

Interview with Dr. Robert G. Johnson

Conducted by: Fr. Thomas P. Kennealy, S.J.

Note: This transcription represents the best effort of the Xavier University Archives staff to faithfully record the interview as represented on the accompanying video program. Spelling of proper names is as accurate as possible but some errors may occur.

Kennealy: Good morning. My name is Father Tom Kennealy, and I'm the archivist at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. Today is Friday, February the twenty-seventh 2009, and I'm seated here in the Brueggeman Center on the Xavier campus with Dr. Robert G. Johnson. Dr. Johnson is a Professor Emeritus of chemistry at Xavier and has graciously agreed to be interviewed this morning for Xavier's archival collection of oral histories. Now first of all, Dr. Johnson, welcome.

Johnson: Thank you.

Kennealy: And thank you for your willingness to share with us your memories of Xavier and your long association with it. Let me begin, if I may at the beginning, by asking some questions about your life prior to Xavier. First of all, where were you born and raised?

Johnson: I'm a native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I was born and raised there -- spent the first twenty years or so of my life there and had some memories that are fading as time goes on of a rather happy life there.

Kennealy: Good. Tell us something about your parents and your siblings.

Johnson: Well, I'm an only child. So there are no siblings. My parents were both high school teachers. My mother taught English. My father taught Latin, and they met in Milwaukee. They taught at the same high school. And so I was born and raised in a house that was a block and a half away from the high school

where my father taught. She, my mother, retired when she was expecting me and we lived a block and a half away from the high school where he taught, where I attended high school.

Kennealy: It's interesting you wound up a chemist but your father taught Latin.

Johnson: Right. Well actually when I was young, I was going to be an archeologist because we had a lot of books dealing with Greece and Rome and I had a pretty good collection of books that related to the ancient world.

Kennealy: Uhuh.

Johnson: But when I took high school chemistry the chemistry teacher said the right things and that's what changed the direction of my life really.

Kennealy: ...life... into the sciences.

Johnson: Really. Right.

Kennealy: Tell us something about your education: grade school, high school.

Johnson: Well, I attended a parochial grade school, St. Catherine's in Milwaukee. I went to Washington High School, which is the school that my father taught at.

Kennealy: Where your father taught.

Johnson: And attended Marquette University in Milwaukee for four years. And then went on to graduate school at, well it was then Iowa State College, it's now Iowa State University.

Kennealy: Oh, in Ames.

Johnson: In Ames, Iowa. Right.

Kennealy: So your undergraduate degree was in chemistry?

Johnson: In chemistry.

Kennealy: And your doctorate, of course, as well?

Johnson: Right.

Kennealy: Was there a specialty within chemistry then at that time?

Johnson: Not as an undergraduate, of course, but as a graduate student, my major was organic chemistry.

Kennealy: Organic. Okay.

Johnson: With a minor in biochemistry.

Kennealy: And where did you and your wife meet?

Johnson: We met here in Cincinnati, and that is certainly one of the big things that happened in my life when I came to Cincinnati. After, we met several years after I came to Cincinnati, and we were married...

Kennealy: How did that come about? I think you told me the story.

Johnson: Well we met on a blind date. But neither one of us -- we didn't have a blind date with each other.

Kennealy: Mhmm.

Johnson: I had a blind date with a young lady that another faculty member arranged -- that date, and she had a blind date with one of the other faculty members at Xavier, a fellow bachelor here at Xavier. And so that was...we went to the Xavier homecoming, I'll say it was 1956.

Kennealy: Mhmm.

Johnson: And that was when we met and then started to date sometime there after.

Kennealy: And then Jenny was from Norwood actually, wasn't she?

Johnson: She's from Norwood.

Kennealy: What was Peter and Paul Church at that time?

Johnson: St. Peter and Paul, now Holy Trinity, but at that time St. Peter and Paul Church. That's where we were married.

Kennealy: There's a lot of Xavier people from that area too.

Johnson: Yes.

