ABSTRACT:
Dr. Roger A. Fortin continues in a long and distinguished career at Xavier University. He is an accomplished scholar, teacher, and writer. He has served Xavier University in various administrative positions, including those as Chair of the History Department, Dean of Edgecliff College of Xavier University, Interim Director of the McDonald Library, Associate Academic Vice President and lastly as the Academic Vice President and Provost.

Upon his stepping down from his position as Academic Vice President and Provost Dr. Fortin graciously agreed to be interviewed concerning his years at the University. In this conversation he imparts both personal information and his perspective upon the developments at Xavier over the years. Some topics include campus life during the turbulent 1960’s, the acquisition of the Edgecliff College campus, campus administration following the dismissal of Xavier President Fr. Charles Currie, S.J., the development of the office of Provost at Xavier University, critical historical Xavier institutional moments, and various influential Xavier administrators, teachers, and benefactors. Nearing the end of the interview he offers his perspective on Xavier in the future.

Dr. Fortin’s publications include To See Great Wonders, a history published for the 175th Anniversary of Xavier University and Faith and Action: a History of the Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821-1996.
>>Fr. Kennealy: Good morning. My name is Father Tom Kennealy. I'm the archivist here at Xavier University. Today is Tuesday, April 17, 2012. I'm seated here in the Brueggeman Center on the Xavier campus with Dr. Roger A. Fortin, Professor of History and the former Academic Vice President and Provost to Xavier. Dr. Fortin has graciously agreed to be interviewed this morning for Xavier's archival collection of oral histories. First of all, Dr. Fortin, welcome, and thanks for your willingness to share with us your many memories of Xavier and your long association with the school. Let me begin at the beginning by asking you some questions about your life before Xavier. Maybe start with first of all where were you born and raised?
Dr. Fortin: I was born in Lewiston, Maine, and grew up there in a French-speaking family and French was my first language.

Fr. Kennealy: Oh, would you like to say something in French for us this morning?

Dr. Fortin: No, je parle en anglais. (translation: “I am speaking English.”)

Fr. Kennealy: We'll do it completely in English, good. So, you were born in Lewiston. Tell us about your family, your parents, your siblings.

Dr. Fortin: Yeah, my mother and father went to grade school. My father to the sixth grade, my mother to the fourth grade. I have a brother and a sister, neither one went to -- my sister did not go to high school. The family -- Lewiston-- it's kind of a textile mill community, so the families were prepared to go to work in textile. And so the idea of going to college was in nobody's mind.

Fr. Kennealy: Well where did you attend grade school and high school then? [01:39]

Dr. Fortin: Grade school was Saint Pierre et Saint Paul, or now we say Saint Peter and Paul Elementary School. And I went to a high school which was bilingual, St. Dominic High School and that's where I was introduced to English.

Fr. Kennealy: Good. Well, obviously then your family is French.

Dr. Fortin: Um-hmm.

Fr. Kennealy: On both sides?

Dr. Fortin: Both sides.

Fr. Kennealy: Both sides. And interesting history too, haven't you traced some of your family roots?

Dr. Fortin: That's right, I can trace them to the 1570's. They grew up in a community -- my 11th grade grandfather lived in a community about oh, 40, 50 miles outside Paris.

Fr. Kennealy: Outside of Paris?

Dr. Fortin: Right. And then my 10th grade grandfather moved to Canada, Quebec, and the family eventually went to Lewiston, Maine.

Fr. Kennealy: Yes, and settled down there and got into the textile business in one form or another. Okay. Where did you do your undergraduate work then?

Dr. Fortin: Attended St. Francis College in Biddeford, Maine. It is now known as University of New England. So I attended a college taught by the Franciscans. I had just left
Saint Dominic High School taught by the Dominicans, but I knew there was some light at the end of the tunnel. That eventually I would be with[0:00 the Society of Jesus. [02:35]

>> Fr. Kennealy: Jesus, oh, yes, that rounded things off.

>> Dr. Fortin: It did.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And what did you major in as an undergrad?

>> Dr. Fortin: I majored in history. And until about my junior year I was convinced that I would be going to law school, but then I met this history professor who was very good. And we developed a friendship and began to enjoy studying history. [03:00]

>> Fr. Kennealy: Why American history in particular?

>> Dr. Fortin: Good question, well he was an American historian.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Okay, all right.

>> Dr. Fortin: That might have been the reason.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And then you went on of course to do your doctoral studies. And where did you do those?

>> Dr. Fortin: Before I went onto do my doctoral study I went to the University of New Hampshire to get my Master's degree in history. And then I had to -- I applied to a doctoral school program and I had two choices: Georgetown or Lehigh University.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Oh.

>> Dr. Fortin: And I chose Lehigh because it gave me full tuition remission and also a graduate assistanship, and more importantly, a Pulitzer Prize winner in history was a faculty member at Lehigh. So I thought, "Gee, I could study under him." And to show you how smart I was, I didn't realize it until I got on campus, that he had retired 15 years earlier, and he was then in his early 90’s.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Oh, my.

>> Dr. Fortin: -- but he still had an office in the archives. And when he learned that I had gone to Lehigh to study under him he did allow me to meet with him regularly every week. And he mentored me which was a tremendous --

>> Fr. Kennealy: So you did benefit?
>> Dr. Fortin: I did benefit. [04:30]

>> Fr. Kennealy: Where is Lehigh now?

>> Dr. Fortin: In Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Pennsylvania, okay. And you got your doctorate from that school there. How did you meet your wife Janet?

>> Dr. Fortin: We met at St. Francis College.

>> Fr. Kennealy: While you were an undergrad then?

>> Dr. Fortin: Right. I was a junior in the college and she was going to college in Boston, Massachusetts, and she went to -- to work at St. Francis in the summer.

>> Fr. Kennealy: I see.

>> Dr. Fortin: To develop some skills. And while there I was a Vice President of the student body and I happened to run into her. We didn't speak, but later on she came back on campus in early October and she decided she and two of her girlfriends decided to take three boys out to go out for them to a movie. And that's how we met.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And that's how you met.

>> Dr. Fortin: It was a blind date. Yes. And then -- [05:27]

>> Dr. Fortin: And a year later to the date, we met on October 14, 1960, and we were married October 14, 1961.

