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## Interview with Jean Probst, Class of 1949 and Instructor in Mathematics

Jean Probst

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Macalester College Archives, DeWitt Wallace Library  
*Oral History Project*

**Interview with:** **Jean Probst**  
Class of 1949; Instructor of Mathematics, 1950-1993

**Date:** **Thursday, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007, 9:00a.m.**

Place: Macalester College DeWitt Wallace Library, Harmon Room  
Interviewer: Laura Zeccardi, Class of 2007

Interview run time: 1:11:08 minutes

Accession: 2007-12-21-02

Agreement: Signed, on file, no restrictions

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**Interview with Jean Probst**

**Laura Zeccardi, Interviewer**

**Thursday, June 28, 2007**

**Macalester College**

**DeWitt Wallace Library**

**Harmon Room**

[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 Thursday, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007, and I am interviewing Jean Probst, Macalester alum, Class of 1949, and Professor of Mathematics, in the Harmon Room in the DeWitt Wallace Library.

JP: Well I have notes, is that...?

LZ: Oh that's great, that's awesome. Um, to start, if you just want to state your name, and where you're originally from, and then what year you came to Macalester.

JP: My name is Jean Probst. I grew up in Cannon Falls, a small town south of here, on the way to Rochester. I came to Macalester in the Fall of 1945, just after the armistice for Japan.

LZ: Well I thought we could talk about your undergraduate education and then move into the time when you taught here. And if you have stuff that you want to say, we can do that. Or I can—we can do it question by question.

JP: Sounds fine.

[01:02]

LZ: Ok, well um, just kind of what was the decision to come to Macalester? How did that unfold?

JP: I had a distant relative who invited me to spend a weekend here in the dormitory with her. She liked it. She was a senior. What impressed me was the friendliness. There was sort of the goal at that time—three hundred and forty students—that you knew every student by name. So that was a source of pride. And it just felt right.

LZ: What was your first impression of kind of the physical layout of the campus? Maybe how does that compare to how you've seen it change?

JP: It was much smaller; there were fewer buildings. There was the Mac Woods, up and down along Macalester, over to St. Clair. So, our kids eventually played there. But it was a small, very small school.

[02:08]

LZ: Did you ever live in the dorms as a...

JP: I lived in Wally [Wallace Hall] as a freshman.

LZ: Oh, ok.

JP: In a triple. It was fun. And the second year, I lived in a double in Wally. And that group of girls, women, became very close. They stayed together many years, kept contact.

LZ: About how many—I would assume at that time it was still single sex dorms, right?

JP: Oh absolutely [laughter].

LZ: How many women about were living in Wallace, I guess when you were—was it about the size it is...?

JP: It didn't have the top floor. That's a recent addition, anyways. But the grand staircase was open. And dorm life... We served, we ate in the big dining room, which is no longer. It's in the connection to Bigelow. We served family-style dinner, so you sat at a table with a faculty member or a dorm mother, and passed all of the dishes. We said grace before meals. One person was designated to say grace. And on Wednesday evening and Sunday noon we dressed for dinner. We had high heels and stockings and dresses. No slacks. Slacks were not allowed, only dresses. Much more formal, but *genteel* in a way. We brought our—the first fall we brought our sugar rationing cards. We were still rationed sugar. And we ate very fattening food. It was a lot of starch and a lot of sugar, because there wasn't much meat. So everybody put on 20 pounds the first year. [laughter]

LZ: Was there always a professor that sat at—

JP: No, I have to take that back. Um, I'm trying to think. I always felt that whoever sat at the head table was somebody important, and I don't remember who it was!

[04:21]

LZ: You had said that someone said grace before every meal. That was the time of chapel and other such things...

JP: Convocation on Tuesday. Required chapel on Thursday morning. Required attendance taken, with only so many excuses.

LZ: Were there people that did kind of skip out on those things and kind of what was—I guess what was kind of the penalty if you didn't go to convocation or chapel?

JP: I'm not sure. I was—I obeyed all the rules. I was that kind of a person. [laughs] So...

LZ: So you lived in the dorms your first two years, and then did you move off campus?

JP: No, then I lived in Bigelow. I stayed on campus. There were—the only off-campus students were basically those who lived at home. Or commuted short distances. But it was... And we had a curfew in the dormitory. As freshmen, we could go out one night until twelve o'clock, and

one night a month until one o'clock. So there were mad dashes back to the dormitory [laughs] to make the time because late, you had to have an excuse and you wrote that excuse to the Resident Council. And then they would decide the punishment, which was usually taking away one of the late night privileges. Of course everyone stood out on the front stoop with their date and then at five minutes before curfew, Mrs. Tift would flash the light and we'd know that it was time [laughs] to say goodbye. And then we signed in.

LZ: Was Dean Doty there when you—

JP: Oh yes. Yes, we had lectures on proper behavior. What you did and did not do when you went out on a date. Social graces were described and you were expected to eat properly. Grace Whitridge told us all how to eat with the right fork and...

