunch, and talked, and she said, "So, tell me about the Days of the Dead." I said, "What do you want to know?" She said, "Well, describe the fiesta." And so then I told her about it, and she said, "Could we do it here?" And I said, "Yeah! Why not?" So the first year we did the Days of the Dead, it was wonderful because we involved—I mean, from the outset were involved the Spanish Department, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Office of the Chaplain, and Residential Life. So it was huge. And there were activities sponsored in all those different areas. In classes—I did a lot of lectures to various classes about the Days of the Dead. I also invited people that I had personal relationships with on campus. Beth Cleary from dramatic arts did a parade from dramatic arts. Sears Eldredge, who retired not long ago from dramatic arts, taught a mask class and had me lecture to the class about some of the artwork, the folk art that's done at the time. And his mask class made these wonderful masks and did a performance in the black box theatre that was called—I am trying to remember what it was called. It was called Living Skeletons, or something like this. And they were images that were taken directly from some of the really famous ones of Guadalupe, José Guadalupe Pasada, the guy who made this [gestures toward figure in room] Catrina figure, the lady with the fancy hat as a skeleton—directly from his, they took some images from my book and from some of the books that I had recommended. And they would turn off the lights in the black box theatre, tell you, "Okay, just

stand still, because we're going to move things around." So you'd stand still, they'd turn off the lights, and when turned them on again, there were all these little scenes with living actors. And you were encouraged to walk around them. And it was one of the most eerie and beautiful experiences I've had at Mac. Because you'd draw so close to them, and they were like people, but they were standing still in these dramatic poses, and with their skeletal masks, and perfectly still. And it was just a very strange and wonderful thing. But it was really in the spirit of the Days of the Dead. And the philosophy that we will all be skeletal. We are all going to die, start getting used to it. You know, what will you be like as a dead person? And what are the dead like now? I mean, this is sort of yin and yang contemplation, in a way, of death and life, and life and death, that...so, yeah. And then we did that for several years. I had always said from the beginning that I was not going to be the one to drive this, because, you know, because I was a little bit the scholarly expert in it, and I didn't want it to be my project. You know, to kind of thrust it on the campus. So I said, as long as there's an interest, I'm more than happy to do everything possible to bring it and teach people about it. And I gave a series of lectures each year; we invited people from off campus, there was the setting of *ofrendas* in the chapel, it was wonderful and very festive. And then people seemed to become less interested. And those wonderful women who had been at the beginning of it, and so enthusiastic, left to other positions at other schools. And when there stopped being that enthusiasm and support, I didn't push it anymore. But there's still little pockets of it!

[1:16:52]

LZ: Yeah, I guess outside the Art Department they've always got a big display, I guess that's what I've seen.

JG: Yep. Yep. The Art Department still does it; Ruthann Godollei is part of that. She knows a lot about Mexico, and we're friends, and...yeah, so there've been little pockets of that continuing. And then it sort of crops up the Twin Cities. So that's fun.

[1:17:14]

LZ: Is that where your research interests primarily have been, with the Days of the Dead? Or has it—

JG: No, I did that. I mean sometimes I thought, God, this book should be updated, but I don't want to do it. I mean, just when I think about it, I think, eh, I'm just done with that, you know. It was my Ph.D. I did a dissertation on the Days of the Dead, and it was really—it was a wonderful project, and I was very—I was totally turned on by it. It was a fiesta that I loved as a child growing up. And, I mean, there was imagery that always kind of remained in my consciousness even outside of that time of the year. Which is around Halloween, of course. So, yeah, that—it was a very powerful thing for me to be involved in, and I still set an *ofrenda* myself, for my own dead. I don't believe that there's life after death, but what if there is? What if my grandmother and my Nana and those people come and there aren't gifts for them? Better to do it than not.

[1:18:34]

LZ: Where else have you—have you been buried in your interests, outside interests, outside of class, or...?