>> Fr. Kennealy: _ A year later. And where were you married?

>> Dr. Fortin: In Wells, Maine.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Wells, Maine, okay.

>> Dr. Fortin: A community just outside Kennebunkport.

>> Fr. Kennealy: So then of course you have a family as well. Want to talk about the family? [05:47]

>> Dr. Fortin: Well, we've had eight children. Our oldest, Tom, died this past year and our first daughter, Christine, died of sudden infant death, so we have six children living. Two -- the two oldest boys now -- two boys are in Seattle working at Microsoft. We have a boy that's in town working at a financial firm. We have a daughter
teaching school. We have one who helps run a business. And our youngest is in the second year of his doctoral program in neuroscience.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Nice. So no historians in the family though?

>> Dr. Fortin: No historians

>> Fr. Kennealy: Oh, yes, so the tradition is broken.

>> Dr. Fortin: Right

>> Fr. Kennealy: But who knows, maybe someone will pick it up in the near future.

>> Dr. Fortin: Maybe some grandchild. [06:30]

>> Fr. Kennealy: Then you came to Xavier in 1966. Tell us about that. How did that come about?

>> Dr. Fortin: Well, I had completed my course work at Lehigh and --

>> Fr. Kennealy: The doctorate dissertation?

>> Dr. Fortin: No, I had to begin writing my dissertation. In those days it was more common for a student in a graduate program to try to find a job and write a dissertation while doing his job. So what I did was I applied to several schools. Two thought that they might be interested in me. One was Texas A & M, and the other one was Xavier.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Um-hmm.

>> Dr. Fortin: And of course you know the distance between those schools.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Yes, quite a distance.

>> Dr. Fortin: And we grew up in Maine, so... But there was also a history conference that just so happened there was an American historical conference in Cincinnati that spring. So I was able to go to the conference and also visit the university and I met the chair of the department, Paul Simon.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Paul Simon, oh, yes.

>> Dr. Fortin: And they offered me the position.

>> Fr. Kennealy: So Paul was obviously very instrumental in hiring you.

>> Dr. Fortin: Yes, he was.
>> Fr. Kennealy: He was chair of the department. Who was the dean of faculty? [07:40]

>> Dr. Fortin: At the time I believe it was --

>> Fr. Kennealy: Jeremiah?

>> Dr. Fortin: Yeah, I think so, I think it was Jeremiah O’Callahan, but I think Malone is the one is the one that I really spoke more with.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Oh, and he would have been the associate dean at that time. Yes. Yes, that's right. I think that's right and I think O’Callahan was dean, later became Academic Vice President and John Felten succeeded him. Yeah. And tell us about Xavier. What were your first impressions when you came here? [08:10]

>> Dr. Fortin: Well, my very, very first impression is one that I'll always remember. I recall arriving in Cincinnati, my wife and I and two boys, and we stayed at a motel until we found a place to live. And I thought, "well I'll go to the campus and I'll go to the library." And I went there and I had Bermuda shorts on. And when I walked inside the library --

>> Fr. Kennealy: That was the old Schmidt library or was that the new one?

>> Dr. Fortin: It was the new one. Al Worst was the librarian.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Oh, Al Worst, okay.

>> Dr. Fortin: And he saw me walk in and he told me to get out. I could not walk in the library wearing Bermuda shorts.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And you were thrown out?

>> Dr. Fortin: I was thrown out.

>> Fr. Kennealy: (laughs)

>> Dr. Fortin: So I went back to the motel, changed my clothes, came back. So those were very different days.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Yes, yes.

>> Dr. Fortin: But other than that I was so happy to be here. And of course at that time, you recall, the campus had a -- of course, it is much more expansive now, but the buildings on the strip were relatively new, you know. In other words, if you are thinking of McDonald Library-- you had Alter Hall, and you had the University Center.
Dr. Fortin: It had just opened. Yes. So at the time it seemed like, you know, the place was on the move.

Fr. Kennealy: And it was. Who were some of your colleagues at that time? Both in the department and elsewhere in campus, people you remember?

Dr. Fortin: Well, I would say the -- in the Department of History you had Ed Goodman who taught history, you had Paul Simon obviously. You also had a fellow by the name of Richard Meister who left a year later.


Dr. Fortin: And of course Ernie Fontana arrived the same year I did in the Department of English.

Fr. Kennealy: Um-hmm. [09:56]

Dr. Fortin: But then over time you met scores of people. There were Chuck Cusick who was Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences later…--

Fr. Kennealy: Um-hmm, Dr. Charles Cusick, biologist, yes.

Dr. Fortin: I mean I could give you dozens of names of people who were just very helpful in making you feel good on campus.

Fr. Kennealy: Um-hmm. You came to Xavier in ’66, and of course those were very turbulent years in the country, all the rioting in many cities and campuses in particular were in turmoil because first of all of the civil rights movement, and all of the issues pertaining to the anti-Vietnam War. Very, very difficult trying times for campuses. What was Xavier's campus like?

Dr. Fortin: It was turbulent.

Fr. Kennealy: Turbulent, um-hmm.

Dr. Fortin: And in some ways I think individuals like Fontana, Fortin, and others were sympathetic to the youth unrest movement. We thought that they should feel free to always question the rationality of everything, but to do so in a civil way. So, yeah, you had students who protested against the war in Vietnam, but you also had as large a number of students who were concerned about the dishonor we were giving to the institution and also to our country by protesting against the war in Vietnam. So you had counter protesters as well.

Fr. Kennealy: Um-hmm, that's true. [11:18]
Dr. Fortin: But as it so happened student body, the student council, as well as the editorial board of Xavier Newswire were against the war in Vietnam. So they had more press, more coverage. And some of the students would go to places like New York, Washington D.C., to protest. But on campus you would have now and then protestors and counter protestors challenging one another, but there was no brawl or anything like that, but they would generate a great deal of attention and would get coverage in the newspapers obviously. The big moment came I think in '69 when the students wanted for the university to cancel classes for one day and have a twenty hour vigil. And President O'Connor who said that he felt that there should be free dialogue on campus, and he gave permission. Well that got some immediate reaction from some alumni, they thought that this was not right and so forth. But the Cincinnati Enquirer wrote a very, very impressive editorial pointing out that Xavier conducted itself in a very intelligent manner. And the press coverage turned out to be very positive about it. There was also another incident when there was going to be a graduation and you had at that time a special ceremony in the football field for the ROTC students. And this was about the time of the Kent state incident in 1970.

