July 29th, 2014: Sister Martine Mayborg, speaking with Professor Mary Ellen Lennon at the Convent of the Sister of St. Francis, Oldenburg.

Abbreviations

SMM: Sister Martine Mayborg
MEL: Mary Ellen Lennon

MEL: This is Mary Ellen Lennon on July 29 2014 in Oldenburg, Indiana. at the Sisters of St. Francis convent. I'm very happy to share this interview with the Sister Martine Mayborg. Perhaps you could introduce yourself?

SMM: Okay. My name is Sister Martine Mayborg. I'm from Cincinnati. I became a Sister of St. Francis February the first, 1954. And I went to the academy as an aspirant. And from there I entered the community. In those years they had what they called the aspiring class, it was equal to being in the seminary in preparation for future religious life. But it was also high school, so I did sophomore, junior, and in the middle of my senior year I entered a novitiate of the Sisters of Saint Francis. From then I went through training as it were, my college through the finished high school then went to college the University of our Marian College or Marian University. I completed my university studies as it were, August the second, 1960, just before I went to New Guinea. I did teach in several schools here in the States, four schools as a young Sister in those years we went out in had on-the-job training, as it were. And I kind of, that's how I started my teaching. I did have an excellent mentor one of our Sisters, Sister Mary Donald was one of our excellent primary school teachers and she was a gem. And so she got me in the right path and I love teaching the little ones. So I did that for five years here in the States and then in 1960, August I was, or July I was assigned to Papua, New Guinea. Now that is another story because our community in taking Papua, New Guinea was a step forward from Earth, a step in in agreement with the Pope as it were, he wished that all the communities or the congregations in the States would have an outreach. Our community was thinking on going somewhere but not had, had not decided where, was looking into it. And it so happened these two Capuchins came to our door early March of 1960, Father Otmar Gallagher and Brother Mark Belanger, they were Capuchins from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. St. Augustine Province and they were bearded men and I think at the time our Superior General was kind of weary of leery as it were. I was wondering who they were and you know, are they safe is this true or what. Anyhow she launched out into the deep and invited them up to the general council meeting room to talk to the Sisters. And they told their story it seems like our community was about the seventy-ninth community in the states that they had visited. And all the communities Mother General and the council would say yes, we will get in touch with you. And so Father kept and Brother kept moving from community to community. Well after Mark and Father Otmar had talked to the community, Mother or talked to the council and Mother Superior, she told them asked the first were they staying and they

were staying over in Batesville and she said, we'll contact you tomorrow, ten o'clock with our decision. And that was new to Father Otmar and Brother, because other communities would say we will contact you. So, and it has never happened.

Anyhow, Mark and Father Otmar kind of held their breath a bit, but at the council meeting they evidently, had talked and they said well we'll put it out to the Sisters. We would be willing to send four Sisters if we could get volunteers. And so that's the message they gave Father Mark, Brother Mark and Father Otmar. We will send four, if we get volunteers.

So that was like the first part of March. It was traditional at that time when our Superior General and the council Mother called it the "Motherhouse Message". She would send a letter to all of our houses, all of our missions, throughout the United States saying what's going on and what's new here at Oldenburg, for the connecting part of all of us. And so in that letter she mentioned about these Capuchin Fathers coming, and our Father and Brother and she said he gave us a story that the men could touch, could contact the native men in Papua, New Guinea, but they could not really get to the women, because there was a very strong division there. Women were down in a sense, where the men were prominent, I guess you could say. And so, they felt if they had Sisters working with them they could do the holistic work of ministry. And so, I guess our council felt well, maybe we can help there. So our letter came to us saying the whole story about Father and Brother coming, and then at the end Mother said if anyone has a feeling of being interested in this type of ministry, please write to the general counsel. That was everybody got that.

So I I guess it struck me that it was a missionary and I, I kind of felt deep in my heart that that's something I would like to do. I think it stemmed when I was in the third grade. My brother, my oldest brother, was in the army. He was in the Indochina campaign, and he used to send pictures home of these little Chinese kids, you know. And it just kind of tugged my heart a bit, but that was way back in the back part of my mind. Well anyhow, as as the story goes, my mother had died, this would been March of 1960, when this whole thing about New Guinea. My mom died August of '59, just two days after I made my final commitment. And my dad was quite lonely and he would call me every Friday night. I knew the call would come in at seven-thirty, he very exact.

