

August 20th, 2014 - Sister Noreen McLaughlin speaking with Professor Mary Ellen Lennon at the Convent of the Sister of St. Francis, Oldenburg.

Abbreviations

SNM: Sister Noreen McLaughlin

MEL: Mary Ellen Lennon

MEL: This is Mary Ellen Lennon in Oldenburg, Indiana, on August 20th 2014 at the convent of the Sisters of St. Francis, sharing my time with Sister Noreen McLaughlin. Sister, would you like to introduce yourself?

SNM: So I am Sister Noreen McLaughlin. My birth name or baptism name which I was saying, working on an ID now so I'm learning that that's their birth name. Anyhow, I am—my baptism name is Mary Patricia, and my religious name Noreen, so I've stayed with them. I was in Papua New Guinea when the general okay was given to go back to your baptism name and I just decided to stay as I, as I was from profession time. So, so I was born in New Albany, Indiana, of wonderful very fine Catholic, Christian family. My father, McLaughlin, the son Irish, we don't we don't know a whole lot of family history, but my mom is Huber, German. So that's my background, so on. And they had a wonderful, fine home. Whatever we need we thought we were happy together, secure, as I work in with other people in other countries and in this in it with disadvantaged, in some ways here because I've also been in Appalachia, so we I learned to appreciate my own home background more and more. Just the stability and so on.

So uh I'm eldest of five sisters and three brothers, my one brother is no longer living. We, I had a pretty normal early years I think you know, and then into a Catholic Saint Mary's, a grade school in New Albany, taught by our Oldenburg Franciscan Sisters, during those eight years. My mom had, my mom was the youngest of seven girls and one boy so she had the advantage of other lot of those that age did, so she had had some learned some music and singing so she got had me started with music, piano. And then we had a sister that was great in the band so I got into band instruments, to it as I was growing up. So uh I was active all the way around, early years got into scouting. I mentioned these things because they lead to the calling to religious life, and to Papua New Guinea too, in ways, so.

And my family, my father was great into sports so that was always a big part of the family, but I wasn't physically able to do what my but that all the others in the family did so I, I was into other kinds of things. They were great in sports. I we didn't have a Catholic high school in our area at the time they were all across the river at Louisville, but my dad and mom wanted us at home. So I went to the public high school, and it's a fine school. I was a lot of things like the music band and all that continued. Connections to the, to the grade school years, too. So my junior year, we were, that was at wartime,

Second World War, yeah. And we were doing it with, I was in senior service scouting at that time, and we were doing volunteer things around town. We were in the down in the basement of a small, old Catholic hospital, St. Edward's, it was a staffed by the and owned by the Franciscan Sisters in Mishawaka.

And we were down there one time on a project making, rolling bandages out of old sheets and Sister came down from the one floor of the hospital above and asked for volunteers to go up and get in to give her some help with the nursing on the floor. So two of us did, I jumped at that right away and didn't take me long to realize how much I was inclined to nursing. And spent countless—I remember one time this was a, the senior service scout was from the Christian Church in there, our neighbors were very strong and active in that church, got me connected there. Our parish didn't have a advance scouting at that time, so that's how I got started with nursing in my life. I remember one time I was up to five hundred hours and got recognized there—for that's how much as a teenager I loved the nursing in so on. That became a very important part of my life, and so those years too I began hearing from the Lord, and calling to religious life. And naturally went toward the Sisters of St. Francis here at Oldenburg.

Another big part of it then was that I had an aunt that was in this community too. So I didn't think of, I didn't think of what work I'd do in the community I only thought of getting my life to God in this way and so on. And following my aunt into this, into this community. So I that's that's how I got here, and then of course we were all teachers at that time so I went into teaching. I always always looking for a chance to be nurse to be into what wherever the need was, and so on. So um then there was September 8th, 1946, when I entered this community, and went on through my early early training and then I went into my first assignment was in Indianapolis, at St. Francis de Sales. I don't know that, how much that still exists but it's a it was a very special touch in there were a lot of poor people there too. That, that had attracted my attention different ways, you know. I can remember a little girl just girl I'm seeing in the classroom because she, her parents had left she and her brother I don't know what they did overnight, anyhow. She hadn't had any breakfast or anything, you know. Things like that were already, all ready in my experience as a real young, you know.

I had been asked to also play organ, but that was a need at that parish a call to the community. So I was assigned to play organ. I had six weeks lessons here, I knew the keyboard but that's that was it, you know. And was a classroom teacher then, plus an organist and that continued in my life. It was a wonderful, wonderful group of Sisters there, so it was a wonderful community life experience and so on. But I was I can remember when I first got there and the sister in charge of us heard me trying to play the organ, with trying to make my feet work. She told me I wasn't supposed I wasn't going to I was going to go to the choir and the practice organ every day, and not use my try to use my feet at Mass times until I until she recognized that I was ready to. So, that was a good help, or a better start, yeah. Then I went from there I went three years, 1953 years over at Holy Rosary. So that was seven years in in Indianapolis. That was the

different people, experience with the Italian people and it's another kind of a kind of a cultural experience working its way in there too.

So then I went to Evansville for five years, that's where I was when this letter arrived asking for volunteers to go to Papua New Guinea. Then all these things that had been happening through my life like the love of the nursing and and the music, and some experience with people of other cultures too, you know and so on. That all was leading tom, so I sent my letter in is as a lot of volunteers did. And then in the spring, that was that was right around the Easter time, so before it was before the end of the school year then I had a phone call from the Mother Superior telling me not to go back to Xavier. I had started on my masters by that time. Not to go back to save you but to come to Oldenburg and work in the infirmary, in the infirmary. I had let them know along the way I was interested in nursing but didn't get me into it. So that if I was being considered to go to as one to go to New Guinea but it wasn't final at all. So, I came on in to Oldenburg and worked in the infirmary here then and was I remember learning to give injections and things like that, and more familiar with with the nursing work which was again a preparation for this, and then. When the assignments were made in July my name was one of the four, so that's uh that's how that very brief, very brief story of how my life rolls along there. Many ways, so many many ways that the Lord was with me.