Kennealy: The Donnelly's, Larry Donnelly and his family...

Johnson: They lived right down the street from where Jenny lived, and the LaGrange's lived over there.

Kennealy: Oh yes, yes. And so you were married here in Cincinnati. What would that have been about 19...

Johnson: 19...January 18th, 1958.

Kennealy: '58! So last year you celebrated your 50th wedding anniversary.

Johnson: Right. Right.

Kennealy: Congratulations on that!

Johnson: Thank you.

Kennealy: And so how many children and grandchildren?

Johnson: We have four children, three grandchildren. Of the four children, only one is married. And the others are over forty and certainly don't have to ask permission to get married but that hasn't happened as of yet.

Kennealy: Do you all live here in Cincinnati?

Johnson: Yes they're all in Cincinnati.

Kennealy: Good. Good. So that you have the benefit of the grandchildren nearby....

Johnson: Well, they're in Anderson Township and we live in Western Hills, so...

Kennealy: Oh, I see. All right.

Johnson:...Nearby is relative.

Kennealy: That's right especially to a Cincinnati Westsider!.

Johnson: Right.

Kennealy: Tell us about how you came to Xavier. How did that come about from University of Iowa State?

Johnson: Well, one day a fellow graduate student in chemistry walked into the lab, his name was Ray Foos, Xavier graduate. He said that he had gotten a note from Father Miller, who was then chairman of the chemistry department...

Kennealy: Father Frederick Miller.

Johnson:...to the effect that they were looking for somebody to teach organic chemistry. And he asked me if I might be interested. Well, this was about the time that I was beginning to think about getting employment after graduation. And actually I had had plans to already make a trip to St. Louis University, so, the upshot is, we scheduled a trip to Xavier following the trip to St. Louis. The trip to St. Louis did not work out well, in one sense. They did offer me a position, but the facilities down there were rather pitiful, really. They were in the basement of the medical school building and it was just not impressive at all. And then when I came to Xavier, the Logan building was brand new. It had not been used for any chemistry classes and so it was, in my mind, a no brainer when it came time to making a decision between the two.

Kennealy: Mhmm, so that's right-- I guess the Logan building would have opened maybe in '53.

Johnson: '54.

Kennealy: '54.

Johnson: Well, it was...

Kennealy: You came in '54.

Johnson: I came in '54 and the Fall of '54 was the inaugural as far as the use of the labs and the classroom facilities for chemistry.

Kennealy: That must have been very impressive.

Johnson: It was.

Kennealy: To have a building exclusively dedicated to chemistry.

Johnson: Yes.

Kennealy: Yes.

Johnson: At that time.

Kennealy: Then who hired you at that time? You mentioned Father Miller...

Johnson: Father Fred Miller hired me, yes.

Kennealy: What was he like? I never met him.

Johnson: He's an interesting person. He was not comfortable with large numbers of people, but he was very charming on a one to one basis. And he really preferred to deal with people that way.

Kennealy: On a one on one basis.

Johnson: And we, 'cause my early days I was still single so I would spend a lot of time in the chemistry building in the evening, and he was always to be found at his desk down on the first...

Kennealy: Always in his white lab coat.

Johnson: Always in his white lab coat. Yes, right.

Kennealy: I had always heard that.

Johnson: And he was rather prominent in the affairs of the University. So he pretty well knew what was going on in the University.

Kennealy: And been around quite a long time as I remember.

Johnson: Yeah, he came in the 1930's.

Kennealy: And who else was in the department at that time, the time you came?

Johnson: Well, we had, I'll try to name them in order in which they came: Richard Garascia, Harvey Dube, Joe Klingenberg, ...

Kennealy: And Dick O'Neill and their...

Johnson: Dick O'Neill came quite a bit later.

Kennealy: Okay, well, when you came then, it would have been Father Fred Miller and Richard Garascia?

Johnson: And Harvey Dube and Joe Klingenberg.

Kennealy: Okay, at that point yes, yes so that would have been pretty much the staff at that time. What was Xavier like? What were your first impressions of Xavier?