[06:35]

LZ: So when you did get to go out till midnight or one o'clock, what kind of things were then, were then typical...?

JP: Well nobody, nobody had cars really, so we went on the streetcar. So if we wanted to go downtown Minneapolis we took the Snelling streetcar to University, and the University streetcar to downtown Minneapolis. And not making the streetcar was not a very good excuse for being late. So we were pretty careful to watch those schedules.

LZ: Were there other kind of gathering points closer, like kind of along Grand Avenue, or...

JP: Well there was still the Green Mill.

LZ: Oh, ok.

JP: So...that was there.

[07:17]

LZ: All right. Um, I guess a nice lead-in might be to talk about kind of your extracurricular activities—things that you were involved in and kind of more general...

JP: Um, let's see I was in Aquatic League all four years. I headed that up the last year. And we had this presentation every spring. So... it was all women; we did synchronized swimming. We had little battery lights on our bodies so that underwater the lights would flow and sparkle, hopefully in some kind of a pattern.

LZ: Was that a competitive team, or just more of a...

JP: It was an entertainment; we worked all year to present a show. Um, I was busy as a student. I worked. I graded papers for Dr. Camp [Dr. Ezra J. Camp, Professor of Mathematics]. And I worked on his book. I proofed it. He was writing a textbook and in those days you know, it was by typewriter. And a mistake you could cover over with white out. So I was working on the diagrams and it was all very primitive and difficult to make a good copy.

LZ: So that was your job, then?

JP: That was my work-study, um-hm.

LZ: Did most students have work-study, or did they find jobs kind of other places?

JP: There was a lot of work-study on campus.

LZ: Did most students work, or was it just kind of...

JP: I couldn't give you a percentage. It seemed like all my friends worked, so...

[09:06]

LZ: How much was I guess tuition—do you remember?

JP: I don't. I remember my dad trying to figure out—it was several hundred dollars—trying to figure out how that was going to come about for the next term. It's all relative. It would still cost a lot of money.

[09:31]

LZ: I had some—the Radio Singers was one thing I found.

JP: Um-hm.

LZ: I guess what was that?

JP: That took a lot of time. It was practice three times a week, and then morning of Saturday, broadcast. And so every week we sang out over the airwaves. Huge choir. Three hundred, I think.

LZ: Oh my goodness.

JP: [pause] Oh don't quote me on that number. [laughs] It was very large. And I had a friend at St. Olaf and of course they had all these multiple smaller choirs, but we had a big choir.

LZ: Was music pretty popular then, to be in a choir...

JP: Yes. There was a large music department. Again, it's, you know, the friends you go with, that's your perception of the college. And so they were either science majors or music majors.

LZ: Oh, really? Who directed the choir?

JP: Hollis Johnson. He was a little bit roly-poly and fairly strict. I think he made good music. Got good music out of us.

[10:55]

LZ: I know this was kind of the time of sororities and fraternities, which is obviously a contrast from now. Is that something that you were involved in?

JP: Um, I think as a sophomore I joined the Philotians. But even at that time, it was no big deal for most of us. I think it went out shortly afterwards. It wasn't something you angled to get in. They did do rush. So it had the feel of that in some ways, but it was much more democratic. And lots of students were in them. They tried to make it democratic by having lots of students in them.

LZ: Were there kind of campus-wide—like today we have Founders Day—and I guess were there things similar to that, kind of all-campus type of events?

JP: Homecoming was a big deal, and there was a Valentine dance. And, um, you know what you picture in the '50s, we had. Very traditional family-style backgrounds; students from divorced families were rare. A lot of PKs—Preacher Kids—were here.

[12:28]

LZ: Were the majority of students kind of from the Midwest?

JP: More Midwestern students than now, but a few international, and that was kind of a big deal, that we were the first to fly the UN flag after the war. The fact that we did have students from other parts of the country was, we thought, great.

LZ: Was that largely because of—Charles Turck would have been president.

JP: I would say he was the mover in that. Um-hm.

LZ: What was he like as kind of a president and...I don't know if you ever had any personal kind of interactions...

JP: I didn't have a lot with him. He hired me back.

LZ: Oh, ok.

JP: And he was sort of a Southern gentleman. And his wife Emmy. I remember he had this rosy-cheek look, rather youthful. And Emmy had aged more than he. And I think, it was sort of a—it wasn't a joke, but once in a while she got taken for his mother. [laughs] It was embarrassing to everyone when it happened. So that happened sometimes.

LZ: Did students enjoy, you know respond well to him? And was there a pretty healthy kind of student-administration relationship?

JP: I haven't a clue. We did have a mock political convention while I was still here. And the students came out for Wallace, which was sort of a—a bad thing for a conservative president. So

I do know that that upset him—that the student body came out for Wallace for president. But I don't remember that any action was taken. We were in the papers with that.

[14:48]

LZ: To talk a little bit about academics, I guess what was your personal major or...

JP: I had a mathematics major. French and physics minors. And I think I—and I certified to teach.

LZ: Oh, you were busy!

JP: I was busy.