So when our Superior Generalis, our superior or house superior was going to Oldenburg, I wanted to send my letter with her. But I didn't want to write the letter before I talked to Dad. That week, Dad called on Thursday. So, and Sister was going in on Friday for the weekend. So I thought well that could be a little tap on the shoulder, maybe not. So anyway I talked to Dad about it, and I'm the last of six children, so when I made my final vows on August the twelfth it was like the last of the kids are settled, and my mom died two days after that, of a heart attack. So it was you know, sort of all worked in. Anyhow Dad was, you know he said, well I'll miss you, can't call you there. I guess I'll have to buy a helicopter if I wanna visit you. It was a big joke. I said, well Dad, I'm volunteer, I would like to volunteer, but I'm sure there's gonna be many volunteers. And so you know, it's like a jar full of pencils, which one do you want, that type of thing.

Anyhow so, that was okay with him and I reached out. So I wrote my letter that night, my volunteer letter. Sister Mary Moots who was my [unintelligible] brought it home. And that was it, I heard nothing, that even the superiors that you know, we didn't hear any more about it the rest of that year.

School ended, we came home here for this summer, which in those years was the regular—we'd come home. Young sisters would have what we call blitz courses in the summer here, which would be courses toward our degree. And so we were in school and everything was, and the talk here was that on July the twenty-fifth, at the end of the first retreat, when the Sisters received their appointments or obediences as we called it that day, those years, there was a little white envelope and on it says, for the year 1954 to 1955 you will be teaching at...Never knew what was going to come, it's just that was our obedience. And through the vow of obedience we all accepted that that was what we committed ourselves to, as a Sister of St. Francis.

So to put a longer story shorter, that on the twenty-fifth I wrote our names on the blackboard. In June I was asked, Mother Mary Cephas, who was our Superior General, called me into her office asking, her question was, you wrote this letter, a letter of volunt—you wrote your volunteer letter in March. Do you still feel the same? And she also asked about Dad, a few other things. And I said yes, and her response was, you are one of many being considered. So, I thought one of many, again I had a vision of a jar full of pencils, one of many. Hello. So I left it go at that, and then when they wrote names on the blackboard, it was the first I really knew. So we we all knew here that those of us that were not in the read first retreat, we knew that they were, Sister Hortense would write these four names on the blackboard. And so, we had our break from class, so we all went to the blackboard to watch. Sr. Hortense came in, she wrote Sister Mary Claver, and Sister Noreen McLaughlin, Sister M.A.R.T.I.N., and we heard Sister Martin McHugh's was sort of in the scuttlebug of everybody was talking about who was going, who wasn't going. And then they put M.A.R.T.I.N.E, M.A.Y.B.O.R.G., and then my classmates were, you know they were, Martine, that's you. And then Sister Annata Holohan, was the fourth one. So that was the way I found out and all of us found out. I don't know if the other ones, we never really talked about it, if the other ones had had a more of a premonition or had been more directly contacted, or not. Maybe I was too green.

So that was the four of us, Claver was thirty-one, Noreen was thirty, Annata was twenty-seven, I was twenty-four. So I was the youngest age-wise, but the second youngest community-wise, Annata was a year younger. Actually she's in this this [unintelligible] class. So so that was the beginnings, and that's how we, and so all through August September we were getting ready. We left September the twenty-seventh, which was the anniversary of our founder, foundress. Mother Theresa Hackelmeier, she it was her death anniversary of a hundred years.

So it was sort of a prominent time a special time community-wise, and so it all kind of fitted in. So we left here, and as a community they didn't know how things went, people going on mission, missionary, foreign mission. and so I think our superiors kind of talked

to the Maryknolls and what how the what procedures did they have. And so it was planned that we'd have a receiving our mission cross, the Bishop was here. And then our families were here and then after we received the cross, we went down the aisle, out the front door into the ca,r off to the airport. We said goodbye to our family before the ceremony. So everybody said it was so disheartening, so but we didn't know, nobody knew and so we just went with the flow, you know. It was just, so many people had said that. Well I guess we we had no idea, no idea of where. We knew it was north of, on the tip of Australia, north of Australia. That's where Papua, New Guinea was. We had, we had no idea. You said it our group the other week, something about that, Noreen was right next to me, she looked at me she said, we didn't have a clue, you know, what we were getting into but we were open. I think we all were young enough just to, to be and to see what how we could help. The need was there, and I feel that's a community that was one of our real strong charisms. There was a need, if we could somehow fulfill it, we would try at least. And I think that's the way we went. So we, you know, and even our flights you know, it was from Cincy to St. Louis to L.A., to Hawaii. We stayed in Hawaii three days, then we went to Australia. We stayed in Australia. I had never been on a plane before, never.