Johnson: Well, of course it was obvious to me that it was a very compact campus, but then again I came from a state university which had a rather large campus, a good number of acres there. And so it was a bit of a shock seeing how small it was. But it never really affected me as far as making a decision to come to Xavier. My focus was the chemistry department and we had new facilities, much nicer than Iowa State and certainly much nicer than St. Louis so...

Kennealy: What were the challenges of the University in those days Bob?

Johnson: Well, as best I can remember, we always had some concern in our department about the number of chemistry majors. In the immediate post-war period there didn't seem to be a large problem in attracting students. Even the students that wanted a career in medicine would major in chemistry on their way to medical school. As time went on, we lost those people who chose to go now to the biology department. And so that was certainly a concern.

Kennealy: And of course the University at that point was just beginning to do some building, after the lull during the Second World War. I guess, chemistry building would have been one, followed shortly thereafter by the chapel and the library, Alter Hall. So probably a period of building, wasn't it?

Johnson: Yes, I think Alter Hall was ,well,...the South Hall was replaced by the University Center.

Kennealy: South Hall was a barracks building wasn't it?

Johnson: Right, just as you entered the drive off Dana Avenue. And then there was a companion pre-fab building across from the Logan Building which was North Hall.

Kennealy: North Hall.

Johnson: And North Hall was actually where many of the chemistry faculty had offices at the time I interviewed.

Kennealy: And those were really just barracks weren't they.

Johnson: Yes. Yeah.

Kennealy: And the other barracks around where students lived or were those torn down by the time you came. Where Alter Hall and the library presently are there were barracks.

Johnson: There were barracks there but they were used by faculty. Those were faculty offices as I recall.

Kennealy: Oh, okay.

Johnson: Yes, but that's right they were torn down when Alter Building was put up.

Kennealy: What were the students like in those days?

Johnson: Well, it was an interesting mix. We had the older students who came from service in the Korean War and some from World War II, and then we had the new fresh apple-cheeked, males of course at that time, who were just come from high school. So it was an interesting mix. The older ones of course, especially the veterans, were used to deferring to senior officers and the young students were properly intimidated by the fact that a faculty member was in front of them. So it was a very controlled sort of environment at those times.

Kennealy: Which of course changed a great deal with the upheavals of the late 60's and early 70's. Did that affect the chemistry department, those days of the anti-war protests and the hippies and so forth?

Johnson: Well, the only affect that I recall was I was chairman at the time, chairman of the department and, I remember writing letters to draft boards on behalf of our graduate students who we relied on rather heavily to teach our labs, and seeking to get them deferments so they could complete their service to the department. And that would have created a major problem for us had we lost many of them. Some we did lose. My letters didn't convince all the draft boards to defer these people, but that that was a very significant impact on us, or could have been much more serious.

Kennealy: Could have been. Yeah. Well I suppose in those earlier days too there were things that have been dropped along the way like saying prayer before class. Would you have done that regularly?

Johnson: Yes. When I came, of course, you had the crucifix on the wall in the front of the room, and we always opened the class with a prayer. I forget whether it was an "Our Father" or a "Hail Mary" but I remember there was a prayer and that continued for a number of years. It finally got to the point that

Richard Garascia and I were the only two doing it. I suspect I probably stopped doing it before he did. He's a very religious man and I imagined he continued.

Kennealy: Everybody holds Richard Garascia in great benediction. I remember when I came to Xavier, it was very clear that he was highly esteemed. What was his secret to success? What was it about it that people admired so much, about him?

Johnson: Well, he was a very quiet individual. He certainly didn't trumpet his accomplishments in chemistry. I must say that he never had an ill word to say about anybody, even at times when he himself had been sort of the victim of things. Why he was very forgiving, very understanding, and very student-centered. I can remember having a debate with him on grading policies. And occasionally one had to call them the way he saw it. And a student got a thirty on an exam, at least my way of thinking. Why you put the thirty on. Richard marked at fifty minus. His lowest grade was fifty minus. And who's to say which one of us made the right decision? But I know that was one of the few things on which we differed. By and large, we, in terms of academics, we pretty much felt the same way.