MEL: Do you remember why you applied to go to Papua New Guinea, or where you were in your life that you thought that was your calling? Because you had to write an essay, you said. Right?

SNM: Yeah, we wrote a letter. I guess an opening, or with the leadership in the community to kind of helping me to realize that that things other things in my experience in my life, led me to realize that that I did have have a desire to continue these various—to continue my life this way, you know. And was just was open to it and so on. That did that did happen at different things like mother, we did not have preconceived ideas about what Papua New Guinea was going to be, you know. We just but like the Mother Superior was looking for people who had had a little more flexible experience in living the community's life, in our rule and so on. So that we could adjust better with that that kind of thing, was also in there. I realized that afterwards, you know. So it's just it's a messages and signals are round and so on, all coming together there, sort of, so on. So that's my story of that of that part of it, to there.

Part II

MEL: It is August 24th, oh August 25th 2014. I am at the convent of the Sisters of Saint Francis in Oldenburg, Kentucky [Indiana]. This is Mary Ellen Lennon speaking again with Sister Noreen would you like to continue, Sister.

SNM: So, think we were to the place where we brought our letters of volunteering, it was the summer—but that was in the springtime of 1960 and we had the summer ahead of us. Our usual time to get our missioning appointments was in July. So when the we were together and the missioning happened, there were four of us then appointed to Papua New Guinea. And that was Sister Claver, Sister Annata, Sister Martine and myself. Sister Annata is now Sister Kate, and we of course praise God for that wonderful, thanked everybody, for that wonderful news on that day, so on. There's a lot of preparation starting then, all kinds of results, famous injections and everything you had when you were going to another country and so on.

There were Mother Cephas was in charge of us at the time, and she had this idea that we we should wear brown habits, because of the of the weather over there, Papua New Guinea. We were going into the mountains and on the island, in the in the the weather was a lot of, a lot of rain, daily rain practically, around midday and afternoon rains started. And so Mother Cephas thought we should have brown habits, so that was a big issue at the time, getting those habits made because we were going to leave late September, and that wasn't far away. So and then there was this thing of getting our trunks emptied of whatever and starting to fill them up with, with oh everything we can imagine that that we would need in—and then I guess we sent them then to the east, where the, we were going. We were requested and called to to join in them by the Capuchin priest, Franciscan priest from from the Pittsburgh Province, and so on. They took charge of sending those trunks over. Of course another part of our, of our history is I can't help it but mention it now of all those things that we had packed in those trunks we're lost when our house burned down four years later, so. But there were friends everywhere there right away helped get that—our needs taken care of.

We went with Mother Cephas always reminding us, you do what the bishop wants you to do, you do what what the need is and what what to do there we didn't have—we knew we were one of our big the big request was that we we joined the Franciscan Fathers there, in there their ministry with the people. Because women were needed in order to bring the women into more active roles in the, in the church, and in Christianity. And so we knew that we were needed as teachers to start with there, and and not a lot of what we did in the beginning and was well, through with that with that that desire, with that calling I should say.

So, late September we took off for Papua New Guinea, and we of course headed out the west coast and we had a night I guess in Honolulu, with some Franciscan Sisters at a hospital there where we stayed that night. Went on to Sydney the next, it was right away the next day. And then there was a Capuchin priest down there who had studied for the priesthood in the U.S. and knew the Capuchins that we were to be working with, and the Sisters there in the part of Sydney where he were his mother lived took us in for, they decided that we should stay there it was more than a week, something like that. So it, kind of familiar with what was available there in us in Sydney, Australia and so on. The mother of the this Capuchin priest had a or the family had a sheep business,

of course lamb, sheep were quite the special meat there and everything. But we weren't accustomed to it, but to be taking care of us feeding us taking care of us in such a special way, Mrs.—their family name was Bacon. Mrs. Bacon donated a half of a sheep yeah to the Sisters, and so we were having lamb like three meals a day. And we were being fed separately, so after the lamb was served to us then came our comments in our you know, it was give us quite a big big thing in our memory was this. And there was a persons who were the shipping agents for them for the mission and so that woman, Mrs. Bacon was her name, she I'm thinking what was it, anyhow um—she was gonna take us on a picnic so we could see the mountains around the rural area around Sydney. Oh good, we won't have lamb for once if she was gonna grill, well we were wrong. The sausages were lamb, too. So that was a big—.

Another little issue that I always remember from Sydney was their accent and their way of different maybe I don't know, whether everybody having been there with that have thought it the experience that as much. One example we always get we always remember is, I can't think of her first name. Anyhow she said, put your [caice] in the boot. Well what she meant was put your suitcase in the trunk of the car, so we learned what they called, the boot was it was the trunk and [caice] was your suitcase. Things like that were happening on to add to our adventures here in Australia.

But then after those days we finally were going to get to the mission which we were very anxious for by that time. So the capital city, we were headed of course to the island of Papua New Guinea north of Australia. So in those days we weren't on as fast a plane as you would be now, so it's a few hours up to Queensland and then onto onto the island north, on to Papua New Guinea. When we landed the Capuchin father who had come to Oldenburg begging for us to come to help was there to meet us at the capital city when we arrived. So it was only spring before, that Father Otmar and Brother Mark had knocked on the door here, asking that we join them and their mission in Papua New Guinea. And we were something like the seventy-fifth religious community he had approached asking to join, to join them. But our Reverend Mother and councilors were were ready then to take on a foreign mission, I think. Now the Church in Rome you know, realized that we needed to—America, us from this country needed to spread out more in and help to evangelize other peoples. And so we were our community was ready for that. And so it didn't take long for them to give a yes answer to the Father Otmar and Brother Mark at that time. So yeah, there was Father Otmar, not Brother—there in Port Moresby to greet us and to—.