So it was just, you know, it was—I guess—. I'm not sure about the other three, if they had or hadn't, maybe they had I—we never really talked about it. And so, it was it was in some ways it was exciting, in some ways it was very scary. But I think we had each other to support each other. We had a wonderful community supporting us and that's where we were representing the Sisters of St. Francis. And for me that was big. I mean, I didn't know, being the youngest and being young, being in community six years I entered February first of '54, this was August, September '60. So it was six and a half years, or so. Through training, teaching. So it was for me it was, it was different. But it was, it was good. I think it was a blessing for me. I can literally say I grew up in New Guinea. I mean, I was young, green, open like the other three. And being sent as obedience, being a religious, being a Sister, and knowing this is what God wants me to do at this time. How long, I had no idea. If it would be but just the first five years, or if it would be extended. And I've been blessed because I was there fifty-one years. So that was, that was our beginnings. And I'm sure Noreen could add a few other little things, and that's—but to me it, it was such a blessing.

Part II

MEL: This is Mary Ellen Lennon on July 29th, 2014. I'm continuing my conversation with Sister Martine Mayborg. So please continue, Sister.

SMM: Well, as we arrived in Australia the reason we went to Australia was mainly to see what was available. Being in the mountains of Papua New Guinea which we had not known what would be there or how we would even live there, knowing that the Capuchin Fathers would have living quarters for us. And we were going over to be teachers. They felt that if we could run a school, which they had started with native teachers, who had grade three education, and they were teachers at that time. They they sort of had a bit of an organized school. So when we arrived in Mendi the

headquarters, and our living place for the next years, they had a school started which we kind of worked into. But before we actually got to, arrived in Mendi, we did stay in Australia to find out about supplies. Then from Australia we went to Port Moresby, which is the port of entry into Papua, New Guinea. And there we went to the education department, gave our credentials and they seemed to have been a bit surprised that our community would send degreed people to work in, as it were the last outpost of God's country. But we were happy that we were able to become teachers there.

And so we then went to from Moresby we stayed with the Sisters in Moresby, and I kind of got a bit information, what the mountains were like, and just kind of getting an idea of what we were getting into. But again we were just willing to do, and to be, and to fulfill the need of the Friars and the people up in the mountains.

We arrived in Mendi. Mendi is the headquarters of the highlands, of the Southern Highlands. And that's where the Capuchin Fathers had their center. So, and that was also the center of the prefecture. We weren't a diocese we were I guess, they called it a prefecture. Anyhow, it was the next step before becoming a diocese, and the head priest or Monsignor Furman was, we didn't have a bishop either. So we you know, it was all always new beginnings. So we arrived there on October the fifteenth, fourteenth, the fourteenth of October we arrived in Mendi. And we arrived in the country on the twelfth, and up to the highlands on the fourteenth. And we when we got there we had a royal welcome by the kids in school, the teachers, the fathers, the people. We were well received. And then within a few weeks we two of us started right into school, Sister Claver and I. Claver had the second grade, I had the first grade. And then Sister Noreen and Sister Annata did the the health work that needed and also started a preschool group. And they more or less taught outside, and we had Ruth, Mary Claver and I had the classrooms.

So it was it was a big ad-we had no books the children did not know English, we did not know their language. So a lot of it was action. And they were great in picking up different things. And we in Melanesian pidgin was a bit that's the language of communication, but in the early '60s it wasn't so prominent either. They had their own language, but our purpose was to teach them English. And so it was more like situational English, where you do something you talk about it, they repeat it. So it was it was lots of fun. And we, I guess we just went in and did what we could do with what we had, which we didn't have that much, but we taught.