LZ: What were classes kind of like at that time? Were they—I guess being in math they probably were pretty...

JP: Um, it was much more formal. The professor was in a suit and tie. The female faculty wore suits, sensible shoes, you know, they looked very professional. You were addressed by Miss or Mister, never by your first name. You *never* would call the professor by his first name. There was a distinct separation between student and professor. And yet, it's just the way it was. We didn't think anything about it.

[16:00]

LZ: Who were some of the kind of main—are there some big professors that stand out to you as being kind of influential?

JP: Well I kind of flow into coming back to teach the year after I graduated. So there was Borghild Sundheim in French and Georgiana Palmer in Greek and Miss Doty. Those three were sort of the top women faculty. And when I came back to teach two years later, they invited me to eat lunch with them. And that was sort of my acceptance into that inner circle. I was totally honored. It—they were just very nice women. But they also felt they had attained a place, and so it was a big deal for me to be accepted into that circle.

LZ: About how large were your classes, at least in terms of students?

JP: Um, twenty, twenty-five in the beginning courses. And then sometimes, especially in mathematics, they'd offer a course every other year in order to get enough students—so then there would be maybe twenty—eight and twelve in each class—something like that.

LZ: You had mentioned the three kind of big women professors. Were there quite a few women professors at that time, or was it still pretty...

JP: No, there were not a lot.

LZ: In terms of the student population, was it, were there more women or more men? Do you know?

JP: Well, my freshman year, the first term, out of three hundred and forty students there were probably twenty-five or thirty men.

LZ: Oh, so not a lot.

[18:07]

JP: And beginning in that January term, veterans started returning. And of course, I'm sure you know, they put them up in the gymnasium. There was no dormitory for them. So the old gymnasium had a row of cots up and down. And these poor vets came home to live in a barracks, so to speak. They did provide a different atmosphere, though. They were—they were not the eighteen to twenty-two-year-olds. They came back with a lot of experiences that they didn't want to talk about sometimes. They had—had to mature quickly. They'd experienced the horrors of war. And there was a big social emotional gap between people like me, young women coming out of high school, and a soldier returning from three years in the Pacific. They were ready to settle down. I remember one man asked me for a date, and on the second date he asked me to marry him. I still feel bad that I could not really explain why I didn't think that was a good idea. And I hurt his feelings terribly. He never asked me out again. But it—you know, he came home ready to find a wife and do a degree, so there was this *huge* emotional social gap between some of us young women and the returning vets. For over a few years, then of course, they went on and it returned to a more traditional student body.

LZ: Were there married couples at Macalester?

JP: They lived—they built barracks down in the Mac Woods. So—and that was a different element on campus, too. I don't know how many married students you have nowadays.

LZ: Oh goodness, I don't—I can't think of any off the top of my head.

JP: Right. They're just not ready to do that at this point. [laughs] But—and there were children down there. You know, so, some of these men came to class and then went home to a family. More like graduate school for a social setting.

[20:48]

LZ: You—the nursing program would have been there. Were there—what was that like, kind of with—

JP: —Med techs.

LZ: With, yeah, kind of the vocational side of courses and then the more liberal arts. Was there a distinction between students and which programs they were in?

JP: Uh, only in the sense that they had a few more specialized courses. In some ways, it was—there were courses that nobody else took, except that particular group, that they took the same chemistry to start with, the same biology. So they had the same liberal arts requirements. They

just had these few specialized courses. Sort of like an education minor in the sense that only people who wanted that particular emphasis took those particular courses.

LZ: And you were an education minor?

JP: I took—I did do that. Um-hm.

[21:53]

LZ: Beyond required chapel, were there other required kind of courses or things that...

JP: We had a course distribution requirement. You had to have science; you had to have social studies, humanities. You had to have two religion courses. So... But there was also variable credit. So, our math courses were four credits, and a religion course—math meant four days a week—and the religion courses, two credits meant two days a week. And then—I forget how the science went. I took chemistry and physics. And there'd be three days of lecture and then two afternoons or times for lab.

LZ: About how many classes were a typical semester-load for students?

JP: At least four, plus choir plus phy ed [physical education], plus a religion sometimes would be in the add-on. You had to have four semesters of phy ed.

LZ: Oh wow.

JP: A half-credit a course. Caused great difficulty for... One woman wasn't going to graduate. She was short a half-course in phy ed. [laughs] Had to go to summer school to make that up. I think she'd dropped out of field hockey or something.

LZ: Oh, okay. Yeah, what types of things were...

JP: Oh, we had swimming and field hockey, and ... Not aerobics or—and Aquatic League didn't count. So...no soccer.

[23:35]

LZ: Were athletics in general fairly popular at Mac?

JP: Oh we had a football team. It was similar to the usual Mac football team. [laughs] But we all went to the games and we all cheered. You know, we had homecoming and we had a bonfire. [pause] It was that hero-worship of athletes and...

LZ: What were kind of, some of the homecoming activities? Because, you know, we don't have homecoming now, so it's hard to kind of relate to...