Kennealy: Well, he was certainly very highly admired. Who were the administrators in those days? When you first came, who was president?

Johnson: Father Maguire was president.

Kennealy: What was he like?

Johnson: I never really got to know him because after a year he moved on. I believe he went to Loyola.

Kennealy: He did. That's right. James Maguire.

Johnson: And Father Paul O'Connor was dean when I came, and after a year he became president. So I knew Father O'Connor much better. I never really had a chance to get to know Father Maguire.

Kennealy: When did you become chairman of the department then Bob? Because you were chair at least twice weren't you?

Johnson: Yes. Well, after Father Miller was moved to John Carroll, and that would have been in the early 60's, Richard Garascia became chairman. And he was chairman up to maybe 1970 or the late 60's and then I followed him as chairman.

Kennealy: I think you might have become chair the first time in 1966. Does that sound right? At least that's what I found.

Johnson: I thought it might have been earlier than that but ...

Kennealy: But a good nine years you were then chairman.

Johnson: Yeah. I was chairman nine years and then later on Harvey Dube followed me. Later on, Dick O'Neill became chairman. And after a number of years he wanted to give up the job and at that point I came back in for a few years.

Kennealy: When you were chair, a number of things occurred. I think that's when you introduced a new program in chemical science didn't you? Wasn't that while you were chair the first time?

Johnson: My memory fails on the timing of that but we did introduce a program that was a bit less demanding in terms of the number of chemistry courses, which allowed the student to take other courses and sciences besides chemistry and we thought that would have an appeal to those people who were perhaps

intimidated by the 44 hours or so of chemistry that they had to take for the bachelor's degree in chemistry.

Kennealy: Now, also during that time you introduced the Alumni Newsletter also, didn't you?

Johnson: Yes, at some point...

Kennealy: This would be the graduates of chemistry and chemical science.

Johnson: Right. Right. At some point along the way I was persuaded, and it was not a difficult job to persuade me to do that, to put out a publication, really for the benefit of our Alumni and I enjoyed being an amateur journalist for quite a few years.

Kennealy: And it was rather popular. I know that a number of people have talked about that because you did some research. You went out of your way to

...

Johnson: Yes, I enjoyed that rather than simply recounting the exploits of our former students. I got into the history of the University. So I did a series on the first chemistry teacher, and you recall, I asked you to help in translating some information that came from France about this.

Kennealy: Going back to the Nineteenth Century.

Johnson: Yes. So there yes, then I did a feature on the history of the Logan Building itself on the Cash Room and ...

Kennealy: Which was in the uh...Logan Building.

Johnson: Which was in the Logan building. Yes.

Kennealy: Yeah. Yeah. Those were... and then at some point the department decided to do away with the graduate program. How did...the graduate program in chemistry, how did that come about?

Johnson: Yes. That was a difficult decision. That was one of the things that Richard Garascia really felt very unhappy about. I think, so did I, but I think it was just facing up to the reality of the situation that we simply couldn't compete with students who were prepared for graduate work in chemistry. We couldn't compete with other institutions, had more resources and able to offer them greater stipends. So, it was with considerable ...

Kennealy: Regret.

Johnson:...feeling of loss that we... This was at the time that Dick O'Neill was chairman.

Kennealy: At that decision that was made. I do remember that that was rather painful for a number of people that were involved. In your years you served on a number of committees. The Athletic Board, weren't you?

Johnson: Yes. That was one of...that was rather interesting. There had to be a faculty representative on the Athletic Board.

Kennealy: Alright. Okay.

Johnson: And it certainly provided a, some sort of insight as to the problems that they had to deal with and considerations that were important to them, which normally one would not know about.

Kennealy: Would you have been involved in the decision to eliminate football or would that have come after your time on the Athletic Board?