Fr. Kennealy: Oh, and there was a lot of anti-ROTC sentiment at the time because of the anti-war movement, yes, yes. [12:50]

Dr. Fortin: Right, exactly. And so it appeared like there were going to be students who were going to protest in a violent way at the celebration.

Fr. Kennealy: That was the commissioning maybe at the end of the school year, commissioning of the ROTC officers.

Dr. Fortin: Right, and they did it outside in the football field. So what happened is that Father O'Connor called a meeting of several administrators and I was invited as a junior faculty member to join them at the table. And this was in the University Center. And the reason I was advised, I had written a few articles and I had given a few addresses on social unrest in America so they thought I probably understood the youth mentality and so forth. And of course I pretended that I did as well. And so we met and I was so impressed with Father O'Connor because the majority of the people in the room were saying we should not cancel the event. And Paul O'Connor said, "we will because I don't want to create any problems for the families who come here, for the children and others, we will cancel the event." And he handled it in such a manner that everybody of course went along with it and that was a pretty interesting moment. But what was amusing was that he also said at the end, "it's not so much that I'm concerned about the students on campus creating violence but students from UC and elsewhere could come." Because
there had been violent demonstrations on both the UC and Miami campuses.

[14:19]

>> Fr. Kennealy: Yes, there had been quite a bit of violence on the various campuses here and elsewhere, and of course the Kent state shooting took place I think that very year. Yes. That was the time too with -- we would hear the statement, "young people don't trust anybody who is 30 or older." Remember that?

>> Dr. Fortin: Oh, yeah, there was a period you de-sanctified authority.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Yes, that's right, authority, that's right. When did you get tenure then, Roger?

>> Dr. Fortin: The year '71-'72.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And of course taught in the History Department. Any particular courses that were your favorites of those that you taught? Things that you particularly enjoyed or classes you particularly enjoyed?

>> Dr. Fortin: Well I always enjoyed U.S. Intellectual History, Study of the American Character, the American Revolution, but most importantly I always enjoyed and I will continue to do this, teach U.S. History to first year students.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Teaching the freshmen?

>> Dr. Fortin: Yep, I enjoy that.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And the introductory survey courses, yes. And you'll be going back to that this year.

>> Dr. Fortin: Right. Um-hmm.

>> Fr. Kennealy: How did you get into administration then? That happened relatively early, didn’t it? [15:25]

>> Dr. Fortin: Well, it did. About a year and a half to two years after I received tenure a Jesuit by the name of Father Frank Brennan invited me --

>> Fr. Kennealy: Who was Academic Vice President at that time…

>> Dr. Fortin: He was Academic Vice President, and he invited me to join him in the office as an assistant to the office. My position could have been called assistant to the Academic Vice President. And my job was to figure out ways of encouraging faculty to become more involved in faculty development and also probably write grants and the like. And so it was “learn as you go” type of thing. Now he had come to Xavier from St. Louis. So at St. Louis University obviously they had a faculty development office where he saw a lot of this going on, so he was trying
to begin building it here. And he thought if there was any hope of the university being able to get faculty to become more engaged in research and develop grant proposals they would have to apply for maybe three hour reduction in teaching, so there would be a process. So I was asked to kind of work on that.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And that's how you got into administration. And what administrative positions have you held over the years? Because I know there were several of them.

[16:40]

>> Dr. Fortin: Right, Assistant to the Academic Vice President, I became Associate Academic Vice President, and I also became Interim Director of the Library in 1979.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Oh.

>> Dr. Fortin: And then in 1980…

>> Fr. Kennealy: Did you allow people to come in wearing shorts or were they thrown out?

>> Dr. Fortin: Why, absolutely. Absolutely. Well that had changed, you know the dress code changed in the ’60s. Some interesting results that occurred in the ’60s, but late ’60s of change. But, I'll always remember an incident that occurred though in 1979 when I became Interim Director of the Library. Stan Hedeen who is a faculty member at Xavier in the Department of Biology at the time and a close colleague, as a matter of fact he and another faculty member in philosophy and I team taught a course together, the three of us, and we were very close. But he was on the Faculty Committee. So he wrote this strong letter to me pointing out what qualifications did I have to serve as Interim Director of the Library? So I wrote back to him and said, "well I'll learn as I go. I'm only here as a temporary basis," and so on. But a lot of -- we were good friends but he thought, "what qualification... " and I also I come to find out that because he and others were good friends of the person who had been director of the library who had been removed there was a lot --

>> Fr. Kennealy: Oh, I see, that was a somewhat behind the whole thing. There was agenda there.

>> Dr. Fortin: Right-- there was…

>> Fr. Kennealy: So you were Associate Academic Vice President.

>> Dr. Fortin: And Interim Director of the Library.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Interim Director of the Library. [18:15]

>> Dr. Fortin: And the following year is when Xavier bought the Edgecliff College.

Dr. Fortin: 1980, July 1, 1980, and I was asked to be the dean at the college and would I be there for three to four years, which meant that the college was only ten minutes away, so it would mean that would be my home base and I would come on campus for regular meetings and so on.

Fr. Kennealy: Now the purchase, and Xavier purchased Edgecliff, we did not merge with Edgecliff and I recall.

Dr. Fortin: Correct...right.

Fr. Kennealy: That turned out to be very controversial. I don't know that we anticipated that when we became involved in the negotiation. Can you tell us about the controversy over the whole thing? What was that all about?

Dr. Fortin: I think to begin with the university's endowment has always been fairly small.

Fr. Kennealy: Ours?