JP: My freshman year we had—I had to work on a float. We had to find a wagon or something like that. And we decorated it, and Dr. Camp didn't let us out of math class Friday afternoon

[laughs] to fix the float. It wasn't that important to him. We had a bonfire the night before, and then the big game. And then the dance at night, and the homecoming king and queen.

[24:49]

LZ: Dr. Camp, he was in the mathematics, right?

JP: He was the professor. He *was* the math department in some ways.

LZ: What was he like? And you must have—

JP: He was so cute. His name was Ezra. And... I think his parents were missionaries in India. And he was bald and he'd think very hard, and then he'd start at the left end of the board and he'd go all across the front and all around the side and all across the back, describing some problem, working away. Very serious. And a good professor.

[25:37]

LZ: Did you know when you came to Macalester that you would major in mathematics?

JP: No, I started in chemistry. I decided I didn't really like the lab work. I think I always knew I wanted to teach, though. That was—some way or another.

LZ: Um-hm. Where were most of your classes held considering...?

JP: Carnegie was math-science. Biology, physics, chemistry, and mathematics all in one. Science. We occasionally lent the large lecture room out to another lecture in political science or something, but we pretty well occupied that.

LZ: Were—and then the other classes were the more, I guess, humanities—

JP: Were in the Old Main.

LZ: —were in Old Main. Were those basically the two, the two...

JP: Um-hm. Weyerhaeuser was built then. So, I studied in the library. The old library had a carrel downstairs, as I got to be a junior or senior.

[26:46]

LZ: And then, this—was it the student union, I guess, what was... was there kind of a main, kind of a meeting?

JP: No. We had a coffee shop. Oh, I'm sorry. They had a coffee shop in the bottom of Old Main, and that's where everybody went.

LZ: Was that the Mac...Mac Grille?

JP: Um-hm.

LZ: Oh, okay. That was the word.

JP: And in the center was the note board. So, you wrote notes to your fellow students, and posted them on the board. No e-mail. And you always walked through between classes to see if somebody had written you a note. Especially if it was a male [laughter] writing to a female, or vice versa. [laughs]

[27:34]

LZ: We've kind of grazed over my questions, and I know that you—I don't know how much we've covered of what you've written down.

JP: Oh let's see. Um... Hm. [pause] You've done very well. [laughter] Well one thing I did that was kind of well-known around here, Miss Schellberg was in the phy ed department, and she took canoe—she took women on canoe trips up in the wilderness—Boundary Waters—which was sort of daring, or whatever. So in order to be eligible to go on one of her trips, you had to take life-saving and water-safety, and then you had to spend at least three of the trips out on the St. Croix to learn how to paddle and camp. I learned to paddle and canoe in the pool, [laughter] the *very* old pool. And then she took twenty-four students, three groups of eight, female, up into the Boundary Waters. And it was unusual. One summer we had a photographer from the Chicago Tribune to come fly in to take pictures of us. [laughs] He was not a camper, and it was pretty funny. By the time we were through, we thought he was hilarious, and he thought we were sort of strange. [laughs]

LZ: You did that during the summer, then?

JP: Well, every summer she would take that group—or *a* group. So I camp counseled during the summer, and then at the end of the summer we'd go on this canoe trip.

LZ: Where did you camp counsel?

JP: Uh. Camp Fire camp one summer, and a camp for Neighborhood House down on the Low—what was...it's been cleared now, the Lower Westside was Hispanic, primarily, and they had a camp.

LZ: Did most students choose to kind of stay in the area for the summer? Nowadays it seems like a lot of people go home, but I suppose then they would have all been pretty...

JP: They went home.

LZ: Oh, okay. Um-hm. Was study-abroad—did that happen when...?

JP: The Mexican Caravan was one, and the Canadian... I forget what it was called. But that was about it in terms of formal programs.

[30:49]

LZ: Well if you... if you're okay, we can move into kind of how then you... what you did after graduation I guess...

JP: When I was a senior, Dr. Camp called me in and he said, "You know, if you would go away next year and get a master's degree, then the following fall, we'd like you to come back and teach." That's how I got here! [laughter] That was the process.

LZ: Was that heard—I mean, that just seems so...

JP: Well, at that time, in each department, Mac prided itself on having one Ph.D. in each department. And then masters' degrees were acceptable for the rest. So, no, it was natural, except I thought it was pretty nice. So I did. I went to the—I was going to the University of Chicago, but the university here gave me a teaching assistantship, and that made more sense financially. My brother was starting college. So I went over there and came back the next fall.

LZ: So you spent, then, a year at the University of Minnesota?

JP: Um-hm. [laughs] That was my interviewing process and my application and everything all rolled into one...

LZ: Oh, so there wasn't any formal sort of... So then you came back, and were you teaching courses—your own courses then?

JP: Um-hm. [pause] At that time we still taught an algebra course, it's basically a high school course. And then we'd have... So, one of your questions was "Have the courses changed?"