I think one of the biggest issues during our a couple days there before we went actually into the mission was meeting some of the other Sisters who were on the island, that was, that was good for us that was and something that we really enjoyed, and so on, because they were the Sacred Heart Sisters who had always remain connected to us in some way. The National Papua New Guinea group of Sisters one of the early ones that established on the outskirts of the town, Sisters of Nazareth. And and they were quite involved in our ministry actually, came up to work with us in our area. And we were

headed through the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. It wasn't a country of its own then, it was just the territory of Papua New Guinea, I believe. I'm not so great at all those technical things.

So I don't remember why but there wasn't a regular passenger plane there to take us up into the mission. We ended up on a cargo plane with seats running down the side face with the back of the seats up against the side of the plane, and going down. That's the kind of plane that we boarded to go up to the eastern highlands, which was the main place where the larger plane could get into with an airport large enough, big enough, long enough to handle a bigger a bigger plane. And so, we went to Goroka, we stopped one place on the coast, and then went on inland to Goroka in the eastern highlands.

MEL: You had never been on an airplane before you boarded in Cincinnati, right? You had never been on an airplane before in your life?

SNM: No, I don't think so. Yeah, yes. So then after they maybe more than maybe a couple of days there we bought in another plane a little bit larger than our tiny little one engine mission plane that we had, that had its adventures too. But so then was our flight finally into the mission where we were going to be in it was Mendi in the southern highlands of Papua New Guinea. The whole island you know is one of the largest—one of the largest areas of all, and but Papua New Guinea was one half of that island, not the whole island. The other one was belonging to Indonesia. So we were finally then with a lot of excitement, we remember Father Otmar of course was with us, and then running from one window to the other saying, pointing out highlights on the way, and so on.

So we landed. The mission, our mission station is weak our mission station is we didn't call these towns in those days, this was a government station, we called it where we landed. And course a very short very small airstrip, and we then were taken down in jeep, probably of some kind a jeep or truck of some kind. We didn't have any cars, and to our mission station which was like one end of this government station. This land had been leased by the government from the, from the local people and then we were given that for that part of the land for our mission station. Before we got there the Capuchin Fathers that actually started a school with a the two fellows said to come up from the coast south of us, which was the diocese that we belonged to at that time, said we weren't a diocese yet. So the there were two fellows in a metal kind of building just a shell like of a building on the ground there with two classrooms.

And these fathers had gathered some boys together to start a school there, with these two boys from the coast. But they were, had only been like to something like third or fourth grade themselves. So something was started exactly, what we might call I don't know. They didn't have any knowledge or our books or anything that they could follow, and so on. So we got. They were there to greet us when we landed finally at our mission station of Mendi, At that time, Brother Claude the carpenter had aimed and worked as hard as possible to get our convent completed. But it wasn't finished, all the

bits and pieces of materials needed had to be flown in. And they just hadn't arrived and so Brother couldn't finish our house. So the Priest in the Prefect Apostolic who would finally be bishop, they moved out of their house and put the shower and toilet, and we always called the cargo shed, in the storage building, a little distance from their home. And moved out of their their home and gave their home to us. And they went to live down in the in this cargo shed. Bishop with them, and so that was—it was all in God's plan, too I think, because that created quite a relationship with us all, because they didn't have a kitchen, they had a what we called a cook boy, a boy they had trained to do something that I guess and to bake bread, that was always a special thing we had to have help with, getting our bread baked. We had a little one engine mission plane, and then they they could fly in the supply said we couldn't yet where we were, but we still had to make everything we needed ourselves. So with meals he stayed there and helped us somewhat, but then we prepared meals for ourselves and the Fathers. And the regular thing was they would take the meals over to their house, of course there would be occasions when we would eat together and so on.

But that was our beginning there as far as accommodation was concerned. Which was fine with us, we know we enough Fathers—.And that lasted till some months because they didn't have the flooring yet they couldn't get the flooring in. And so that we were still in there over Christmas, and into maybe something like April or March before the house could get finished and we could we could move over. But Fathers being very solicitous for us, and very very much aware of what we might we might need or might want or, our ministry was a big thing for them. So they would arrive at our door, Bishop, Father among different ones every day to see how we were doing, what was happening and so on.

Now from the beginning they had two girls girls maybe twelve, thirteen years old, who had been around a mission station a lot, one's father worked there, chopped the wood, pumped the water— we got our water off the roof but into a low tank which had to be pumped up into high tank to flow down into the house so that was hours of work daily. So this one girl who her name was Masami, became Marianne, she had been there on the mission station with her father, her mother had died when she was born. And her mother was dead by then, she might had a sister born after. Anyhow, she and another girl were there when we arrived, you can still see them standing on the porch and outside there, because Fathers had looked ahead and saw that they knew a little English by then, and so they were around regularly to be help with us in interpreting the language and so on. Because this was the language of people of their own, not not anything that that was written for learning, yet. So we did have that help, we did have Marianne and Clare there there was [Masami] and [Tiol] at that time and that was a big big help for us too.

So it wasn't long very short time when the Fathers showed quite a concern about our ministry. I think they felt they were they felt that we would have a strong need to get to work pretty quick. And probably was was true. So we headed toward toward teaching

right away, and that would mean that they would they must have been the second classroom must have been planned by then, it didn't take long to build them because they were just buildings on the ground. So the two classrooms that two boys from the coast and then from the coast had been in were taken over by Sister Martina and Sister Claver. And the other two teachers here you know and then Sister Annata and I began using the front room of our house as a place to gather some some girls in. Now this of course followed some ventures out into the villages to tell and tell the people that you know, it would be good if their daughters or boys and their little girls would have some education too, however we would try to get that message across. But in the beginning of course, Father Otmar would go out with us into the into the villages, which is—it was quite a venture for us, anything we did was quite a venture but we were young, we just we went along with the flow of things that was sure, and felt very blessed.