Dr. Fortin: Yes, our endowment is fairly small, so the idea of agreeing to buy a piece of property ten miles away was among the faculty very troublesome. The Board of Trustees decided not to have an outright purchase in 1980, they decided to, again because of the monetary investment, decided have an option to buy it at the end of three years. And then in 1973 it did exercise that option. [Note: Dr. Fortin probably meant '1983' here (Xavier University Archives)] But then it sold the property in 1986 or '87, and so Xavier was able to recoup the money that it invested and significantly more. So that became controversial because in a sense it almost appeared like we were buying a piece of real estate. But when you look back what we did was we were able to buy programs and faculty were able to come on campus and programs that we did not have -- Nursing, we did not have Music --

Fr. Kennealy: Theater..

Dr. Fortin: Nor did we have Social Work.

Fr. Kennealy: For a short period of time.

Dr. Fortin: Yeah, so in a way the Fine Arts and Human Services helped strengthen Xavier's educational profile. So it was a very good investment from that perspective.

Fr. Kennealy: From our point of view.
>> Dr. Fortin: From our point of view.

>> Fr. Kennealy: But it was not perceived that way at Edgecliff, was it?

>> Dr. Fortin: By some, by some of the alumni definitely. But on the other hand the Sisters of Mercy were -- when I worked with them from 1980 to ‘84 -- were very, very gracious.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And eventually it worked out very well for Xavier.

>> Dr. Fortin: And the alums, the Edgecliff, many of them have been associated with Xavier ever since.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And subsequently Xavier University when it renovated the old Alumni Hall renamed it Edgecliff Hall. And a lot of the memorabilia from Edgecliff is in that building. That's a very, very nice tribute to the school and the sisters as well, the Sisters of Mercy there.

>> Dr. Fortin: Yes.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And so you held that position how long then?

>> Dr. Fortin: Four years.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Four years. And then after that did you continue administration?

>> Dr. Fortin: Yeah, then I went back to the main campus. By that time --

>> Fr. Kennealy: In fact the whole --

>> Dr. Fortin: Right, about eight to ten faculty and the programs in Human Services, Social Work mainly and Nursing, Art, Music, and Theater came to the campus. And Frank Brennan had left by that time. So Frank Brennan and the President, Father Bob Mulligan, had left. So the new Associate Academic Vice President was John -- excuse me -- the new Academic Vice President was John Minahan. So I came back and worked under him as the Associate Academic Vice President.

>> Fr. Kennealy: So John Minahan became Academic Vice President --

>> Dr. Fortin: And Father Charlie Currie was the President.

>> Fr. Kennealy:...was then President. Okay. [21:50]

>> Dr. Fortin: So there was a change in an administration while I was...

>> Fr. Kennealy: So you came back and worked as Associate Vice President for academics. How long did you stay in the position that time?
Dr. Fortin: I stayed there for about, let's see... Two more years. I resigned in the spring of '85, and the reason is I felt you know I've always had a belief that you stay in a position as long as you feel you can enjoy it and you have a good working relationship with people. And I felt I could not work under John Minahan so I thought, “well I'll submit my resignation.” I thought, “go back to the faculty.” I enjoyed the Department of History. And so in the spring of '85 I submitted my resignation and then went to Maine for vacation with my family. And in early July I get a phone call from a young man by the name of Nick Vehr.

Fr. Kennealy: Oh, yes.

Dr. Fortin: V-E-H-R, Nick Vehr.

Fr. Kennealy: He was Assistant to the President at the time.

Dr. Fortin: Assistant to President Currie. And he said, "Roger, I have some news to share with you. Are you free to talk?" I said, "yes, I am." "The Board of Trustees decided to terminate the presidency of Father Currie and also John Minahan will be removed as the A. V. P., and we'd like to you rethink your stepping down from the associate position and serve for one more year at least." And I agreed to do that. I didn't even have to think about it. At moments like this you do what's right.

Fr. Kennealy: You act.

Dr. Fortin: And so when I came back I met with Father Currie and Father Currie decided stay on until January. And meeting with Father Currie, also he invited Frank Mastrianna who was the Dean at the College of Business and he invited Chuck Cusick who was the Dean at the College of Arts and Sciences and I -- And so he thought well somebody has to be in charge of the Academic Affairs while we, during this period that I will be stepping aside as President and so forth. So the three of us, Cusick, Mastrianna, and I thought, "Well, we'll do it together."[24:00]

Fr. Kennealy: Oh, so this is where the famous ‘Troika”…the “Triumvirate”…(talking over each other)

Dr. Fortin: Right. Well. The formal name was Internal Executive Advisory Committee, or Executive Committee. But yeah, the “Triumvirate,” the “Troika.” So the three of us…

Fr. Kennealy: That's what it was popularly called, I remember.

Dr. Fortin: The “Troika,” yeah..... And Frank Mastrianna of course he had to continue do his work as Dean of the College of Business, and Chuck Cusick as Dean of A. & S.
So I pretty much took care of the Academic Affairs in the A. V. P. office. But we all agreed whenever big items came up that we would consult one another.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Now you became interim Academic Vice President in 2001.

>> Dr. Fortin: Right.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Is that right? And then you became Academic Vice President in '02?

>> Dr. Fortin: Act --

>> Fr. Kennealy: Is that correct?

>> Dr. Fortin: That's right.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Okay. Tell us about the position in those years. We had changed Presidents again, would that have been the beginning of the, I guess, the -- the Graham years.

>> Dr. Fortin: When I -- so in '85-86 I was part of the “Troika,” right, so I went back to the Department of History. Well actually I had a sabbatical for a semester anyway. So I went back to Department of History after that and then they conducted a search for an A.V.P., which I did not apply. So in -- Then so I stayed in the Department of History.

>> Fr. Kennealy: All right, okay.

>> Dr. Fortin: And then in 19 -- in 2000 is when -- in 2001 --when I became…

>> Fr. Kennealy: When Father Graham became President, I see. So during the Hoff years you would have been teaching essentially.

>> Dr. Fortin: And chair of the department.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And chair of the department. Okay. And then in '01 became Interim Academic Vice President.

>> Dr. Fortin: Right, so the year that Father Graham became President of…, the Academic Vice President Jim Bundschuh accepted the presidency of a small college on the East Coast.

>> Fr. Kennealy: That's right, that's right.

>> Dr. Fortin: So they needed somebody to serve on an interim basis.