Yes. Yes. Students come more prepared, so they learn more mathematics in high school than they did then. So, I was a full-fledged faculty member. Oh dear. Then I got married. And Tom went off to the Korea war, I was pregnant, and that was the end of my teaching career. [laughs] One didn't teach, one had a baby. And so, that whole culture was quite different.

LZ: But you came back to teaching.

JP: Well, and thirteen years later, four children later, Dr. Camp called and said, "Would you like to come back and teach a course or two?" and that just kind of went from there.

LZ: Okay. So then what year did you, did you stop teaching at Mac then?

JP: In '53. I taught from '50 to '53, and then came back in 1966.

[33:52]

LZ: Wow. What was that like coming back in 1966 after all that time?

JP: Very different. The whole emphasis had changed. They were—Mac was going to be the Harvard of the West. They were upgrading faculty and courses and that sort of thing. My master's degree wasn't really acceptable, but they needed me, or they needed someone. So here I was. I went back to graduate school, I—is this where we are?

LZ: Yeah.

JP: I went back to graduate school and by the time I—and I was teaching basically full-time.

And I had four children and a husband at home, and when it came time to the dissertation, I had two in junior high and two in senior high. My options were laid out fairly clearly, and I decided for my family. And let the chips fall. Dr. Camp, he said, “There will always be a place for you at Macalester.” Then later, a dean said, “There will always be a place for you at Macalester,” so I stayed on with all of them. Dissertation. Which has been both good and bad. Pros and cons.

LZ: Has any—

JP: I had fun. I enjoyed it. I got to do what I love to do.

[35:35]

LZ: Had the number of women faculty increased over time?

JP: Yes, yeah.

LZ: I know there was something called the Faculty Women’s Club. Were you involved with that?

JP: Um-hm. Um-hm.

LZ: What was—what was that like?

JP: I remember one session we were discussing the cost to women of being in academia. And I looked around the room; I was the only woman who had a husband and children. Every other woman has—was single or divorced, or had one child and was divorced. Emily Rosenberg was here at the time with a joint appointment, and of course Pat Kane was here. And I made the comment that the way our culture is set up, it's really hard for a woman to succeed in academia and have that family, simply because of the biological clock that it's nice to have children a little younger. One young woman, who was single and on a tenure track, said, "You know, if you want to go into academia, you expect to give up some of those things." And I—I really was upset, and argued that it isn't right that we are asked to do that. But that's the way she felt. She didn't make tenure. You know that. How many years for a goal that she didn't attain. So...

LZ: Do you think that's still fairly true today, that I guess, women who enter the community should be prepared or at least...

JP: I've spent many hours and years and meetings going round and round and round that. And yes, I think it's still hard. I see a traditional marriage in which the woman has to be the superwoman to have children, to have a career, to maintain a home, that sort of thing. And then, on the other hand, I see people like my son, who does at least half the housework and half of the baby care, but I don't—I can't judge at this point how many men are like that and how many are the other direction. My—I don't think there's a real solution...yet.

LZ: So going back to kind of your coming back in the '60s. Were there still a lot of those professors that you had had as a student, that you... or had things really...

JP: By, by—I'm sorry. '50s or '60s?

LZ: You came back in the '60s to teach.

JP: Um-hm. Um-hm. There were still a couple of leftovers, but there was in '66, -7, and -8, there was a huge influx to bring in some well-known scholars that had published or been elsewhere. More senior faculty. So, no, it was pretty much new faces.

[39:02]

LZ: And you would have been here during kind of the whole Vietnam War protests and EEO and I don't if you have kind of some comments about that...

JP: That's where you might need to edit. [laughter] It was a pretty turbulent time. Students were pretty vocal. It was pretty adversarial. Administration, faculty, students, and... I would sort of say the student—the faculty was divided in some ways. There were conservative faculty, there were very liberal faculty; some of the newer, younger ones came in. There were—there was sort of this, under Flemming, a push to expand all these programs and basically, there wasn't enough money to do that. So there were those of us who felt sympathetic to what was trying to be done, but also, you didn't want to sink the boat. So I was perceived on campus probably as

being fiscally conservative, but off-campus I was perceived to be liberal, and it was just, you know, the particular group you were in. Faculty meetings got so raucous. They were in Olin Hall, in the—an old auditorium in the Physics Department that doesn't exist anymore. And there were a center section and two side sections, and the students would mix in with the faculty. And so if there was a vote and a show of hands, there were a lot of hands up that belonged to students voting as faculty [laughs]. So they finally put the faculty in the center section and made the students sit on the side sections, and the students—I mean, there were those students who thought that was too discriminatory. You shouldn't— So there were just lots of radical things said, that, in the heat of the argument, were kind of out of line and not terribly thoughtful or rational. It was sort of interesting to be part of. [laughs] And, I think most of the faculty had sympathies with what was trying to be done, but it was not—there was sort of an uncontrolled feeling to the whole thing. Tom Hill was a very gentle Southern philosopher, and when he got up and gave his speech, or was going to try and bring a bit of rational discussion to the floor, he was shouted down. You know, this—it was raucous and not terribly respectful, I think.