And a few girls came into our classes. With the male teachers who were there as we came there, they had only the boys, some of them were men they were big guys. But, you know, but when we started the school or got into the school the families from the nearby villages brought in their daughters, so that the sisters could teach them. So that was a plus, we were thrilled. They had two women or two young girls there to meet us, Clare Antio and Maryanne Masami. They had been they were like our [unintelligible] our translators. Both of them knew a little bit of English you know, and Noreen taught them, tutored them a bit. And they, you know, were a big help to us. And so we just tried to do what was best we could do and, by that first year that was the first end of the year we

taught school up until Christmas Eve that first year. I can remember that because what else was there to do, and the children would stay with us until after Christmas. They lived on the station, it was like a boarding school, in the rough. So it was, like I say, it was mostly boys. The girls that did come they went home in the evening because their villages were right near us. So I think that would have been been our beginnings.

The second year there, at the end of the second year our Superior General and one of the council brought two more Sisters with them. So we were four, and that up to October Mother Cephas and Sister Hortens, brought two more, Sister Naomi Frye, and Sister Lorraine Geis. So then there were six of us. And the two superiors at the time, three went north to a station in Tari, and that was our second mission. We had Mendi, and then we had Tari. Mendi Our Mother of Divine Shepherd was our school, and in Tari was St. Francis. And that would have been, it was about a twenty minute, twenty-five minute flight. See, the mode of transportation there was only air, there were no roads. And where we went, there were actually there was nothing. Like I said, there was road from the mission to the town, in quotes, the town. There may have been some a trade store or two, but there were there really you know, it was it was very very primitive.

And the people themselves were primitive probably we would have been the first Sisters, religious Sisters that they had seen. And they weren't too sure about us, they didn't know if we were Sisters or angels. One of the men, later in years I was driving from Hagen, and he was one of our first boys. And he said, Sister we didn't know what you were, we didn't know you know if I could say angels, or women, or men, because we had a scapular on and there was no indication of our sex, you know. Because that that was our habit. And so is amusing to hear then, that would have been about thirty years later, what they thought of at the time we came. So we had a good laugh at that.

So it was and then we had three of us stayed in Mendi, and three went to Tari. That would have been in 1961. So from there we continued teaching in the primary school. Noreen and Annata, did Annata did, like I say, outside health work, they set up a little clinic. Annata was working here in the infirmary, although she was not a nurse but she had some, she had a lot of knowledge. So did Noreen, of what to do, giving injections, you know. And there's many stories that they can tell that were out of sight, really, But good, it was interesting, and I think, trying to think where, like I guess we just continued and then in '63 two more Sisters, Sister Ruthann, who, you will see this afternoon, she and Sister Mel came over in 1963, which made our group eight. So, and then one stated Mendi and one of the two went to Tari, so it was four Sisters, four Sisters. So it was then, we just kind of moved on from there. A high school was established in Mendi, a government high school. Our own Catholic high school had not begun yet. And so Noreen started to teach English at the government high school in Mendi. And so that was a little bit more of an expansion there. And then the girls from the high school, some of them, lived on the station as in the dormitory. And Noreen looked after them. And they commuted back and forth, so.

MEL: I'm interested in the first few years about your classroom, when you used to walk into the classroom.

SMM: Well, our classrooms were very primitive, we did have desks and we used a lot of pictures and drawings. And the children, some of them were rather old like for first graders I know I had fifteen, sixteen, seventeen year old, because it was new. And the people from the bush area wouldn't send their little ones but they would send their older one into school. And like I said, we had boarding school, we had boys and girls. We looked after the girls, the boys were up on the bush up on the upper part of the mission station. The dormitories for the women or girls were closer. I guess, like I say, it was teaching using situational English, and English as a second language, whatever. But I know with my little ones, the first days of school just was was hysterical because they walk, first of all, it was the building. It was a room, they're not used to a room, they're used to their little grass huts. And something to sit on, they're used to sitting on the floor. So they look at a desk, they weren't sure to sit on top, or under or where. You know and it was it was just sort of easing them into a new world, and that's exactly what it was, it was like a new world opening up to them. And that was what was exciting for me. Where a new, the newness was just beyond expression. It was fun, I loved teaching. And I was in the primary level first grade for pretty much the first ten years. So it was growing up with them.

MEL: You taught English but did you teach other subjects?