>> Fr. Kennealy: For one year, um-hmm. And then tell us about your years as Academic Vice President.
Dr. Fortin: Oh, so that you know they conducted a search when I was the interim Academic Vice President, they conducted a search that year and I decided apply, so this is the first administrative position, it was the only administrative position I applied for at Xavier. And I knew that history was not on my side because they had never hired anyone from inside certainly in those positions.

Fr. Kennealy: Oh.

Dr. Fortin: So they hire from outside or that had been appointed as a Jesuit.

Fr. Kennealy: Yes.

Dr. Fortin: And, but I survived. And the reason that I applied for the position was that I knew that I could work with the President, Mike Graham. So he had and I had served in the Department of History together and it is incredibly important that when you take on a position that you feel you can work well with this person. So I recall the day that he offered me the position and I said to him, "Well, I will do so on three conditions." I could do that and know I could get away with it.

Fr. Kennealy: You were both historians for one thing. [27:12]

Dr. Fortin: Right. I said -- first I said, "I appreciate the honor." But I said, "one, I want to make sure that my wife never feels obligated that she has to go to all the events." "Oh, you don't have to worry about that." "Two, I never want to learn how to play golf." And I knew he didn't golf, okay, so he agreed to that. And then the third one was that, "we must agree to always speak our mind with each other and always level with each other." And we did that.

Fr. Kennealy: And did that. Good. And then in a few years you took on another responsibility, you became Provost in addition to being Academic Vice President. The Provost was a new position at that time and tell us about it and how did it come about that the job was introduced.

Dr. Fortin: Right. The -- I have to say as a historian that the term “provost” was used once before in Xavier's history when Fr. Paul O'Connor was ill. As President of the University they knew they had to find a successor for him, and they invited Father Bob Mulligan from Chicago to come to the university and work under him, and they gave him the title of Provost.

Fr. Kennealy: Provost… (talking over each other) [28:20]

Dr. Fortin: But he did not have the administrative responsibilities that the provost position have.

Fr. Kennealy: And he was kind of “heir apparent” to the Presidency at that time.
Dr. Fortin: That's right.

Fr. Kennealy: And it lasted what? Maybe a year, year and a half?

Dr. Fortin: Nine months, something like that.

Fr. Kennealy: Yes.

Dr. Fortin: So --

Fr. Kennealy: But you became Provost in '04 with a really different job description.

Dr. Fortin: Yeah, which meant that the Student Development which was called that then, today it is called something different. But Student Life and Leadership, Mission and Ministry, also Information Resources, along with Academics would be under the jurisdiction of the Provost.

Fr. Kennealy: Yes, and so you really took on much more responsibility than you had had before.

Dr. Fortin: Right.

Fr. Kennealy: How did that workout from your perspective? [29:00]

Dr. Fortin: It worked out well. I think -- and the reason -- the idea was to have -- we had talked about being Provost and Academic Vice President. I wanted to keep the terms “Academic Vice President” and “Provost” because the faculty were concerned and that possibly by having a Provost joined to do both ---that academics would not have the same sort of attention it used to have. So I wanted to make sure that in the eyes of the faculty and also for my own comfort that “Academic Vice President” came first.

Fr. Kennealy: Okay, okay.

Dr. Fortin: And so on. And so I think it worked out well.

Fr. Kennealy: And then when did you step down as Provost and Academic Vice President?

Dr. Fortin: July 1 of 2010.


Dr. Fortin: I submitted my resignation in May of 2009.

Fr. Kennealy: And you're presently on sabbatical this year, the 2011-12 year.

Dr. Fortin: Right, it's really an administrative leave, officially.
Fr. Kennealy: Yeah, and going back to teaching in the Fall?

Dr. Fortin: In the Fall.

Fr. Kennealy: Yeah. Have your classes been assigned to you as yet?

Dr. Fortin: Yep, I'll be teaching a honors class for the first year students and I'll be teaching the Senior Seminar for the PPP students.

Fr. Kennealy: Very good, very good. And “PPP” you might explain…

Dr. Fortin: Philosophy, Politics, and Public Honors program.

Fr. Kennealy: One of our honors programs. Yes. And you're also the author of several books, Roger, let's talk about those. Want to tell us about --

Dr. Fortin: Well, the three that I could talk about very briefly one is a novel that I wrote after I stepped aside from the administration in '86 after I left the “Troika.” I was -- had a sabbatical at that time. So I thought, "Well Gee, why don't I start something different." I had written historical articles and the like, and I thought, "Well, let's write a novel." So I wrote a novel on a bootlegger, George Remus, who lived on your side of town.


Dr. Fortin: A famous bootlegger. And I so I had fun doing that. It was a person who came to Cincinnati from Chicago, he was an attorney in Chicago and came to Cincinnati because he felt to become a good bootlegger because he believed that prohibition was wrong and he believed that middle class folks should be allowed to have a drink just like the upper class did because he could tell the rich had their liquor, so why couldn't they? So he wanted to make sure he would be located where there would be many distilleries in Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio. He came here and became the biggest bootlegger in the country, bigger than Al Capone. And then one day he was arrested. They -- the law finally caught up with him. He had to spend a year in jail in Atlanta but he had a suite, he had a maid, he had a car.

Fr. Kennealy: In prison?

Dr. Fortin: In prison. He lived very well. While there he learned that his wife was cheating on him and she was dating the arresting officer.

Fr. Kennealy: Oh.

Dr. Fortin: And she actually -- They had rendezvous in his house on the West Side. So when he came out of jail he decided to do something about it. And so he waited for her
just outside of Eden Park, she came out of her hotel. He followed her in his car, she was in a cab. And then the cab pulled to the side, he forced the cab to pull aside. The wife ran out, he took a gun and shot her in cold blood.


>> Dr. Fortin: In Eden Park. He turned himself in and as a lawyer defended himself and he was acquitted.

>> Fr. Kennealy: He was acquitted?

>> Dr. Fortin: On the grounds that, back in the ‘20s, he argued that his wife deserved to die because she cheated on him.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Oh, and the jury bought that?

>> Dr. Fortin: The jury bought that.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And he was acquitted?

>> Dr. Fortin: He was acquitted.

>> Fr. Kennealy: That's a book everyone's going to have to read now. What's the title of it?

>> Dr. Fortin: One Man's Justice.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And so that was a novel. And then subsequently you've authored several books.