MEL: Do you remember how you felt going into the villages?

SNM: Well yes, yes I mean people were very friendly and very you know when we'd go into like Christmastime they always had a big same thing they called it a big sing-sing gathering of the people with their dancing in there in the center place of the government station. And we always said we were probably more of a spectacle to them than they were to us. There was one other woman, we were called Europeans there was one other European there who was the wife of the head person, I think he was called Bishop at that time either of the United Church, Methodist Church it was called then.

So there was one other white, one other European woman that they had been there, but then we then there was then this the four of us, you know. So uh, that the people I say were very friendly with us and so on, and and very welcoming when we'd go out into the villages. At that stage that was just visiting, we didn't you know we weren't staying at that time in the villages. But I can remember one incident we were out on our own by then going over to the villages it one off one the opposite end of the mission station—the government station where we were, and we had walked over there and and there was a stream there and we started must have been—it would've been like maybe early afternoon or right after right around the midday. And we were going to cross this stream which you can walk across at that stage and go on visiting some more people on the other side. And there was some children around that were saying something we couldn't understand them.

Until later on when there were children who had been in school around in those villages that news of English, it was quite a challenge to go out on our own but we went up this one and this time and we went on it we didn't think of what they might have been trying to tell us, but just we went on across this stream. And it wasn't long so the rains came and the stream rose, water rose and we couldn't get back again where, you know we're anything like that could happen to us because we were so little familiar with anything. But again, we were young and I guess we had to be somewhat adventurous so we

found ourselves in quite a predicament trying to get back. And now, we finally we finally had to climb some kind of a well mountainside, a hillside in the mountains oh it's just part of them our valley was five thousand, five hundred feet high. That was how the valley is where we had landed where we were living, where the mission was.

And so we were already at quite a height. So we, of course it was raining hard by then and in the ground was getting more slippery and so, but somehow we made it up this just up this hillside, mountainside. God found our way, people were guiding us on the way, but got we got our way back to the mission station somehow. But things like that happened. So we want to stop here for a few minutes?

Part III

SNM: I'm just remembering that often when we would venture out in those early days remember we had Marianne and Clare, available to go with us and help us. And that was quite important to us. Marianne was the type of person who learned well, learn quickly, and was to a stage where she was so far ahead of any other girls or women and that you know, we had that in the whole province in the whole province of southern highlands. So we sent her down to the coast, coastal place where which we were under officially from Rome, was new [Lae] Diocese they were straight south of us and on the coast. And the Sacred Heart Sisters had a school down there a grade school down there with boarding.

And so we sent Marianne down there to go ahead with her education because there was no opportunity for this in the southern highlands. And they had a high school, it's still well-known in Papua the capital city in Port Moresby a big high school, why can't I think of the name of that now. Anyhow, so from the grade school she in, sent her on to their high school in Port Moresby, and the capital city so she had her four years of high school.

The name of that school later, and then and then the government had a high school teachers training college in Goroka, that I spoke of before in the Eastern Highlands. And so that was her desire to become a teacher. So then she qualified to go into the high school teachers training in Goroka. And then came out as soon as she was always good in math, she taught math and English, in our high school, it's another chapter yet to come, but she that's just a story of how the Marianne got into little future about her.

And then as far as, back a little bit to our teaching, as as we brought in some women we kind of divided them into age groups as we said we meant to go to the village to kind of interest people and, beg to let their girls come in. And so Kate took the younger ones and I took the older ones and we would bring them into the front room of our house. And priests' friary, which was a big very large group and she could handle work with the younger ones at one end and I would work with the older ones. We developed our own

teaching methods as we had to as far as getting them. English was that was the language of the country but that would be coming into the language of the country. Another whole thing would be the pidgin English which was a more conversational language around. So but then, when the teachers are when Sister Martina and Sister Claver would let their children out of that classroom building was there the beginning, then Mr. Nada and I would take our children up into those classrooms, same classrooms so that they could sit down in a classroom atmosphere that we could relate more to them and so on.

A couple stories of what went on there, one of my most greatest memories is we must have had Marianne with me or Clare, I'm not sure, at the time in a classroom with— these were younger children though. And when I was in classroom at that time with some younger ones and we were making an effort to speak of Christianity of God, and I was making an effort and one child said yes, it in her own way, yes we know who you're talking about. The name is Lisa, which was so enlightening to know that that God is with us always, ever. And that they had come to a realization of that, knew that there had to be a supreme being, and they had already devised in their own language had a name for it. That was so special, you know. To me and in my memory for forever you know since since then yeah yeah.

But another story that happened, and that was very very early days of the classrooms. I was in the classroom at that time, with the older girls, and the few government officers that were around now governing the province it's like a small state whether you when they what get these government visitors from England or Australia or wherever sometimes with their wives, some they would look for us to entertain the wives while they took the men. They didn't know where to go, what to do. But then we had the supervisor of the schooling that was starting throughout the province, too. And this one time we tried to make something interesting you know in school or some way for them we'd give him a demonstration how we were teaching English, so when the school supervisor would bring a visitor around and we we would invite them to visit in the classroom. I was in this classroom and Mr. Bagley was his name, he came in with these visitors and I looked down at they were like women, because the older ones would come in at first from the village instead of the real little ones which we were aiming at.

And there she sat with her pet pig, cuddling her pet pig. I hadn't realized that, I would ask her name was [unintelligible] I remember, and I would have, I don't know what I would have asked her to do but anyhow, it was and I never did know how much they noticed it or if they did or never became an issue at the time. But I look down in there was {unintelligible} sitting in a desk by the desk cuddling up with her pet pig, so that was one of my one of my memories to that kind of day for us, in the beginning and so on.