JG: Yeah, I've—what I've become more and more interested in in the last, I don't know how long, eight years maybe? After teaching *Don Quixote* a couple of times. And this is one of the things that has changed a lot at Macalester, and then the Hispanic Studies Department: courses used to be up for grabs. “Well, what do you want to teach?” And we used to talk about it in a department meeting, and if two of us wanted to teach the same course, we would negotiate, in a very friendly way, and say, you know, “Go ahead and do it this year, I'll do it another year.” So I taught a course that was basically the classics of Spanish literature a couple of times. And after teaching *Don Quixote* a couple of times, I thought, I better see what these books are that drove Alonso Quijano, the character, crazy so that he became Don Quixote and started to think of himself as a knight in shining armor, although he was really rusting and falling apart. So I started reading those books, and was quite captivated by them. And my husband keeps watching me to see if I'm going crazy yet. And maybe, I don't know, the screws are coming loose, because of the reading [laughter]. But they're like, you know, like eating chips...you just become addicted. At least I've become addicted, and I keep reading them. It's the same story with variations, but I love the imagination and the craziness. So that has given rise to a seminar that I taught several times, maybe four times, and is now part of the curriculum, but I guess will have to be dropped out. And it's the course called “Medieval Pulp Fiction: Romances of Chivalry.” And I've done—I've been writing a lot of conference papers. One of the things I want to do is try to turn those into articles for publication, because some of them, I think, are worth sharing in more—in a wider way. But I'm a bit of a dilettante. Always the next conference paper, the next topic is more interesting than the last one, so. I want to try to be disciplined and try to publish some of those.

[1:21:01]

LZ: Did you ever collaborate with students on some of this work, or I guess I'm—maybe more in like, kind of the honors paper, or...

JG: Yeah, not really. I took a couple of students with me to Mexico for the Days of the Dead when I was doing my dissertation research. One of them, Brian Berkopec, who I think is on the board now, and is a very good friend, whom I love very dearly; I think he's from the class of '92, '3, or thereabouts. He went with me pretty much my first year, and we did some interviews. He kept the notes of one, and lost them subsequently, which made me very sad [laughter]. So in my book it says, well, what this priest said that—but I didn't have any of the facts or figures and couldn't go back to find the guy, and so that was kind of not great. And another student went with me, but we weren't really—we didn't really do any work together. Most recently I was part of an honors thesis in French, where a young woman called Lela Astrom, a French and Spanish double major who took my Medieval Pulp Fiction course, asked me to be part of that committee. Because I do read French, and she translated a novel from French into English. And it was kind of fantastical, and had some of the elements were from Romances of Chivalry, and I think that's why she had invited me to be there. Somehow I haven't seduced anybody to follow so closely in my footsteps that they become young medievalists. You know, I'm hoping some of the students in their graduate studies get more into it, but that's hard to predict. And people, you know, too, at Macalester, students are very passionate about the politics of their time, so they're much more likely to be turned on by contemporary letters. And I taught that for many years too.

“Contemporary Women's Fiction of Mexico,” for example, or “South American and Mexican

Literature,” pulling at some of the gay literature that not very many people have been teaching, and that kind of thing. It’s a lot of fun.

[1:23:32]

LZ: Are there past students that you actively stay in touch with?

JG: Oh yeah. Yeah, quite a few are good friends, and I have to remember that in fact that they were my students first. But I have a number of student friends. And some of them get in touch when they remember that I’m a minister of the perfectly postmodern Universal Life Church. And I’ve designed and officiated a number of weddings for former students, and that’s been quite wonderful. Yeah. And so, some of them I have stayed in touch with because of that, or, you know, it kind of drifts in and out, once you’re relevant or useful for them.

[1:24:16]

LZ: Right. So are you, have you officially begun now, I guess the MSFEO program, and—or have you—

JG: Oh. Laura. When you’re an adjunct like me, that’s not part of it.

LZ: Oh, you don’t get to be a part of that...