Johnson: Um...

Kennealy: Because that was certainly a very controversial moment.

Johnson: Yes. Yes. That was at the time that Father Currie, I believe was president, and I wasn't involved in the decision, but I was certainly aware of what was going on. Actually, I suppose my greatest contribution there was I was

involved in the hiring of Pete Gillen as the basketball coach. I was on the first screening committee. I was not in the decision making process, but I remember speaking up on his behalf after he came for his interview, he had a very impressive interview.

Kennealy: And that was really the time when we began to turn our basketball program around.

Johnson: Right. Right.

Kennealy: Pete Gillen is a big name there.

Johnson: Right.

Kennealy: Did you ever serve on the Faculty Committee?

Johnson: Yes, I served on the Faculty Committee. I believe several times, and that was interesting certainly.

[At this point there is a break in the recording lasting about five seconds (approximately from 23:45 to 23:50)]

Kennealy: Well, you served on the Faculty Committee at least on one occasion.

Johnson: Yes. Now those were interesting days and reflecting on what were then major problems, it seems like they shouldn't ever be a problem but we were concerned about things like mail delivery, telephone calls coming in to the University, and matters like that. I recently found a copy of a questionnaire that we sent around to the faculty asking them to comment on the telephone...

Kennealy: Service.

Johnson: Service. We didn't have private lines or anything like that, and there was a problem with the switchboard.

Kennealy: Alright.

Johnson: We were concerned about things that seemed sort of petty at this point...

Kennealy: But seemed very important at the time.

Johnson: But seemed very important to us at the time.

Kennealy: And of course you served many years on the Pre-medical Committee too.

Johnson: Yes.

Kennealy: Writing letters of recommendation for students who wanted in to dental school, medical school, yes.

Johnson: Right. Yes. Yes.

Kennealy: That was a very time consuming job.

Johnson: Yes it was.

Kennealy: Having served on that committee myself.

Johnson: Yes. It was time consuming. You, we engaged in mock interviews to make sure these students could get some idea of what they would have to go through and we sort of put them through their paces at that time, but then we did look at their biographical information and construct a letter of recommendation.

Kennealy: It was all very important because getting people into professional schools like medical schools was very important for Xavier.

Johnson: Yes and our percentage of successful for applicants was high, then...

Kennealy: Was high.

Johnson:...and its high now as I understand.

Kennealy: And were you involved in the renovation or revision of the core curriculum the years '67-'69? I know that period there was a special task force

that restructured the core curriculum. Did you get involved in those discussions at all?

Johnson: Yes. We had an input as far as the positioning of science in the core curriculum. There was a science module and ,we were, I remember arguing rather strongly that chemistry should be there and that was a battle that we won. We also had different feeling about the inclusion of experimental psychology. That was a battle we lost.

Kennealy: Well you took on a formidable opponent.

Johnson: Yes. Yes. Vitas Bieliauskas was a formidable opponent. I've discovered copies of letters that I wrote to him and to the chairman of the committee on that subject.

Kennealy: Well there would have been no doubt that psychology was a social science and a science in that sense.

Johnson: That was our argument.

Kennealy: But now what was his argument? It was more than that?

Johnson: Their argument was that experimental psychology had methodology that was more akin to the natural sciences.

Kennealy: Natural sciences, and therefore belonged in the natural science module.

Johnson: Yes.

Kennealy: So that debate...did you serve on other committees over the years, presidential searches or anything like that?

Johnson: As a matter of fact, I was on the search committee when we hired Father DiUlio as president. Flew up to Milwaukee and spoke to a former friend

at faculty at Marquette to get a feeling about Father DiUlio. And, so that was certainly a unique sort of experience.

Kennealy: And his presidency was a short one, about four years.

Johnson: Right.

Kennealy: About four years he was president here and then what the time...we were very disappointed that he left. Was that your impression? That his was a successful presidency?