>> Dr. Fortin: Right. Well one that was somewhat ambitious, and I remember having a conversation with Jim Hoff about it. The Archbishop of Cincinnati, Dan Pilarczyk, asked me if I would be willing to write a history of the Archdiocese. I had never written an institutional history before. And I'm surprised that he still allowed me to write the book after I asked him a very ignorant question. I said, "Well, is there enough material?" Now, what I didn't realize is that they never throw anything away. So he took me …he had me go to the archives and now the problem was just the reverse, there was so much, where do I begin? So, yeah, I took on that project. So I wrote a history of the Archdiocese, 150 year history. [33:38]

>> Fr. Kennealy: They were celebrating an anniversary that year and --

>> Dr. Fortin: Well actually it was, yeah, they celebrated in 1996 but they asked me in '95. There was no way I could finish it in one year. So it ended up, finished it, in 2000.
>> Fr. Kennealy: But of course your magnum opus is your history of Xavier, I have a copy of it here…To See Great Wonders. And this is “A History of Xavier University, 1831-2006” by Dr. Roger A. Fortin. How is it that you came to write this particular book?

>> Dr. Fortin: Well, just before Father Graham became President he thought -- he and I had lunch and he thought, "you know, it would be good for Xavier to have a comprehensive history of itself." Now our friend, Father Bennish had written a book of Xavier --

>> Fr. Kennealy: Father Lee Bennish, yes.

>> Dr. Fortin: Continuity and Change, but we thought it could be enlarged and expanded and bring it up more to date because under the Presidency of Jim Hoff as you know, Xavier took off in a very different direction. So, he wanted to incorporate that as well. And maybe even some of the things we doing in the early 2003, 2004 so he asked me if I would be willing to do that, and I had just finished writing a history of the Archdiocese. "Sure, why not."

>> Fr. Kennealy: Uh-huh and that was written really for the celebration of the 175th anniversary of the school in 2006, yes.

>> Dr. Fortin: Right…and it was finished in time for that

>> Fr. Kennealy: Just for that. Who published it for you?

>> Dr. Fortin: Scranton…University of Scranton Press.

>> Fr. Kennealy: What were your principle sources?

>> Dr. Fortin: For the Xavier history?

>> Fr. Kennealy: The Xavier history.

>> Dr. Fortin: Well, obviously the archival materials that we have here, the trustees' minutes, going through all of the materials in the archives, going through the student newspapers, and of course -- and also being familiar with the Archdiocesan archives there was material there I was able to tap as well.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Good. With regard to, you obviously know Xavier history probably better than anybody else, could you single out for us maybe presidents who in your estimation were the most influential in Xavier's history?

>> Dr. Fortin: Yeah, well it is kind of a tough one, we're talking about 181 years.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Yeah.
Dr. Fortin: I guess I would say that Jim McCabe.

Fr. Kennealy: Father James McCabe, okay.

Dr. Fortin: He was very instrumental in getting Xavier to decide to buy the property in Avondale. Father Hubert Brockman, very -- (talking over each other)

Dr. Fortin: Actually I would say Celestin Steiner was very influential in the 1940s because… I can elaborate on reasons if you want to hear them… Celestin Steiner---I’ll give you the names---Celestin Steiner, Brockman, O'Connor, Hoff, and Graham.

Fr. Kennealy: Those would be the ones. Talk about Father Hoff. You knew him personally and...

Dr. Fortin: Yeah, I did not know him as well until later on in his life. In the first few years of his Presidency I didn't really -- I was in the Department of History, I didn't run into him that much. What Father Jim Hoff was able to do was build -- get the faculty and the university community at large feel good about themselves, feel good about Xavier. And he had a way of somehow getting people to acknowledge the successes the university were making. So he felt we had low self-esteem. So a way of doing this was to keep emphasizing and thanking people for the good things they were doing. And he would on occasion, not on occasion, on many occasions come into meetings and he would read letters he had just gotten from students or parents, the wonderful things they were saying about the faculty, the wonderful things they were saying about the attention they receive in different offices of the university. And he wanted to people to feel good about the good that they were doing. But it was later on in his Presidency and especially when I began doing the writing of the book I wanted to study it more closely---he had an engaging personality where he could meet someone and make that person feel that he was the only person that mattered at that moment. He had a pastoral way about him that I've never seen in any other President. Paul O'Connor had some of that too, but boy, he was very good at that. [38:10]

Fr. Kennealy: Yes, he did. There was a very, very successful fund raiser and a really big builder too, Cintas Center among others. Talk about your relationship with Father Mike Graham. I know you and he got along very well.

Dr. Fortin: Well, the -- I mean it's, to me, the two administrators that I think I've work closest with and I derived so much personally, intellectually from them would be Frank Brennan and Mike Graham. In many ways Frank Brennan was like my mentor. Mike Graham is more like almost a brother to brother relationship where we could level with one another. And he knew that he could say anything to me and I could say anything to him that it was for our ears only and he always leveled.
Fr. Kennealy: And that made it much easier to administer.

Dr. Fortin: Much easier.

Fr. Kennealy: There was a candor and a meeting of minds.

Dr. Fortin: Exactly.

Fr. Kennealy: Yes, and that really helped a great deal. Again going back to Xavier's history, in Xavier's long history, 181 years, obviously the Presidents have been very influential, many of them. But truly other individuals as well have played an important influential role in the university's history. Could you identify some of them for us?

Dr. Fortin: Well, in terms of having an immediate impact monetarily and also administratively for the direction of the college and the university Mary Hinkle was the first individual to make a significant gift. And as you know made a figure -- a gift of over $100,000.00 to the College which made it possible for Saint Xavier College to buy the land in Avondale where now the University is located. So you begin with Mary Hinkle and then you go to today in 2012 and you find that individuals associated with the Schiff Family have contributed significantly to the life of the institution. But between Mary Hinkle and the Schiff Family you have a number of individuals like Walter Schmidt in the '20s and so on.