JG: I’m gone [laughter]. At the end of this month, I receive my last paycheck in the mail, and I’m out. *But* I haven’t burned any bridges, and as I said to both the provost, Diane Michelfelder,

and to my chair, Galo González, and to anybody else, I said, “You know, we’ll see if it works. And if I miss the classroom too much, I may check in with you to see if you have courses that you need taught, or want taught.” So, we’ll see.

[1:25:06]

LZ: Do you have plans for your next phase?

JG: I want to read and write more. I really do. Yeah, mostly that.

LZ: Did you bring, I guess, a lot of new courses to the Spanish Department that—

JG: I did bring new courses. I did bring new courses.

LZ: Do you perceive them being picked up, or do you just see that they’re going to be dropped?

JG: I’m afraid they’ll be dropped. I don’t know. The “Mexican Women’s Fiction” nobody else has taken up, the “Literature of the Literary Boom,” which is, you know, really the greats of Latin American literature—Carlos Fuentes, Borges, Vargas Llosa—you know, that whole lot, continues to be taught in different iterations. The course of classics I see becoming kind of weak and maybe abandoned. I hope it comes back, because—maybe it’s a conservative position, but my feeling is that there are books that our majors should be familiar with, should read before they graduate, and you shouldn’t be able to say “I’m a Spanish major,” without ever having read *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, the stories of Borges, *Don Quixote*,

La Celestina. I mean, there are books that have given us words that are now part of the language. One of the ways I organized that course of Spanish classics when I taught it was to include those books that give us the name for the child who helps a blind man, a blind woman, to move their way around: a *lazarillo*. That comes from this wonderful and strange little truncated novel. And like that. So I—there are people who can teach them, including some adjunct faculty. Alexandra Bergmann, who was a recent Ph.D. from the U [University of Minnesota] and is teaching as an adjunct at Mac, I hope will teach a course on *Celestina*. That was the topic of her dissertation. Everybody there can teach the classics. Everybody. Especially the older faculty because we all had this training that made us, you know, jack of all trades within our field. So, that's my hope.

[1:27:41]

LZ: When you look back on your time as a student and then as a professor, I guess kind of in—as we wind down here, what are some of the biggest changes to the college, I guess maybe in terms of the faculty, students, the department itself, just kind of the atmosphere?

JG: There's a sense of style that in some ways has remained the same, and I'm happy for it, and in some ways has changed. There are some good aspects about that and some aspects that I'm sad about. Macalester's a small school. I'm not crazy about the way it pretends to be a big school. When people know you by sight, why do you still have to turn over your ID card to check something out? I mean, you know, we used to be able to just sign and you would take out DVDs and videos and whatever materials you needed, and then you'd bring them back within time. I mean, you know, nobody stole things. Why does everything have to be so

bureaucratized? I don't get that. Why do we have to use corporate language? I hate it when somebody says, "We're turning out a much better product." And they're talking about students?! These are human beings! I mean, products? I hate that. I resent it very much. And we're talking about *teams*. Well "our team this," and "our team that,"—what do you mean, team? You're not athletes. You're not—I mean, you know, for me, teams are athletics teams. And this sort of bleeding of US corporate speech into the academic setting, I find strange, artificial, and I'm afraid of what it symbolizes. Because as a scholar of language and literature, I think language is important. And I think the language we use affects the way we think and behave, and the way we think and behave affects our language. So it makes me very nervous to hear somebody talk about our students as products. Or, you know, other things like that. That I don't like. Other things that remain wonderful: it's still a very idealistic school, it has become—the faculty has become more professional, has become more dedicated to scholarship, but has not abandoned the passion for teaching, for relating to students, for working with you, and inspiring you. And I love the ways that that has continued. I like very much the philosophy of humaneness of Macalester. I wish it were implemented more universally. I wish it were implemented more with all the staff. From janitorial staff to adjunct faculty, to everybody who staffs the offices. You know, I'm uncomfortable with hierarchy. And that's a little bit from my hippie past, and from kind of a rebellion against the very strong class structure with which I grew up in Mexico City. I don't think it's the best way for human beings to be together.