LZ: Were those kind of arguments in those meetings, were they centered around Vietnam or was it more the....

JP: It was more campus politics. Courses and changes, things like that. Not particularly about the war. More about what was happening on campus.

LZ: Beyond EEO, I guess, what were some of the—and that's kind of the big one that comes up and so we haven't heard so much about some of these other, kind of, campus issues...

JP: Well basically, it was—everything that came out was out of that program, and how that program grew and what it actually accomplished. You know the idea that anybody can come to college and prepare for any career is a wonderful philosophy. But when a student wants to be a brain surgeon, and believes she has the right to be a brain surgeon, and really hasn't had the background or whatever it takes to get there, and then feels that she's been racially discriminated against because we've said, "You have to pass these courses in order to be a brain surgeon"—that was kind of the atmosphere. So I think a lot of us felt, "Yes, we need to offer the opportunities, and everybody has a right to the opportunity, but they have to be able to embrace and grasp what needs to be done in order to get to whatever goal they set." But that was maybe too rational for the moment. [laughs]

LZ: And this was during the Flemming era?

JP: Right.

LZ: What was, I guess, being a professor then? Did you have a lot of—I guess you would have seen him in meetings, but was there other contact with him?

JP: I sympathized with all that he was trying to do. He—I was very—and most of us were. Or it wouldn't have happened to start with. It just was not financially sound. If he didn't want to think about the money part of it, he just wanted this program, and he had already evidently run

through a similar thing in Oregon, where the goals just weren't supported—couldn't be supported with the finances available.

LZ: Did the EEO program bring much more diversity to the student body or was it kind of on a large-scale, did it really make an impact on...

JP: From a white person's point of view, it seemed like there were a lot more diverse backgrounds. I think if you asked some of the minority students of that time, they felt there still wasn't a critical mass; there still was discrimination. So I can only say—I can't stand in their shoes, so I can't answer that for them.

[46:07]

LZ: So then as the time period continued and kind of, the money had run out, what impact did that have on the campus on kind of, I guess maybe even funding for the Math Department...

JP: [pause] I think there was some relief, sense of relief that we weren't having to defend the need to require students to pass courses. I think the Math Department was seen as the baddie because we sometimes flunked students. [laughs] I think we were seen on campus as being too strict, or too—not open to other... It's hard to put. If you want to teach a body of mathematics, in order to prepare a student to do this, you can't say, "You can write an independent paper that sort of flows around the ideas and go on." And it's easier to evaluate whether a student has actually assimilated some mathematical concepts. And there's an advantage in being able to say, "You can do this or you can't do that," because it was obvious whether a student could or

couldn't. I think in some of the humanities and social science courses it's easier for a student to step around some of those hurdles. I see my prejudice is showing. [laughs] My bias as a hard science person.

[48:29]

LZ: Did the math program start to grow into the '70s and '80s like I guess, maybe comparing it to when you were a student and then to maybe—

JP: Very definitely. For a long time, there were six of us in the Math Department, before a real spurt in growth. And it was a very congenial group. We sort of had the reputation on campus of getting along, which some departments didn't—all right, you may have to edit this. [laughs] But there just weren't any big egos among the six and we shared courses and we were nice to one another. People always said, "The Math Department people get along." It was a good group. It was fun.

LZ: Did the Math Department move into Olin-Rice pretty soon after it had been built? It wouldn't have been in Carnegie then...

JP: No. It was in Olin when I came back, and Rice wasn't built. I was the only woman in the building for many years. Except for the secretary.

LZ: What was that like, being the only woman in the sciences and mathematics?

JP: They were all so nice, and it was very—it was very nice. On the other hand, they were all old-fashioned enough that I was a woman and they still opened the doors for me. [laughter]

[50:14]

LZ: When you returned to teaching had the types of courses you were teaching changed? I guess... You had said you taught algebra, I guess in the very beginning.

JP: Oh. I taught calculus in the—and then we started the statistics. Kind of in that whole question of statistics the question is who teaches statistics. Does Sociology teach statistics for its students and Psychology statistics for its students? And it's true, they use different kinds of tests and they need to know different things, and then the social sciences will say, "No, you teach it in the Mathematics Department," and so, about that time they were giving it back to the Mathematics Department. And so then we tried to develop a course that was appropriate for students coming from all backgrounds that could go back and actually choose different methods, depending on the discipline. And that was—it was a good thing to try and develop that kind of a course that was appropriate across a broad spectrum.

LZ: Did you see the addition of then the computer science component to the Math Department?

JP: And then Michael Schneider was hired. Allan Kirch had started developing computer classes, and then I think it was Michael who was our first professional computer scientist, and then it grew from that.

LZ: I guess more in general, how has technology kind of impacted your teaching style or maybe even just kind of—and now I mean, today, e-mail is kind of the way you communicate with your professor. Did you ever get into that towards your last year...

JP: No, I retired in '93, and we had just brought Mathematica [computational software program] on board, I think the year before. So—and it—it was changing what you would teach and how you would teach very definitely. I think it was exciting.