So one more thing before we close off here. We started boarding students, we had to in the beginning because there were no schools out throughout this entire valley that we're talking about a large area with many many villages. And there was no opportunity for education except those who lived right beside us in the village right beside us or right

very close to us there. And so Fathers, Brothers got the dormitory building and then we started a big thing, dealing with all that that had to be done had to be experienced. At this time too, we had a special kind of help, when we had come through Garoka, on our way into the mission, the Sisters I think they were Sisters of Mercy from Australia the ones we stayed with overnight, maybe two nights there, they recognized that we would have to be having we would be boarding students. And we would run into a lot of issues that we didn't— So they offered to send a couple of young women over to join us in in our ministry there.

And also, with the baking and cooking and so on that we would we would meet. So they they did that we weren't there too long until they came. They sent two girls one, well they were young women really in their twenties or something. And and one was Veronica and one was Angus. Veronica got it, took over the supervising of the boarding for us. I mean, staying right there in this building with them and and supervising them. Under our supervision of course, the cleanliness in the meals and the sleeping and all that. And Agnes helped us with the baking of our bread, she came and helped us with some of the cooking in the baking, so that that we were freer to be out with the people in the classroom with the children. That was very much aware of the help that we had with them, and so many people ask, how on earth did you ever get along with with just going in like that? I know Father, the Father's did foresee some of that like I said, having Marianne and Clare there, and then Sisters offering these women and us. I'm sure with the advice of the Capuchins' go-ahead and send in these girls to help us and so on.

So that that was they didn't Veronica I think after a while when they would go back to visit her family had a marriage plan for her. Agnes stayed longer, and then we had by that time a woman from the village could come in. Her name was Laura, my baptism name. She came and started coming in and staying overnight with them. But we had a lot of issues, anyhow with the boarding but that was absolutely necessary.

And then just to go a little further once it just was all in little arts playing for us about the time that that the grade schools were being built then, that was late '60s, yeah maybe and into the seventies there were some grade schools being built out in the valley, farther out in the valley so that boarding was not an issue for some. And so with our boarding was not absolutely necessary for the younger girls.

And so, the—okay so, about that time the first high school started in Mendi, in our in our province, and the superintendent was quite friendly to us. There was were I don't know how many boys in it, and two girls. One of the girls lived with her parents on the government station, was from another province, had come in to help with the government departments. And the other was a local girl, and they tried keeping them up on the other mission the Methodist mission that that didn't work. So the first year that high school which was built on the mountain side up and the others into the government station, that high school was the first year we had these two girls the one needed help

with her boarding and so we were asked already that first year to take them in, to take her in on with our boarding that we had down on our mission station. So that started our the boarding school, boarding facility being needed then for another year. Well the second year, he asked one if one of our Sisters couldn't come to join the staff at the school. And they were getting in about about twenty girls then, and the way things working out with our ministries and so on, by that time we had two more mission stations started by the end of the '60s, I forget the exact dates in there. And so we were needed in different areas, and I wasn't needed anymore but at times Sister Annata was over charge of us. And so I was the one who went into the high school at that time. So there our boarding facility then must of still had some younger children, but there was an idea to take in high school of orders, yeah and I went on staff, at that same time. So, I think that's it, for today.

MEL: Thank you, Sister.

Part IV

MEL: This is Mary Ellen Lennon at the Convent of the Sisters of Saint Francis in Oldenburg, Indiana, here with Sister Noreen for our second part. Thank you.

SNM: Good morning. 'Till now I've spoken a lot about our happenings in the early years, leading a lot into our ministry of education, and of course that was with English second language, with a lot of experimenting with us and in learning. But many came to us and we were on our way. Of course with our special calling we knew from the beginning of being there. I mean not I shouldn't say mainly because there were too many and reasons why what the Lord called us, but greatly to help promote the equal opportunities for the women the girls, and the women too. So we did not go with a lot of preconceived ideas, we knew we weren't going to westernize them, that was a big thing. And so we were so so very much in in the Lord's hands, listening, following, just being led so clearly through the flow of of everything with God's loving us and leading us on the way.

One incident that happened was so powerful, just meant a lot to us. We didn't need this to know God was there with us, but but this really did happen. In the early years we were a prefecture, I don't know how these stages of growing into diocese, and that real a diocese, organized part of the church. But we there was a gathering when we were celebrating some part of this, and we had a lot of missionaries, priests, Sisters, foreigners plus a lot of local people. People from another diocese or two gathered and our means of providing meals to these people of course was limited, we had the local food that we could manage to to prepare somewhat. And then we were relying on our flour, our hundred weight bag of flour, and it had decreased and decreased, and little did we know that it was gonna be hard to get it at any time. But it was just then our hundred weight bag of flour was down to just a little bit in the in the drum, and our pilot had gone to our place where he could our small one engine plane could fly to on the

coast and tried there to get flour for us, even landed the plane halfway up from the coast to try to find the flour in that town. Still no flour, so we said, what are we gonna do, you know. So to each other so we just said, well we'll bake bread and when when it's gone it's the flour's gone and then we'll deal with that. But you know, that flour never decreased, actually it didn't and others remembered this, not just me. I guess we were so busy we just went on and and so grateful we couldn't quite believe it but it didn't, it just never decreased.

Again, knowing that the Lord was so much with us even in that kind of thing that we were facing so I just wanted to tell that little story of how very very much God was God was with us. So we were there, we were there too for the needs of the villagers around us. Getting to know them, we were always inviting them to come to us for whatever needs we could help provide for them. And so health care of course, was one of their needs and they realized that we could be of some assistance to them with this.