Johnson: Well, selfishly during his presidency they did do some remodeling in the chemistry building. So we profited in that way. I know along with others that I was rather disappointed that he left. We thought, prematurely.

Kennealy: But he left to become president at your alma mater...

Johnson: Right.

Kennealy:...Marquette...that's where he went and then Father Hoff came in at that point. Well, what do you regard as your most significant contributions to Xavier? You were here almost forty years. What would you single out as the things that you did that made Xavier a better place?

Johnson: Well, I believe that they pretty much centered around my work in the chemistry department.

Kennealy: Mhmm.

Johnson: I don't regard my contributions outside of that to be all significant unless we talk about the Pete Gillen story again.

Kennealy: Mhmm. Mhmm.

Johnson: But I...I remember being a strong proponent for the getting the chemistry department on the American Chemical Society list of approved departments.

Kennealy: Okay.

Johnson: They never wanted the term accreditation in connection with that, but that is probably a good approximation to the process. And I felt strongly that the University had to be able to say that its chemistry department had its program approved by the American Chemical Society.

Kennealy: What did that entail, Bob?

Johnson: Well, it entailed a detailed examination of what our program was --the number of graduates and so forth. I remember Father Miller had to, I believe, make a trip to Boston in order to appear before the committee that made that decision. So, that I thought was a giant step as far as the department.

Kennealy: Would that have been in the 50's or maybe early 60's?

Johnson: Uh...

Kennealy: He was still chair at the time I believe.

Johnson: Yes. I think Father Miller left in the early 60's, so this perhaps was about 1960.

Kennealy: '60. Yeah. Well, I would suspect that the achievement you're proudest of is your teaching.

Johnson: Yes. Yes.

Kennealy: What did you teach over the years?

Johnson: Well, when I came everybody had to teach a section of general chemistry...

Kennealy: The introductory freshmen.

Johnson:...the freshmen course and so I had one of those. But my fielding, my specialty, was organic chemistry and actually the gentleman that I replaced, Jack

Nobis, had taught organic chemistry. Coincidentally, he was also an Iowa State graduate.

Kennealy: Graduate.

Johnson: So I took over things that he had taught and I taught the chemistry majors. Father Miller was teaching the pre-med students.

Kennealy: Mhmm.

Johnson: And Garascia was also teaching organic chemistry.

Kennealy: Mhmm...so and at one point you taught some bio-chemistry as well didn't you?

Johnson: Yes. Yes.

Kennealy: I remember.

Johnson: Since I was the only one that who had really had any formal training in bio-chemistry. That was my course too.

Kennealy: Looking at the broader picture, who would you single out as the individuals who contributed the most to Xavier's development in your years here? What individuals stand out as important in Xavier's growth?

Johnson: Well I...I think there's no question about what Tom Hailstone's in the area of business and Ray McCoy in terms of the education programs were the two giants among the laymen that were here at the time.

Kennealy: Mhmm. Thomas Hailstones of course founded the business school...

Johnson: Right.

Kennealy:...And Ray, Raymond McCoy was he chair, he was both chair of education I think at one point and also dean?

Johnson: Dean of the graduate school.

Kennealy: Yes. Yes. And they really carried the water ...

Johnson: Right.

Kennealy:...there for a period of time.

Johnson: No question about it.

Kennealy: Yes. Yes. Some of the presidents, we talked about Father DiUlio. Father Paul O'Connor, what was he like?

Johnson: Oh, he was a charmer. Anybody you met in Cincinnati, especially in the business community, would have met him and been very much enthralled by that conversation, because he was a very amiable, very engaging sort of individual. He he did a great deal for the University ...

Kennealy: And sometimes referred to as "the great builder." A number of buildings went up during his tenure.

Johnson: Right. Right.

Kennealy: And then his right hand man for many years was Father Nieporte.

Johnson: Father Victor Nieporte. Yeah.

Kennealy: What was he like?

Johnson: He was, well, his personality was quite different. He was much more subdued and of course wasn't a public figure that Father O'Connor was. Father O'Connor represented the University. Father Nieporte was in the background. I remember when it came time for contracts to be renewed, we dealt with Father Nieporte.