SMM: Oh, oh yeah. We had, we had the regular math, English, religion. I mean we had all the subjects but we had no books, we used to, you know. Here we had "Run, Jack, Run" you know, the simple little books that we had here, I forget what was the company here was, you know. They sent old books to us at first until 1963, then we we got our first syllabus syllabi whatever you want to call it that had the program in. And it was written by Australia, by Australian teachers. And then we had two different series an [unintelligible] series and way--. And the series had books that really helped the teacher progressively teach English, teach math, spelling. It it took the whole thing, and it was very very well laid out, it was very good. And around '64, '65, their own teachers or the native, had been beginning. They weren't yet we I think there was a College at Port Moresby, where people who had young men and women who had gone through high school could go on to be trained as a teacher. And we had native men and women mostly men in our beginning years, working with us. Again it would be like on-the-job training. And in on the coast they were much farther ahead, with education, even the church too, were up in the mountains. It was all beginnings. And that was, you know, a different sort of level there. So people from the coast or young men and women, would come up to help us teach up in the mountains. And I know my first year as I taught with a young man from Milne Bay Area and again that was a coastal area, and I learned a lot from him. We taught the first, he taught the second, I taught the first. But we interchanged, and in like social studies I didn't know much about the coastal, so he would come in and our are you little people didn't know much about this they called it "numbas" that was the pidgin word for coast, and they didn't know that much about, they just know it was there. And they were kind of you know, they were fearful you know.

They had a fear of different tribes, and you know, that was ingrained in them I think. And so, but once they heard it kind of opened up a new world to them too. So, it was it was very interesting.

MEL: I'm kind of interested in this fellow teacher. This fellow teacher that you taught with. How long did you teach with him, or where did he come from?

SMM: Just a year, two years, two years actually. And then when he left them our diocese he went into the seminary, became a priest later. So I kept trying to think of his, Mayo was his surname I can't think of--Sam--and I heard before I left, it was at 2011. In 2010 or 2009 he either died of malaria, and that is probably, that happens, you know. Either he couldn't get the medicine or it was too late. Coastal, they have the bug in them, I mean they have it and sometimes they can't keep on top of it. So it was, but he became a priest and ministered for at least ten to fifteen years. So it was nice, it was nice I was years I would have been the early '60s that we taught together, our first years. And then I think it was sometime in the '80s I forget he came up to the diocese, and it it was just so good to see him again, you know. We had some good laughs, so.

MEL: What was like a whole school day in these beginning years? What was that like? When did it begin?

SMM: Well we began you know, in the morning around 8 o'clock, eight fifteen, eight thirty, somewhere in that time. Then we always had assembly, which got to be a big joke, because because that was the Australian style. See we our whole school system was based pretty much on the Australian education system. Even the books written were by Australians. And so that was good, so that it was the assembly was important for in Australian school. So we had an assembly and the raising of the flag and singing to the Queen. Actually Papua New Guinea, was a protectorate of Australia. Well we first got there, we were under Australia, and the Australian police, kiaps or district commissioners, or whatever, were all Australians. Up into '75 when we got our own independence, but our early years we were with, under Australia. I forgot what your question was.

MEL: You were describing the day--

SMM: Oh, the day, yeah. And so we, and it was amusing. A couple times we did a few faux-pas. I remember one time in Kagua, it was in our third station, but I was headmistress maybe it was, that we had assembly and the Australian district commissioner with some visitors had come to visit our school. Our schools were because we're Americans, we had a school you know, we had a good established school and did well. And the Australians realized that and appreciated that. When out of assembly when one of the seven of sixth graders had the flag on the flagpole, he had it upside down. And so it went up upside down. And this Rick he was really joyful, I mean he was really a nice man, family man his family was there. He said, hey Sister, that's S.O.S. what's the problem? But when the flag was upside down was indication of. Well we laughed and laughed and laughed about it. So we were very cautious and it was a

good learning time for the kids too, because they learned they had to do it right side up and not upside down, so.

I guess another on our assembly part, the kids often because of the climate you know, they had colds and often they would have you know, and one of the teachers was directing the assembly and he said, was talking to the students, and he was talking half English half pidgin. And he said, "and I would appreciate or I would like that all 11 o'clocks be wiped off". And we looked at each other. 11 o'clock. And so the kids automatically left the assembly line, went back behind school, got leaves, came back, and stood at attention. Well we almost doubled up, so that's how simple they were. It was beautiful.

MEL: Did they all wipe their noses?