[1:31:13]

LZ: I only have one last question for you, and I was wondering if you have a favorite memory, or a fond memory, of a certain class, a time period, anything that really sticks out.

JG: [sighs] There's so many, Laura, I—with a history as long as mine of Macalester, you can imagine I have—I mean, Macalester has given me wonderful friends, and wonderful professional experiences. Just unbeatable. Besides the people that I've spoken to you about, the two that I haven't talked about very much yet are David and Beverly White. And they...they were like the sun and the moon of the campus for some time. Because they were, in a very cool way, absolutely loving. And I mean—when I say in a cool way, I mean, not in a sentimental way. Not in a way that you had to be certain ways to be loved by them. But they had this very open attitude toward students that was just amazing, and they modeled being a human being and being a humane person in ways that I think affected their students and their disciples—I can almost call us that—in such profound ways that we may not all be entirely conscious of it. They invited us to their home. Beverly used to have a Zen meditation at her house; I'm trying to remember, I guess it was weekly. On Wednesday evenings, in fact, a little group of us learned how to find our way from the campus through Tangletown to their house at 136 Amherst Street. And we all had to take off our shoes, and then she would have the fat Zen pillows, and we would have a formal meditation according to the Japanese tradition that she was familiar with from her youth in Japan. And she taught us to sit. And at the end of the sitting we would have tea in a very ceremonial way, and it was...I don't know, it was just an amazing experience. And I think I learned to meditate with Beverly. And that's something that I still do, and I still remember her lessons in meditation. Like saying, you want to pay attention to the moment when your breath changes from inhalation to exhalation, and from exhalation to inhalation, because that's when thoughts arise. So if you try and keep yourself focused, that's the moment where you want to keep your focus, and not lose it to the random thoughts that come. So they're, you know, they're

two of the people that were very deeply effecting. Beverly was the earliest true ecologist that I knew, and she lived that way. Her book, early cookbook, *Living High on the Bean*, which is such a sweet title, and was eventually it was published as *Bean Cuisine*, by Beacon Press, addresses the matter of the ecological interest of being a vegetarian. And I've been a vegetarian since I was a sophomore in college, and, you know, that was encouraged; I realized, you know, you can be quite healthy, and happier because you're not involved in the karma of violence and so on. And so people like David and Beverly, with their deep pacifism, and profoundly lived philosophy, were really quite stellar. And two of the memories of Macalester that are huge and important to me.

[1:35:21]

LZ: Well, those are my questions. If there's anything that you want to add that we haven't talked about that should be out on the record...

JG: Oh, I don't know. I was thinking about this last night, and it seemed to me I had parting thoughts for you, and now...I suspect we've talked about or touched on them enough that I think you probably have enough. I'm very happy that Macalester exists, that it's still a resource for wonderful students, and wonderful, dedicated faculty. I hope it never loses its soul and its sense of passion. I hope it never becomes corporate, bureaucratic, and cold-hearted, because it shouldn't be that. It should become closer and closer to its ideals. I hope that for the country as well. In so many ways the US is such a beacon, and has been such an inspiration for other countries, and I'm afraid it's losing its soul. The democracy, the most powerful ideas of democracy, I'm afraid are being sacrificed, and there's growing selfishness in every part of the

society, which is very, very disturbing, and very sad, and very destructive. It's one of the things that Macalester, and schools like Macalester, and places like Macalester, and our alumni, and our alumnae, and our faculty, wherever they go on to be, I think continue to counterbalance, try to bring back the whole world to be a saner, and more loving place.

LZ: All right. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us. This was lots of fun for me, so...

JG: A pleasure. Thank you, I'm glad!

LZ: All right!

[End of Interview, 1:37:22]