Kennealy: I see.

Johnson: He dealt with the business side of the negotiations but ...

Kennealy: And also kind of supervised the buildings that went up in those days as well didn't he? I think he played a rather big part.

Johnson: Yes. He was involved especially with the University Center, which is on the site that is now Gallagher.

Kennealy: Would you have had dealings with people like Father Hetherington, Father Pete Buschmann, Joe Peters?

Johnson: Well...each one in a different way. Father Hetherington was a bridge player...

Kennealy: Oh. I did not know that.

Johnson:...and we would have a noontime bridge game in the faculty lounge and so... He was a very good bridge player and so that was my...and of course the fact that my father had been in classics sort of tipped me toward wanting to get to know him.

Kennealy: Ah yes.

Johnson: And then I knew people like Paul Harkins, in the Classics Department.

Kennealy: Mhmm...oh, yes, who taught classics.

Johnson: And Xavier was a small school at that time. You knew people from all departments. You associated with them socially if not professionally...so that ..it was easy to...

Kennealy: Would you have had any dealing with Father Pete Buschman, a man I always admired?

Johnson: Well, he was involved with admissions office. And of course we were always concerned about admissions and how many people would come in declaring an intent to major in chemistry and so forth. So I dealt with him certainly in....

Kennealy: In that regard. And of course Father Joe Peters-- he was a fellow scientist.

Johnson: And a competitor in a sense! There was a strong competition between chemistry and biology for the incoming students and we recognized that many of these people had their minds made up that they wanted to go to medical school, but we still wanted a crack at getting them to take as much chemistry as possible. And so there was sort of a friendly rivalry.

Kennealy: Rivalry. Father Joe Peters of course taught biology and was chairman of the department also for many years.

Johnson: Right. Right.

Kennealy: As you look back, what were the most significant things that happened at Xavier in the almost forty years that you were with us? What events would you single out?

Johnson: Well, the expansion of the physical facilities is perhaps the most obvious. Certainly things had changed greatly when I, when I came. We still had the old red building...

Kennealy: Oh.

Johnson: ...across where the Education Department now is on Winding Way.

Kennealy: That was the old...

Johnson: Avondale Athletic Club.

Kennealy: Club. Yes. The build... the only building I guess that was on the premises when the Jesuits bought it in 1911. Yes.

Johnson: Right. And the, the cafeteria was there. And so we would go over there for lunch. And then of course we had the barracks, North Hall and South Hall. And Alumni Science Hall and Schmidt Building, Hinkle Hall, Albers Building. Those were the front row buildings. And then of course the new Logan Building-- that comprised the buildings on campus.

Kennealy: I'm sure going co-ed in '69 is an event that most everybody, would stick out in everybody's mind, as most important in the University's history. Was there controversy that surrounded that or did that go fairly smoothly?

Johnson: I heard of individuals who didn't favor this, but I don't recall any, any group reaction to it. I think it was more individuals who regretted the change in the nature of the student body, but I don't think it was a big issue. And I, I think most people recognized that from the economic stand point it was rather important thing for the University.

Kennealy: To do ---yes.

Johnson: Yes.

Kennealy: How would to compare Xavier today with the Xavier you knew in '54?

Johnson: Well again, the dimensions of the campus...

Kennealy: The plans.

Johnson: ...the number of programs. We're offering programs in areas that weren't at all represented at the University at the time. I don't know...

Kennealy: 'Course the acquisition of Edgecliff helped in that regard.

Johnson: Right.

Kennealy: What departments did we inherit through Edgecliff? Edgecliff was about 1980.

Johnson: Well, Art was one of them.

Kennealy: Art, yes, that's right. I think we had a Theater Department too...

Johnson: Yeah.

Kennealy: ...briefly. Yeah.

Johnson: Yes. Nursing.

Kennealy: Nursing.

Johnson: Nursing. That was a...