Fr. Kennealy: There were several buildings named after him. [40:25]

Dr. Fortin: Schmidt Fieldhouse, the Schmidt Administration Building. And then you have people like Charlie Gallagher with the Gallagher Hall, individuals like Bob Kohlhepp who is currently the chair of the Board of Trustees, his large contribution toward the Cintas Center. You have the Farmer Family contributed to the Cintas Center. So you have individuals of that quality who've made significant gifts. And of course you have Steven Smith with the Smith College of Business building, the Williams family. So along the way Xavier would not be what it is today if these individuals had not been as generous to the university as they have been. [41:06]

Fr. Kennealy: And you certainly have individuals who were administrators here, extremely influential and important. People like Dr. Tom Hailstones.

Dr. Fortin: Yeah, I would say Dr. Tom Hailstones was Dean of the College of Business and Dr. Ray McCoy who was Dean of the School of Education were in the ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s very vibrant leaders on campus. And so was, I would say, Dr. Vytas Bieliauskas as Chair of the of the Department of Psychology very influential. So
those three lay people were in many ways good mentors for crops of young faculty were coming on campus.

>> Fr. Kennealy: As you look back over Xavier's history what events would you single out as perhaps the most important, most significant in its history?

>> Dr. Fortin: Yeah, sometimes I've given talks where I talk about the pivotal moments in Xavier's history, you know. So to me the most -- once they decided to establish a Jesuit college in Cincinnati and it was located downtown as Saint Xavier College, they had trouble financially to make it work. In the 1850s a big decision was made either to close Saint Xavier College or to keep it functioning but in a different scale. So in a study of higher education before the Civil War a number of small colleges closed their doors. Saint Xavier was at that time faced with the same challenge. It decided to simply to give up its dorms and become simply a commuter college. And so in 1854 the decision was made to keep Saint Xavier College afloat, but not admit students from outside the Greater Cincinnati area, simply be a commuter college. So that was a very important decision. Otherwise we would not be here today. In 1887 the establishment of the Alumni Association was critical because that now got the members of the Xavier community meeting once a year to do what they could to help the college find its way forward, keep moving.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And raise money. [43:15]

>> Dr. Fortin: …And raise money, absolutely.

>> Fr. Kennealy: In fact I think Edgecliff Hall was originally named Alumni Science Hall because the Alumni Association …

>> Dr. Fortin: Right.

>> Fr. Kennealy: …actually financed it.

>> Dr. Fortin: That's right.

>> Dr. Fortin: Through their Diamond Jubilee fund raising efforts.

>> Dr. Fortin: Precisely.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Yes.

>> Dr. Fortin: Then I would say -- yeah, then I would say the important period would be the time of World War II when the College was -- many of the young men had to go to the service so what the University had to do was keep the small classes going as much as possible. They had to get the students of Saint Xavier High School to
come on campus, take some of the classes. Very difficult time, but Father Steiner was able to get it moving, continue moving for that two and a half to three years. And then in 1945 he said “let's prepare ourselves for expanding the college when the G I, when the veterans return from the war.” So from '45 to about '51 the University enrollment more than tripled, and also during this period a graduate school was established, and the honors A B program was established to make sure that we do not lose value of the core, H A B was strongly connected to the core. So a lot -- this was a very important moment. The next big moment would be 1969-72, ‘69 the University went co-ed, in '72 you had the laicization of the Board of Trustees. Going co-ed was very important in the life of the institution and introducing lay people on the Board proved very important as we moved forward. [45:07]

>> Fr. Kennealy: And I guess another we might want to put in there, the purchase of the Avondale campus in 1911.

>> Dr. Fortin: Yep, yep.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And moving the college operation from downtown out here.

>> Dr. Fortin: Right, absolutely.

>> Fr. Kennealy: I remember reading not too long ago a letter from an alumnus by the name of Dennis Cash and this was written in 1911 just after we purchased this campus here. And he wrote to Father Heiermann who was President at the time, and said, "Father, I think you made a bad mistake. People are not going to go all the way out to the suburbs of Avondale to go to class." It's hard to believe today but those are, it was a bold move in those days and an important one. So those were probably were things that we would --

>> Dr. Fortin: But then of course if you take the Hoff years, incredibly important, because what Father Jim Hoff is able to do, was as you mentioned earlier, he was able to convince a number of people to join the Board of Trustees who were not connected to Xavier. They were not alums of Xavier. People like Bob Castellini was currently the owner of the Cincinnati Reds. These individuals were invited to come on the board and they did so because they just loved, and I'm using this word deliberately, they loved Father Hoff. They loved the idea that -- they loved his mission. They loved what he stood for. So they joined the board and these individuals raised the bar. And of course then Father Jim Hoff did a very wise thing, he began to mentor a young historian by the name of Michael Graham to eventually become possibly the President to succeed him. So that transition was very smooth. So what Father Mike Graham has been doing is building upon the floor that Jim Hoff had built.
Fr. Kennealy: Created, yeah. I don't think there's any doubt about that. That's rather, pretty clear. The dropping of football in 1973, you treated extensively in your book, tell us about that. I know there are people who to this day have not forgiven us for dropping football. [47:07]

Dr. Fortin: Well, -- and of course what happened too is that Father Bob Mulligan has just come in as the Provost for that one year to work with Father O'Connor who was not doing well. So, but there were people even then when they saw him arrive on campus who felt that he was going to be the hatchet man, he was going to just cut things. Well the University had been operating in the red financially for a few years. The enrollment was low. So, but the cost of the football program according to one estimate could be as high as a half a million dollars we were losing in football, that was the deficit. So what they decided do in '71-'72 was to scale it down, not give as many scholarships and so forth, but to try to keep the program moving. But by '73, after considerable meetings with the Alumni Board and also meet with the Trustees, the decision was made to drop football. And of course this meant that some of the members on the Alumni Board left Xavier, they no longer wanted to be connected with Xavier anymore. But some individuals who were very disappointed stayed with Xavier and have been valuable ambassadors of Xavier. People like Michael Conaton.

Fr. Kennealy: Who opposed the decision very strongly…

Dr. Fortin: Yep, very much opposed it. But, yeah, it was controversial. Looking back I guess a better decision could have been to go to Division III like Dayton does -- like Dayton did. Maybe that would have been the easy way out. [48:42]

Fr. Kennealy: Well, it is true that football cost us our accreditation for a short period of time in '36, isn't that true?

Dr. Fortin: That's right.