LZ: Did you see, starting from when you had started right out of college kind of and then towards the end of your teaching career, had you found that your style of teaching had sort of evolved from...

JP: From—definitely from strictly lecture to a little more collaborative, participatory, or Socratic method, maybe a little bit.

[53:01]

LZ: Oh, one thing I thought of, being that you, you know, you were a student and you taught for so many years, did you see changes in kind of—and not necessarily in Mathematics—but in the addition of certain departments or focuses on certain studies and kind of, then departments I guess not existing anymore, in terms of like kind of the general curriculum of Macalester?

JP: Okay, are you asking me if I saw the change or if I—

LZ: I guess, I mean, were there. I assume that there...

JP: Yes, well definitely—

LZ: —and kind of, what were those changes?

JP: Well when I first started, there were these sort of vocational programs. And then, I think the thrust was to go back to more liberal arts, more, [pause] more traditionally liberal arts. And then I've watched it as liberal arts, the definition of liberal arts, has expanded. So things like environmental studies or whatever don't—have never—were not in the original five or seven liberal arts. So depending on how you define liberal arts, yes it has changed from the early Greeks to what it is now.

LZ: Do you feel that that was a good choice for Macalester to go towards that?

JP: Towards which?

LZ: Towards the liberal arts kind of...

JP: At that time—that's my bias, so I liked it. And I am still biased enough that you know, people could learn Greek and Latin and do all these other things, and then finally, go and explore the real world. But a lifetime isn't long enough to do that anymore. So, you need to move with the times.

[55:08]

LZ: I guess—we talked about Vietnam War a little bit. Were there other sort of campus issues? I guess—did you see students really change for you? We've talked a little bit about this and I guess maybe more in the '80s and up until the end of your...

JP: In the '60s, I saw them. I really, I really like the flower children. I like their altruism and their idealism, their wanting to change the world. There was sort of an innocence in—I didn't like the drug scene, which often accompanied that. I felt that it was a waste of real talent and humanity. And then when students—and I can't tell you in what decade—when they get more focused on, "What am I going to do to earn a living?" and sort of that pulling back into a more individual goal-setting, kinds of things. It was disappointing in a way, that don't-lose-sight-of-the-whole-world feeling. I'm not sure where they are today. Where are they? [laughs]

LZ: Did you feel like in your time here that activism has really kind of died down or has it just shifted...

JP: It ebbed and flowed, I think. I don't know—do you have sit-ins nowadays?

LZ: No, they don't—

JP: My grandson was horrified to find out his mother had participated in a sit-in. Because he would be the first one to do it if he thought he could.

LZ: Did any of your children end up going to Macalester?

JP: No, no. They played over here. Why would you go to school where you'd played all your life? I still live two blocks!

LZ: Oh, do you really? Okay, so then you must be fairly, I guess, aware maybe at least.

JP: No!

LZ: No? [laughter]

JP: I live in another world, I'm sorry. [laughter]

[57:31]

LZ: When you retired in '93, had the MSFEO [Macalester Senior Faculty Employment Options] program been established by that point?

JP: I don't think so.

LZ: Okay. Did you—

JP: Is that the phase-out program?

LZ: Yeah, kind of the phasing out. Did you ever feel as though not being a tenure-track professor... Did that—were there ever times when you really had wished that you had a Ph.D., just because it...

JP: Um. That's a hard question. There were definitely effects of my not having a Ph.D. Would I have made the same choice? Yes. I probably would have. I was not under pressure to publish, so it was a great relief. I had seen some faculty members really suffer mentally and emotionally from that pressure. And I didn't have it. I enjoyed—I had time to enjoy my children. I walked to work every day with a song in my heart and I was coming to a place that I liked, to people I respected, to students I cared about. A lot of my pleasure was in students coming to my office, just talking. Did a lot of sharing. I didn't have to serve on a lot of committees. I did do their Title IX self-examination.

LZ: I did—yeah, what was...

JP: We were trying to find out if we discriminated against women, you know. There was the sports angle, there was the academic angle, social angle. And all of my dear colleagues, most of them male, never discriminated in their eyes, and all the subtle discrimination was there. But I tried to do a couple of statistical studies. It kind of made me smile, but it also made me sad to think how pervasive the discrimination was against women. It was so subtle. It wasn't necessarily malevolent. It wasn't intentional. It was just part of the culture, and all these dear male professors [laughs]—it was there! And so just that whole consciousness raising was finally

the only way that women could do much about it. We tried. We'd do the little sessions, and we'd show little vignettes that really were portraying discrimination against women. We'd look at textbooks and it was all there, but it had to be pointed out.

LZ: When was this Title IX kind of...

JP: I was afraid you'd ask me. I'm not sure.

[1:00:59]

LZ: So just in terms of broad changes, you've, you know, spent a large portion of your life involved with Macalester, and so have you seen the student body really changing? People have different perspectives on these changes...