SMM: But it was, we teased about the 11 o'clock situation often. So teaching was was a real joy. But it was an experience, and learning for us even though we taught here you know, you don't you don't really know teaching until you have to teach in a situational English way. That almost everything you do, you mimic it, they mimic it, and it becomes knowledge. It's beautiful.

MEL: And you had many of these children, for many years? You stayed in that first place for ten years?

SMM: Oh well I think I I was there for first '65, '66 I moved to Kagua, our third place. But ours our teachers and as we were in these schools up until, 'til we localized, you know. And then I was in Mendi for the first six years, and then I moved three of us moved to Kagua to establish a school there.

MEL: So you saw the children grow over those six years?

SMM: Yeah, and more Sisters came over. So we in '65, '66 three more Sisters came, so that made us eleven. Actually we, there were twenty-six of us that administered in New Guinea, over the fifty-one years. So it was anyway, one stage we were nineteen, that was our largest number of our group. But teaching, even in our latter years now it was interesting because some of the first ones that we had you know, our men working in Mendi town, and or their kids are helping us you know, or in their children's children are in school. And they say you know, my mom and they you know, they through pidgin [speaking Tok Pisin]. You're teaching him you know. And then after a while they said, you taught my dad just like you're teaching me. It was, it was nice. The high school people I think had the same experience you know, like Noreen. And then in '70 when we began our Catholic high school, which would be Lorraine, Ruth was in, and then Sister Mel who has died, was the headmistress. And there's I think that Oh Marilyn, Marilyn Shaw and I don't think you're gonna be seeing Marilyn she was here in the weekend but she went back to St. Louis. So it you know, we've touched so many people and it's just interesting to to see after you see them as a little seven, eight, ten, twelve year old then you see him as a thirty-five, thirty-six, like here you know. It's the same but it's in on a

different level in a way. You know, the simplicity of it all. I think that's the biggest thing with our people, it's simplicity, to the hundredth degree. You know, little things mean a lot.

And then, certainly has impressed me from my life. So, that's pretty much, but the country itself developed. It was very primitive in the '60s, and with the Australian, with the strong arm. And then it was quite peaceful, the villages, the clans. They communicated not just that much but they you know, but as soon as we had gotten independence not that what they were you know ready, they'd never be ready so they had to do it. And that's when so much tribal fighting and lots of things happen after that. The Australians did a lot to develop, and then when the development was you know, to their whatever they felt they could do, and independence was the option. Actually they did self-government from '70 to '75, and then went into independence. So that was that was 1975.

MEL: In the early years Sister, I'm interested in, did you visit the villages or did everyone come to the mission? Did you leave the mission much?

SMM: We are, we had home leaves. Our home leaves would be our first leave was after four years. Noreen and I came we were the first two that came home for leave. We came home 1964, November I think it was. I think, and yes, and yes that's when because as the history here I don't know you probably will find out that we had some big fires here that destroyed our buildings. We also had it in New Guinea. Our convent burned down in November of '64, and the reason was we, our electricity. We had no, a generator a generator. And the electricity was limited for so many hours a day. So our ice boxes, our fridges or whatever you want to call it was kerosene. And there was kind of a trip to keep that yellow light burning. And if it got blue it was dangerous, you had to work it until it got yellow again, back and forth or blue I don't. And maybe blue was the normal and yellow was the bad, I don't remember anymore. Anyhow they said that they were having difficulty with the with the burner of the of the icebox the night before. And it seems like that was the source of the fire, our home in Mendi burned down. Lot it, luckily, the Sisters, Noreen and I were on our way home for leave. Mel was there, Annata was there, and Claver I think were the three sisters there. And they managed to get out but they hardly could save anything. They not, because of it was like a tinderbox and just. So, this it was disheartening but it, that happens. Several years later the Swiss sisters down in-- which is another area south of Mendi I think. They too, their convent burned down. Similar thing. And so it was and then in the end I think they was noted through the mission we don't use kerosene. But it was what we had.

MEL: It was rebuilt?