So, they would come to us with minor things and then we did have a there was a government hospital close by, I don't think that too many people over here would recognize it as a hospital but but there was some staff there, and we could take and help them out by taking them to the hospital and following up their stay there, their care there. And this was very, this is all health work and health ministry, had been a very part of my calling—for some years and so I was very pleased and very much ready to help where I could in this way. Also at that time, we were among people with leprosy. Leprosy was not under control at all yet, when we landed there in 1960. It was quite especially among certain families, certain villages, the village that our mission station's ground was on had a number of leprosy persons in that village. And we we became involved with with them and in the same way just how we could. And the World Leprosy Association was in there and they would come to our children in the school and inspect them constantly to see if they had any of that of the, well you could see it developing in parts of their bodies. And there was a what was called a non-contagious skin leprosy, and that well their dark skin you could you could see it. And they were always searching for that, and then they were very very active in getting the people into regular treatment. And by the time that I left, which was about thirty years later, leprosarium I was around were closing, and because of the constant care in in the eight posts out in the valleys too, in the mountains had trained workers to to see that they got their medication. They had a little book, it kept the account of their like the the aid workers would keep account of their treatments and so on.

And many then the leprosy and many of them became under control, and of course that made a big difference. Our local hospital had a, an area this was the first hospital very simple, had an area over the hill and down by the river where the leprosy persons were admitted there had had like a little village set up. And I love to go and visit them there. Even Brother Claude would get involved with me, even would take the truck down at nighttime and I don't understand they would get the electric power out of that truck and and show of some of our good news, the Bible film strips to those people down there.

So much was much was happening, and when the better hospital was built they just had a ward from them, we could still visit them, was not quite like the early days in their own setting that they had. But when I went back to visit years later, this lady was saying in her own language I didn't understand I kept hearing the word 'shoot' 'shoot' 'shoot'. And then I remembered there was a specialist, leprosy people had come into our the government hospital there for a while like that at some time, and I knew that made her helped her become acquainted with it and helped her to get her first pair of shoes on her, what was left over of her feet. And and so that was a nice memory that time. She remembered that it was time to tell me where she got her, how she got to know about the first shoes that she had.

So um we can see like that told story Brother showing the good news filmstrips in the evening, and so evangelization was was blossoming all along. Of course by the time we got there the Capuchin priest brothers have had already been gathering and inviting the local villagers to our worship and so on to Mass and other services, and been very active in the training and educating the catechist in those who wanted it and enough of our Catholic religion so that they could teach people in their own in their own language that made such a difference. And that's we have special training schools now there but in those days that was depended on the original missionaries coming in there. Of course, they didn't know about Jesus but they did know about God, I couldn't remember I can remember one time in early days in the classroom doing best we could with difference in languages and so on. And of course the children were learning some English at the language of the country must become English, since they were part of the British Empire, British Commonwealth. So, but one time I was trying to give them some idea of God and all that God was and is and so on. And one of the little fellows maybe it was a girl, popped up and said, we know we know his name is Lisa. So they they had known that there was, there is, a Supreme Being they and they had they had a name for him in their own language by the way many many languages on the island, of course.

So we were very much a part of the evangelization to in however, again however God was leading us. We were in fairly early years we were appreciating that there is there was, there is so much good in their own culture even though it's so different, and that there there were cultural things that could be brought into the celebration of the Eucharist and the Mass and so on.

In in ways that they could could become more a part of instead of just onlookers because we you know so much was of God. We never knew how how it was or how that they could become such a part of the church and how they could, because when you're working with somebody of a different language it's not clear how much in what way and how they are absorbing what we are getting to them, and so on. So they would play something like guitars in the village and then we couldn't we invited them to bring that into into our Mass and our worship and so on. And different times we'd have Mass in the local language, the priest of course had to learn that language, where we were dealing more in teaching them the English and so on. But the priests had to because of the

sacraments and so on they needed to go. So they could work at all of this and be involved in in different ways together, we were one happy family and together we were really able to to gratefully continuing whatever it is that that that the Lord was and the Lord was calling us to.

Another we—I worked a lot with the youth and the youth and most of my time was spent in Mendi in the southern highlands, there and when I went that last six years to another mission station there to the young youth groups, teenagers and older had realized how dramatizing the scripture the Sunday gospel could be so important to the people there, that adults, their parents, their grandparents, their aunts and uncles and their extended families how they could could learn through dramatizing the scriptures and so on. So that was a way in which the youth with music and with that and then sometimes and their local drum could be brought into the service, sometimes their local dances could be brought into like bringing up the offertory presentation of the gifts and things like that, in processions we would in different ways, so that the evangelization was blossoming in those days, and so on.

And so it gave an opening in a way again for the youth and the older people to to become the church to become theirs, not just ours, but their's too. At the same time, another very important part of development of church was when young women began after observing our life the life of religious women, our community life, they began to show interest in joining. And joining us, not necessarily doing this but in and living the same kind of dedicated life to Jesus.

And it was it was very clear that God was calling was calling them, too. And so gradually, they began to to make known their desire and their feeling of a call into religious life. And so in in working with and and a lot of thought and prayer with our bishop, he decided to that he would start a new congregation. There were five congregations of Sisters from overseas, us being the first there by then. And so he had a meeting of all the Sisters he asked that.

Part V

MEL: September 29th, 2014, with Sister Noreen.

SNM: Going back to my experience with leprous people, I have a very strong feeling about what we can name these people according to their illness, according to their physical condition. You know, I don't I can't call these people suffering from leprosy I can't call them lepers. To me, that's calling the person by the name of the illness, and just for an example we don't we don't do that we don't call persons with cancer we don't call them cancers, and so or persons with Parkinson's we don't call them by the name of another sickness.