Fr. Kennealy: How did that come about?

Dr. Fortin: Well that -- what happened is that the -- I don't remember all the details but it's -- some of the players were -- I guess I don't know the specifics enough to comment on it but definitely it was only for one year.

Fr. Kennealy: That's right.

Dr. Fortin: And it had to do with the recruitment of students and they were working certain hours and we were not as careful with the grades…(unclear here)
Fr. Kennealy: There were some issues too with how it was being administered. That the university didn't have sufficient control over the program at that point. Yes. Where do you see --

Dr. Fortin: Yeah, now you refreshed my memory, yeah. The university did not have sufficient control in that you had a lay board that had more authority over it. And that is what the NCAA --

Fr. Kennealy: Objected to, yes. I think they were distributing the scholarship money, they were running concessions and so forth.

Dr. Fortin: Yes.

Fr. Kennealy: Where do you see Xavier going in the future as you look over the next 25-50 years?

Dr. Fortin: Wow!! Well my biggest concern would be that we may not have a Jesuit President in 25-50 years. And we've seen more Jesuit college and universities having lay administrators at the top. So, that in itself is not terribly problematic. What would be terribly problematic is to lose the heritage that we have, the Jesuit Catholic heritage that we have. So it would seem to me that the challenge here is to make sure that we do not lose the soul of the place, that we stay in touch with the understanding, where we've been and understand the value of the core. And the faculty have to be very much engaged. So if I were to read a crystal ball I would say that if the principles of shared governance are observed and the faculties stay involved academically with the administrators, and other folks in important offices in the university, they stay in touch with the Jesuit values and so on, we'll be okay. So I -- so in terms of the size of the campus, we could be a campus maybe having ten thousand students probably, but again wanting to make sure that we have that close person to person relationship with the students.

Fr. Kennealy: That we have been noted for.

Dr. Fortin: That we have been noted for, exactly.

Fr. Kennealy: Yes, yes. [51:35]

Dr. Fortin: That is incredibly, incredibly important. And we must always retain both the Jesuit and Catholic identity.

Fr. Kennealy: Identity, yes. As you look back over your career at Xavier, what would you single out as your major contributions, the things you're proudest of that you've done here? I

Dr. Fortin: I would say teaching would be number one.
"Fr. Kennealy: That's interesting for a person spending so many years in administration.

"Dr. Fortin: Yeah, teaching was -- I just this weekend I was at a Best Buy in Northern Kentucky and a woman happened to walk by me and said, "Ahh, Dr. Fortin, I was in your class twenty years ago. I remember you, you were my best teacher." Well to me that's very gratifying and I feel like that's where I've made the most impact and I absolutely get the most enjoyment. And even when I was in administration and I wrote like the history of the Archdiocese, the history of Xavier, I had to stay involved academically and I'd written articles during that. So to me being an administrator or just being an administrator is not fulfilling enough. Teaching, writing is important.

"Fr. Kennealy: Yes, and that's why you want to go back to teaching now.

"Dr. Fortin: Right.

"Fr. Kennealy: What are your fondest memories of Xavier? [52:55]

"Dr. Fortin: Fondest memories? Oh, the many people that you've met. One of my fondest memories is when I did the history of Xavier was that all of the sudden I was writing about a period...When I came to Xavier in '66 there were people who were in their 40s and their 50s and 60s ---individuals who had contributed to or had been Xavier 30 years or so. Suddenly I was reading about them and they were in their late 20s and 30s and I saw a fullness of their contributions at Xavier that I had not seen before. Individuals like Bob Johnson for example. Suddenly reading about Bob Johnson, reading about Harvey Dube—what they did at Xavier-- it gave me an appreciation of the breadth of contributions people make at Xavier. So someone could be working in an office for thirty years and somebody comes in new only sees that person in their 30th year at Xavier. But when you see the full picture—wow!!-- , that's what Xavier's about, the contributions that people make over periods of time. That I've enjoyed. [53:57]

"Fr. Kennealy: Well you've met some interesting people like Tom Savage, Father Tom Savage who was an experience, no doubt about it. Or Father Joe Peters would be another, I'm sure, that you have known very, very well.

"Dr. Fortin: Yep.

"Fr. Kennealy: Great men.

"Dr. Fortin: They were great men.

"Fr. Kennealy: Any regrets as you look back?

"Dr. Fortin: Not at all.
>> Fr. Kennealy: None at all.

>> Dr. Fortin: None at all.

>> Fr. Kennealy: You'd do it all again.

>> Dr. Fortin: Do it all again.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Well that must be very consoling to you as well.

>> Dr. Fortin: Yeah.

>> Fr. Kennealy: And anything else you want to add that we haven't covered? Anything else you'd like to say for the record?

>> Dr. Fortin: No, it's a great place.

>> Fr. Kennealy: A great place and it will be great long after we're gone, I'm sure.

>> Dr. Fortin: Yeah well I will say this though, one other thing I should need to add. I'll share something that really touched my deeply. Last year when I announced that I would be stepping aside and joining, going back to the faculty, someone from the Development Office approached one of my sons in Seattle and said, "you know your father's going back to the faculty and he's done all these years in the administration. Is there something you would like to do on his behalf?" And of course he graduated from Xavier. And so he decided to make a gift to Xavier and it's called the Roger A. Fortin Endowment for Outstanding Teaching and Scholarship in the Humanities. So he made a quarter million dollar gift, and every year beginning next year a faculty member who teaches in humanities, someone will be selected and will receive a ten thousand dollar gift each year, a faculty member. And his point was that the humanities are so important in the life of the institution so he wanted to do something in my name for the university.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Wonderful, wonderful. [55:40]

>> Dr. Fortin: I really thought, "Wow! Humanities are important."

>> Fr. Kennealy: That's right, absolutely. And also a boost for the humanities which is really at the core of Jesuit education.

>> Dr. Fortin: Exactly.

>> Fr. Kennealy: Good, fine. Is that it then?

>> Dr. Fortin: Yep, that's it.
>> Fr. Kennealy: Well this concludes our interview. And thank you once again, Roger, for joining us this morning and for this very, very informative and pleasant conversation. God bless you.

>> Dr. Fortin: Thank you.

End of Interview