SMM: Oh yeah. It was rebuilt. That was like November the fourth by the end of November they already had cleared and the structure was beginning to. But see it was so hard to get supplies up there. Like, well we came or arrived in Mendi in '60 our convent wasn't finished. We lived in the friary. The Fathers and the Monsignor lived down in the workshop, but we did the cooking. So it was and our house was almost

finished but not quite because it was difficult to fly, they had to fly in all the supplies. All the wood, all the timber, you know. All kinds of things because there was nothing, nothing there that they could use for building. So Brother had to, and they had these planes bring it in and there were no roads to bring it over road. So that's how and that I'm not sure if there was any walkabout sawmills around it in those beginning years, I'm I'm not sure. I just know that the material, Brother was waiting for flooring or something like that as we got there and then they felt bad but we were all right. I mean, they were the ones that had to move out of their house for us, which they did. But they benefited because we were the cooks.

MEL: You mentioned cooking, can you talk about food?

SMM: Our native food, they we did eat a lot of greens. The people themselves, the staff the main source of food is sweet potato. Now it's much different than our sweet potato here. Much more sweeter, but there's just all kinds. There's purple, there's white, there's yellow. I love the yellow, most of all, it's much sweeter, it's good. But that's in their gardens, they there's subsistent gardening gardeners, so they had their own gardens. They were very generous to us bringing us food, and we they did have white potatoes, that was another source. Rice was a sort of, they didn't grow their rice, they imported it. So, and that was that where the trade stores came in, but it was very expensive for them. We got our supplies from Madang, we had a mission plane and the mission plane would bring in the supplies you know, that we would need. We got we called it freezer meat, we
got fresh meat at different times. And you know, we we were well taken care of considering.

But the people and then there were just different types of greens. Gardens, corn, they they had and then I think the I thought I think I knew, the Australians brought in seeds and the people planted broccoli and things after a while, not way in the beginning. At the beginning it was a bit sparse, but if you know we were okay we lived through it. And we didn't lose too much weight.

MEL: Did you eat with the children?

SMM: No, we didn't. When the children at the boarding school we'd supervise them, but most of the time was the same thing we yeah, I mean the same food. But the rice was mainly rice and fish, tinned fish or canned fish was sort of the stuff, and sweet potatoes, boiled sweet potatoes. And that's pretty much what we did, we ate. Now the Sister who was on duty, I'm not really I can't recall, see it was different because I was in the primary school. And those like Annata and Noreen I know I did at different times you know, go out to the bush with the women with the girls, I don't think the boys were with us, and collected sticks pitpit in the bush. That we would carry it in and they would use that to cook their food. So we you know just we did that, we'd supervise that, that was kind of fun. So, that was, so.

MEL: Your first Mass. Do you remember your first Mass?

SMM: That would have been on the 15th of October, Feast of Saint Teresa of Avila, yes I did remember well. Father had it, he had it in English for us, but it with the people they the Fathers there were working on the language so they actually had the format of the Mass in the native language. Not totally at the time we got there but it gradually developed, and our bishop was very open to incorporate the cultural things into our liturgies. We were really blessed, some of the areas within the country the bishops were very traditional. Our bishop in some ways was traditional, but he was also open. The story always says you do it, you don't ask him. You tell him what you did, and he more or less agrees. That's you know, sort of very broad of it. An the recent Bishop see, Bishop Furman, he was the Monsignor when we first went in '60 and then and '65 we became a diocese and Monsignor Furman became Bishop Furman. And then he was Bishop until Steve took over. He would have been Bishop for about twenty years, Furman. But he would he was a teacher in their school in Pittsburgh. It was like not of military school but in those they had, it was a high school. So he evidently was something there, and when he was assigned in New Guinea everybody you know, he was good, but he he was very--in some ways. But in other ways he was very open. And then when Steve Riker became our Bishop, followed Furman, Steve was a parish priest for twenty-five years in the diocese. And so becoming Bishop, he had the vision of what had been and what is, and what could be. And so it was sort of opening us up it was and Steve was for fifteen years, and just in 2012 we got our third Bishop, Bishop Don Lippert. And Don was also, he wasn't a parish priest, he was a theologian and a teacher in Morseby, but was very much connected to our diocese, very good. All Capuchins, by the way. And so Don is our Bishop, Bishop Don Donald Lippert is our Bishop now. Again, all of these bishops have been have been just opened to our people, and I think our people have really were blessed. We all were blessed by their leadership and it was good.

MEL: Did you build the church from scratch?