And so it's a very strong feeling of mine not to call people with leprosy lepers. I it's so it's so easy to speak of them as persons with leprosy or leprous persons. I've searched the scripture, and you do find that I have I think when I did when I did look in scriptures to see how they was written, one time I did find it saying persons it was leprosy, but it's not common. And I just like to take opportunity to if any anybody that has the occasion to speak of these people that they might also call them persons with leprosy. They are they are persons, they are so very special.

So, I think that I'm often, I see pictures of two of them are three of them that I have knew of and had followed through some years, so they're still very much in my thoughts and prayers.

So, as a church was blossoming, as people became more and more a part of the church and as the church became more and more theirs, young women began to want to enter the kind of life that was dedicated completely to service in a church. And they they would come to us, and say that they wanted to live religious life as they saw us living, religious life in community. And our Bishop was a very good very listener, very interested very much considering the Lord calling us in another way, one more way, by many. And after some years of guiding these women and listening to them and letting them be more evolved and bringing them together to experience the community living in our way and so on. The bishop decided that he wanted to start a new congregation of local religious women, and there are five congregations from overseas we were the first five different congregations of Sisters from Australia, England, Ireland, Switzerland where else besides in the United States.

And then and so they were gathered as a group and the bishop asked them all to join in promoting one new congregation, and they opened up the meeting to suggestions by the Sisters' President, and our Sister Annata, now Kate was requested, was chosen to become the first leader or the director of the of these young women with this at that time. So the decision was made and various steps taken toward how this could all happen. And I'm, my role in that was of promotion. At that time I was teaching in the local high school, was among teenagers besides a youth work in the parish. And I—there were a number of ways in which we could bring these women together until that time came, when they were gathered by Sister Kate, into their first community experience. And I kept promoting as I could along the way go back to a place when I also got involved in gathering the girls and they were writing in and and requesting to become to join our—to become Sisters, join their new congregation. Until we would at first bring these girls in together or at that time bring these girls in, and have them with in a group for a week, and different Sisters in the diocese would come and give a little bit of courses like women in the church, and what it means to hear God's calling, and so on.

And that was my role in promoting them. And then as things develop and so on, when women, girls showed more and more interest, then we would go out to the Franciscan Sisters of Mary then were were had begun, and we would go out into the village to meet their families and to speak with them staying in the village with them. And they of course they weren't driving yet so I was then I was the driver in our jeep. We would go out in various and into other dioceses also to visit the people in the villages. This gave us of course a lot of experiences out on the roads and in the mountains going into quite a different all kinds of different areas in the mountains.

And lots of lots of experiences with the people living and getting to know them better, and it was a chance for the Franciscan Sisters of Mary to get much much-needed acquaintance with the families too, and to get to know the girls' backgrounds and so on. So that that too was was my was part of my role at the time. And this continued for quite a few years, until the Sisters themselves could take over that that over in for their own community.

MEL: Could you talk more about those young women you went out to visit their families? What was it like to try to explain to their parents about what this new life these women wanted, these young girls wanted? Could you talk about that a little bit, Sister? Or not, I just mean you would you would go to visit the families and you would try to explain to the families. Were the families excited that their girls were becoming Sisters, or no?

SNM: No no the girls, it was not easy for a family to promote their girls to joining communities, because the girls brought in a bride price, and that was something the family, of course in the early days of tribal fighting and so much, the more important thing was was the men in the line, in the line in the family because they needed more men to defend themselves in tribal fighting and so on. But on the other hand, the girls brought in the bride price and so on, so that the families were not we're not that willing, so we needed the Sisters themselves would do this talking to the families, mainly because it was their responsibility really to help them to understand that this was a vital part of the development of the church. And that their girls were wanting to follow a call that they were hearing from the from the—that God to see. They did believe in God and so they that was a our our role when we were in the villages with the people, was to to help them to understand that it was like a giving of the family to the church, when it was time for them to make their first vows and promises and that would be done in the village with the village people present too. That was the director the community's responsibility, but they would go into the village and have the people present when part of this. There would also be the big celebration, too, but previous to that they there would be all this that we tried to help the families to understand that this was a real commitment and so on. So those are the things that we we were trying to do get again.

When the Sisters were with their own language group if it was someone from their own their language area, that was a big big plus because they could really speak to the people in their own language and so on. It was, so when we went out to visit the families

we would make sure it was limited to Sisters that would be with us and—. And so we would if there was a sister of the same language group we would make sure that sister was along so that she could she could speak with the families and help them to understand, what our role of their daughter would be for them, that it was a lifetime commitment so on.

Those were some of the things that what happened besides the landslide when you got the round the corner, and something like that. So that was a lot of miles to cover at times, too, and so on. Once I drove across a cable bridge across a little stream, and I didn't know it was there of course. And I was in on it, and across it going across it, before I realized that it was a swinging bridge and I went on up the mountain we were visiting a mission station there we were visiting a pastor at that time, where the girls had written in just to get acquainted with it with that village area, and the church and the girls themselves. I was so nervous knowing what I had to cross when I got back that I could hardly stay there, until I got on, little surprises like that one or along the way, of course, yes.

So I spoke of language it was in the evangelization of teaching and so on of the life of Jesus and all this, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, as well I said local villagers and so on and local people. Once they could be instructed and learn and experience it is such a big difference in us who don't have the same, didn't have the same kind of experience, the same kind of life experience and the same kind of understanding of things through who we were. That they could be the ones instructing the people and and leading them and so on. One of the local leaders that came forward in the station of Mendi where I was, for thirty, twenty, twenty-two, twenty-three of the years I guess, was Xavier, was his name and he just became such a great leader. And he is still leading the youth in the parish today, yes.