Kennealy: ...which helped your department.

Johnson: Right. Right.

Kennealy: Criminal justice was in there -- or did we...was there a Criminal Justice...?

Johnson: I have a feeling we may have had that but I'm not sure.

Kennealy: Yeah. But certainly the University both physically and in its programs has developed a great deal. As you look back, what were your fondest memories of Xavier?

Johnson: Well, apart in the fact that it brought me to a community where I could meet my wife. That has to be...

Kennealy: That had to be up near the top of the list.

Johnson: Right. Right.

Kennealy: You better say that!

Johnson: Especially if this is going to be part of the permanent record. But I think the associations with the faculty and to the extent people are still around. My wife and I still enjoy socializing with people from many other departments on campus. But we had a comradery there that I'm not sure exists anymore simply because of the growth in the University. But ...

Kennealy: And I'm sure the religious affiliation of the school meant a great deal to you.

Johnson: Yes. Yes. It did. I...I...

Kennealy: I'm sure that's one reason why you came here in the first place.

Johnson: I had made up my mind that at some point along the line, that I wished to teach at a Catholic university.

Kennealy: Mhmm.

Johnson: I don't know that I determined that it had to be a Jesuit university but a Catholic university.

Kennealy: ... was one that you were looking for. As you look back, are there any regrets? Are there any unfulfilled dreams?

Johnson: Well...I...I...I think I could have been much more efficient in the use of my time. I think that I got distracted by other activities which I don't really regret, but it did keep me from perhaps doing as much in the areas of research and publication that I might have done. But as our children reached grade school, I became more involved with activities involving them. I don't think I ever short-changed Xavier in terms of my teaching, but I think probably my professional development suffered a little bit.

Kennealy: 'Course in your defense ,too, you were chair for many years and that's always a demanding position -- attending additional meetings, and so forth but ... In what year did you retire then?

Johnson: I retired from full-time teaching in 1993, but continued to teach summer school for four or five years after that.

Kennealy: And what have you been doing with yourself in retirement?

Johnson: Well, I certainly can speak to the truth of the statement that one can be much busier in retirement than prior to retirement. Since retirement I've been involved with St. Vincent DePaul Society in our parish. I'm now treasurer. I do the client visits, home visits, and that has been both a delight and a bit of a chore at times.

Kennealy: And a revelation too I'm sure on occasion.

Johnson: Yeah, it certainly has been that. And then I've been doing some editing for a number of years, and this actually started before retirement -- involved in proof reading, writing copy, and generally doing a variety of things in connection with the publication of a chemistry textbook.

Kennealy: Mhmm.

Johnson: It's ... I started when it was in its fifth edition, and we're now going into the tenth edition. And there's still work on my desk awaiting me when we finish.

Kennealy: When you finish, that's where you're going to go from here --- back to your desk!

Johnson: Right.

Kennealy: Yes. Bob, is there anything else that you'd like to say, perhaps something I forgot to ask about? Any other thoughts about your years at Xavier or years subsequent?

Johnson: Well, I certainly never regret the choice that I made. I think on several grounds it was the right choice for me to make. I just can't imagine having chosen to go somewhere else, and again I can't say enough about the people that I worked with both in the department and outside the department.

Kennealy: Mhmm.

Johnson: Those are memories that I will treasure ...

Kennealy: Treasure. Yes.

Johnson: ...all my days.

Kennealy: Well, I think it's also universally agreed Bob that you certainly made more than your contribution to Xavier in a lot of different ways, and I think everyone would agree with that. So we'll... can we end it on that note?

Johnson: That's fine.

Kennealy: Okay.

Johnson: Thank you.

Kennealy: So this concludes our interview with Dr. Robert Johnson. Thank you Bob for joining us this morning and for this wonderful interview. It has been both interesting and enlightening and ,as far as I'm concerned, a lot of fun.

Johnson: My pleasure.

Kennealy: God bless you.

Johnson: Thank you.

Kennealy: Yeah.

END