SMM: Well, the Capuchins were there, they came in 1955. We came in '60, and our we kind of worked right in with with the Capuchins. Even the places we went, we went to Tari, Capuchin Fathers were there first. When we went to Kagua, but each time we went to these places as teachers in the primary school grade school. And and then only once localization took over our own people took over our jobs, we moved out and moved into something else. And so it was the localization of the schools, then we went into parish work, working with the adults. And for myself I was working with the adults in parish work. And then think in nineteen, not sure what year now 1999, '98, '98 I think it was 1998 I was home for leave and I was moving from Tari, back to Mendi and the bishop asked me to coordinate the adult literacy program which had started but it was sort of airy-fairy so I had the joy of doing working with it. And that would have been '98 until 2010. So it was twelve years that I worked and we had we had a good seventy-eight, eighty little bush schools for the adults. And we had someone in in the village as a teacher, and I would meet with these teachers for in-service and visit the schools you know. And it was the bishop always said all three of them, it was such a joy to visit a village. And one of these little old ladies would get up and read the first reading in either

their tok place or tok pidgin, because our literacy school was pretty much in tok pidgin. And so the bishop you know, they said it was just such, and they'd be so proud of themselves too you know, little old lady--so that was one of the many blessings. So that's a, but in I guess it would have been 2010. Again, we moved it moved it into the hands of the our own people, to direct it as a diocesan position, coordinating coordinator of the adult literacy program. We worked with the government but not as much. I worked I wrote or grants, and got help from the Netherlands, got help from different places. Our own community here had sent you know, money to help us to do certain phases. So it was, was good. And even now I'm not really sure, I know they had a lot of problem. But I don't know just how it's continuing. But the people were so interested, and it was just that these older people didn't have chance for education. And so it was their, like their time, you know. It was it was very nice.

MEL: Were all the children Catholic, or families Catholic?

SMM: No, most of the children were not Catholic, and within the schools we had baptisms, we had baptism classes, we had First Communion classes, you know. In the beginnings and then the adults had their RCIA, to meet the need of the people, a little different than RCIA here, but it was quite comparable in stages, it was good. In the recent years it was more prominent in the early years it wasn't, I mean it was teaching them and working with them. And instructing them, they all they came to Mass they came to a morning Mass often it be a nice group from daily Mass. Sundays would be and then Noreen was one who worked with music, and she started putting some of the music words English songs into the local language through the youth that she worked with. And so they would sing their own the songs that way, and the people would just be so elated. And they've taken on with that, they have their own music now their own singing. Sometimes they have a song that we would know, but maybe we wouldn't know it because they adapted it to their own. So you know, it's like a new world opening up. Now there was a lot of things that weren't so nice, too. But there was a lot of lot of things that were good shots in the arm for us.

MEL: There were challenges?

SMM: Oh, many challenges, many challenges. And but as I say we were open, we went over to fulfill a need. And I think that is one of the you know, the legacies of our community. And that's one of the blessings, many blessings I think of us who had been over there.

MEL: For you and the Sisters especially in the early days, when there were only four Sisters, what was your community like then? Would you eat dinner together, would you pray?

SMM: Oh yeah, oh yes. Pray together, oh yeah, yes yes. We had, we had our community but we ate all the meals, breakfast I mean early. We had our morning praise together, we had our breakfast, we had our time for prayer, the afternoon we had our time for prayer, we had our evening office, we had recreation, played cards you know.

Once the children were settled, then we get together at night. Oh yeah, yeah we we did. We were Americans I guess, Toward the day we could have been Papua New Guineans, but in the evening we were, we were who we were. You know, we enjoyed life. We, it was nice it was a nice community, diverse community in a sense but we were all kind of in the same age. All of us over there, we were pretty well you know in the classes. I guess Julie Susanna would have been the youngest. You know, I can't even think of it. I entered in '54. I guess most of them were from early '50s until early '60s. That age, that time range, worse that they to enter the community here. Mary Katherine was fairly old when she came over, she was past seventy, I think. Or late sixties. Charlene, Patricia Charlene would have been Angela, who was here, she celebrated seventy years in the community. She was over for three years, she taught in high school she was a delight. So there there were a few older Sisters but most of us were within the same age range, I guess you'd say. And and that that was helpful, you know, because we kind of had the same ideals in a sense. We all were Franciscans, Oldenburg Franciscans for sure. And knowing that we were representing our community as an older Franciscan, that was a big thing.

MEL: Thank you, is there anything else you'd like to add today, Sister?

SMM: I think that's enough.

MEL: Well, thank you very much.