So things have changed in the country now, but some of the same ones some of the girls now in are strong leaders and a group of women in the church, and so on. So things do still continue they didn't end when we left, not at all. It was, it was what we were there for, we knew from the beginning that we were there to bring ourselves out of our town, and that was very much a part of everything and so on. The Franciscan Sisters of Mary now are those like entering the community later are much are more educated, some are now have to the point where they could do the teacher training course. And so they're teaching several of them teaching in the grade schools, some have gone into health ministry where the sister when the Sisters from Switzerland had been so strong in that ministry and this is has the training there for that.

And so other of our Sisters were directly involved in those ministries of the teacher training, and so on. And so much more. So in those early years I, 1968, the government started building the first high school in our province, and we had, it functioned with I don't remember a number of men no, more boys some were men because they started school some of them so much older and just two girls, one of the family in town was a government worker in the province and the local girl were the only two that were in

school that year. And by the end of the year we had asked her name that local girl was Monica, we were asked to keep, to board her because the first arrangement didn't work out. The school did not have a girls' dormitory at all to start with, they had a boys dormitory, we didn't have a girls, and it needed to be boarding because it was the only high school in the whole province. And so the superintendent of education in the province, whatever his title was, asked if one of our Sisters would go on the staff then the second year, and it was myself.

So I, and that by that time but that year that they had that second year they had twenty girls enrolled, something—. So part of that agreement was that we could board those girls too. You could walk, the government station and our mission station were side-by-side in the ground, and you could you could walk that from that mission station to the high school which was on the mountainside up where the other across the government station, and up on the mountainside, there. And I drove the truck the Capuchins got a truck that I could, Toyota truck, and Brother put seats in the back of it.

Our school years started first of February or late January, and we were in the southern hemisphere, and so I started that year in Mendi High School with the twenty girls boarding with us at the mission station. And we things work things worked out well for us, it was very primitive in a lot of—I taught English, social studies, home-ec, a guidance, I was in charge of some of those departments. A I, mean like the first year we had we didn't we had a little hand sewing machine and it was for the home-ec and it was we carried it from the little building there to finally, the men's, the boys, whole class where they were learning something about carpentry, they built us a little bush house. And we had a place to put the little sewing machine and and—. The girls we had our breakfast before we went those who were riding in the truck with me, they stayed back and cleaned up from breakfast and so on, while the other half of them got on their way walking. And so things worked out, that went on for three years, until they finally completed the girls dormitory. And I remember the girls saying you know, the boys didn't like them being around that much or they didn't like them being in the mess hall and all meals and so on. I remember saying just do what you have to do, we'll take care of it and so on. So there was a lot to do with the promotion of the of the girls being in education there too. But it was it was, I stayed in Mendi High School for twelve years, and continued as much as I could with the life of the parish at the same time. I was also in charge of health care of the students at the high school, so that took my time. I liked that better than that then the classroom teaching.

So I we had a couple very serious illnesses, we we lost one girl, she had encephalitis we didn't realize it which left to put her into a coma, like. And between the fathers on, fathers and brothers on the mission station, well there was three men, they had on the staff at Mendi High School, they kept Nancy alive for several days in the coma, with a on a hand pump, that's a hand pump, but I want to say—breathing for her, day and night for several days just taking turns with that hand pump to keep her breathing until they could decide whether she was going to come back or not. After several days they

decided to take, just discontinue that ventilator. So, that was one experience with the healthcare.

We had opportunity to, there was an aid post so we have boys and girls trained to see that the children before I got up there for the first class I didn't stay at the high school, and I continued living at the mission station. But they I could train some of the boys and girls who were interested, to see the students take care of sores or whatever, different things than see them. And when I arrived and then they would have them—waiting for me something serious or something. Of course I had my teaching periods and periods off then I could take care of them or run them down to the hospital, or whatever. So that went on during like my twelve years there. And of course a lot of staff relations, is staffers from mostly Australians and English, some from Canada, Scotland, they were from different countries coming in there to staff the school until Monica finished the four year high school, and then went off to high school teacher training, there was one in the country. And she qualified for the high school teacher training. And she did that and came back to Mendi High School. So there was a teaching position for her there and worked along with the different departments. I remember she was very interested in guidance actually, actually in the end she became the national guidance officer for the education system. A lot of our students our students were in Parliament it the end, in the National Parliament in the end and so on. They and appeared in the Church in a lot of ways too, Monica's my example of working my way out of a job too, because Monica when she was eligible applied for the position I had and not to get her eligibility that's the way that system went. She had had to be approved for the that position, she did not apply particularly for my position, but but I knew unless I left she wouldn't get on her way. And so I am that was the end of the high school teaching for me, Monica was the one who took over my position. So that actually was our egg, to work ourselves out of the job we were working, and so that's that's how we went from one one calling to another, and so on.

All the time again listening to the Lord what he's saying what he's what he's wanting us to do. My last six years I went to another station where the Motherhouse other Franciscan Sisters of Mary was. And that was full-time working with them and with the parish youth and [unintelligible] there too that was in [unintelligible]. I was there from '83 to '89 when I came home, having having gained so much from the Papua New Guineans in what they shared and how they how we how we were. We're part of how they took us in, and I think you know with my experience at Malaysia later, and they know you love them, and believe in them. You're in, you know. That's what it's not always so much of what you could do for them but but they sense that how much you appreciate them too, and so on.

I felt that actually what happened was it not it really, a couple of years before, my sister, a letter came from my sister which was afraid most unusual, because mom was still living and them them keeping connections. And my sister was saying, would you consider staying home, because she said, mom and dad can't bear seeing you go back

again. So that led me to—that was really what led me to coming on back to the States. Mom and Dad were in their nineties at the time, and that's what led me coming on back. I thought that I would perhaps get back again, but and I wasn't gonna leave my mom. Dad died after a few years and Mom lived a long time yet. I couldn't leave her so. So that was I knew the Lord wanted me in those years. So there's lots more to tell, but I think that's all for right now.