JP: Of course there have been lots of changes, and they're reflective of the culture of the times, I would say. What I think was true certainly when I came back in the '60s that Macalester students have a curiosity about life. They have—they're usually quite intelligent. They—They're risk takers, and I compare them—I went on a couple of the interim terms with Jim Smail to Hawaii and the students from—and I went on an interim to Paris, and students from the other colleges are much more docile, much more—at least that was my impression at the time. They weren't—I hate to say, they weren't as much fun to be with because they were very nice people, but they weren't as stimulating. If somebody was missing in a group it was usually a Mac student. [laughs] We came home with one less on one of the Hawaiian trips. Yes, when we

tried to find the student, we'd gotten a telephone number and when we called, the answer was, "This is God's house." The student had joined some sort of group out there—

LZ: Wait, you—the student was left in Hawaii? Or...

JP: He was an adult. And that was the choice, [laughter] so we came home with one less. And one day, Jim Smail was talking about the islands and the atolls as they stretched across the Pacific, and one student said, "Oh yes, I was there yesterday." And he said, "No, it's a thousand miles away." And she says, "No, I met a Navy pilot and we flew up there and back. I went on his round with him." [laughter] So, my image of Mac students is they're fairly adventurous, and they're somewhat risk-takers, and they're fun.

LZ: Do you think that's something Mac students come in with, or do you think it's something that gets kind of cultivated?

JP: I think it's both. I think just the whole application process—if Mac can refuse somebody with an 800 SAT score in math, to take somebody else that looks different, they have a wide choice. So I think it's both. I think it's probably cultivated here too.

[1:04:24]

LZ: Since your retirement, have you kept involved with Macalester or...

JP: Not really, no. I went on another career. I got involved in Episcopal Homes, which is senior housing, so I chaired their trustees for the whole building program over there on University and Fairview. I'm totally out of mathematics. I learned to read the balance sheets, and raise money, learned a lot about health care and senior housing. Steep learning curve. It's been fun. Now I'm looking for another career. [laughter]

LZ: I guess one thing—being a student, have you come back to your student reunions, and kind of seen the people you went to school with, and what is that like?

JP: I do. They look sort of old. [laughs] But what I'm finding is people I didn't—I just didn't have contact with before. I'm making new friends. I'm finding acquaintances; we have common experiences. So that's been fun. To not only come back and meet old friends, but to make new friends among the people that we have common experiences with.

LZ: Do you find that—given that you've never really kind of left Macalester since you were a student, and obviously a lot of these people have very little contact, do you find that they view things that are going on with the college differently than you do just because...

JP: Yes. Quite differently. I think just being here on the faculty for many years gives me a different perspective from most of my student-day friends.

LZ: What are some of, just out of curiosity, what are some of those differences?

JP: Well, a lot the people I went to—as a student with turned out to be very conservative. And you know, we grew up in the ‘40s and were married in the ‘50s and raised our children in the ‘50s, and that was a conservative time. And I had, I think, the advantage of coming back in the ‘60s and ‘70s, and just being involved at that time with young people that age certainly changed my view. Or I moved along and they didn’t without that kind of contact.

[1:07:07]

LZ: What kind of outside people say that today Macalester is very, you know, left of center, liberal, kind of radical college? Do you, do you see that? Or is it just because it’s—do you, do you feel it’s any more—

JP: It’s no different from—

LZ: Right.

JP: It’s no different. It’s really easy to get bad press, and we got it, as a student and as—and the ‘60s we certainly had more than our share. Or ‘70s. And when it comes out today, it—I find myself having to defend Mac sometimes. But I know that’s true. I had a son-in-law in healthcare and as the stories come out, there’s not a very full picture of whatever has happened. I think Brian Rosenberg has been pretty good, and very good sometimes, and very good period—let me put it that way—at diffusing and explaining the things that happen.

[1:08:18]

LZ: Well, I used to end these interviews on “What is your favorite memory of Macalester?” and I’m finding it’s not a very exacting question [laughs], but I guess maybe when you look back and kind of just reflect on your experiences at Macalester, what kind of comes to mind?

JP: [pause] I think, I think good people come out of Macalester. I think the Macalester experience is a good springboard to full, productive adult lives. I see the—read the kinds of things the students go on to do. I think Mac students wind up basically contributing a lot to wherever they go. I think the Mac experience is kind of a treasure that you take with you wherever you go. I’m not a great bagpipe fan, but on the other hand, when the bagpipes pipe in that graduating class, I think—you know you asked about a favorite memory. Just over the years, that skirling of—that’s kind of announced an ending to a good four years and a beginning of a new life. It’s just that transition. It’s the one place the bagpipes really move me, is in that commencement procession. It’s kind of an announcement of something important.

[1:10:21]

LZ: Well those are my questions. If there’s anything that you want to talk about that we uncovered...

JP: No. No, except that it was a wonderful career here. I feel very fortunate to have had that time. I had nice students for the most part. [laughs] Got a lot of grayed hair. [pause] Mac is a good place.

LZ: Well, thank you. Thank you so much for letting us interview you.