



Michael J. Graham, SJ

Oral History Interview

Interviewed by Anne Ryckbost

2021 March 2

Schmidt Hall, Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio

Transcription by rev.com and Anne Ryckbost, 2021

- Anne Ryckbost: [00:00](#) Good afternoon. My name is Anne Ryckbost, and I am the University Archivist at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. Today is Tuesday March 2, 2021. With me in Schmidt Hall is President Michael J. Graham of the Society of Jesus, who has graciously agreed to be interviewed today for the archive's collection of oral histories on Xavier University. Father Graham assumed the presidency of Xavier in 2001. In 2019, he became the longest tenured president in the history of Xavier. And at the end of June 2021, he will step down from this role. So, Father, thank you very much for participating in the series of interviews and for your willingness to share your experiences with us. I think in this first set of interviews, we're just going to get started with your personal background, something that not everyone knows about you. So, if you wouldn't mind sharing where were you born, raised, and your family background?
- Michael Graham: [01:00](#) Sure, sure, sure. I was born and raised in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. I was born March 9, 1953, so a week from today I turned 68. Scary thought. I'm the oldest of seven kids. We were all born within a little bit more than 10 years. I think a dominant memory of when I was a kid is that there were always other kids. I have no memory whatsoever having been by myself. Jeff came along 13 months after I was born, Steve 11 months after him, Laurie about 15 months after Steve, David 10 months after Lori. And so, before I was five years old, I had three brothers and a sister. That's just my experience.
- Michael G.: [01:52](#) Mom and dad were wonderful. Mom was a small town Iowa girl. She'd grown up about 50 miles west of



Cedar Rapids in a very small kind of rural community. Not quite the county seat. The county seat was the next town over, so it was a small town indeed. She and her sister had moved to Cedar Rapids for job opportunities. Mom was in nurses training until she injured her back. Dad had moved there after completing... He was from Wisconsin originally, born in Chicago, but the family moved up to rural Wisconsin during the Depression, and so he grew up in rural Wisconsin. His dad bought a dairy. Figured people would need to drink milk during the Depression. And he was right.

Michael G.: [02:53](#) So, dad had a year of college at a Beloit college, went into the Army. Had health trouble there with... He got pneumonia, had to have part of his lung removed. And after college, I'm sorry, after discharge, went to the University of Wisconsin, got his BA. And I'm not quite sure why he ended up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He had a cousin who lived there. I suspect that had something to do with that. And along the way, he met my mother through his future sister-in-law and brother-in-law, my mom's sister and her boyfriend. And one thing led to another, and then as I said, we had five kids.

Michael G.: [03:40](#) The house that I grew up in was one we moved to when I was about four. It was right before I started school. And it was kind of a ranch-style house in a track development that was being built on the edge of town. Nowadays, of course, everything's swarmed up around it. It was a neighborhood that was full of big families. The house next door to us had seven kids ultimately, as we did. And up the street, there's a family of five behind us, a family of three across the street, family of three, so we had great games of hide and go seek and that kind of stuff growing up.

Anne R.: [04:26](#) Did you play any sports, or have any hobbies growing up?

Michael G.: [04:29](#) I didn't. I didn't. I was never very good at sports when I was a kid, and so I avoided them. And I later realized that the reason was because I hated to lose. I was incredibly competitive. So, I was very good,



however, at the things that school rewarded. Right? So, I loved reading. Every summer, the library would have a promotional thing to get kids reading and you get prizes for every number of books you read. One year, it was these homemade, what, plaster dinosaurs that had been fired with bright glaze. Dinosaurs are always cool things for kids, right? Not that I needed any incentive to read, I just read a lot.

Michael G.:

[05:21](#)

I remember summers, my next brother and I would go and spend two weeks at my maternal grandparents house in this small Iowa community, and I well remember this, what, a window that was a kind of reading nook in their...off their dining room, where there were pillows and so on. And I would just sit there and read for hours and hours and hours. So, that was my hobby. I also grew up playing piano, so that was a big thing in my mother's family, music in general. So, I got a love of music that way. I started taking piano lessons when I was eight and had to drop them in high school because there was just too much else going on. I couldn't maintain them.

Anne R.:

[06:25](#)

So, is it fair to say that English or reading was one of your favorite subjects in school? What did you gravitate to?

Michael G.:

[06:31](#)

Yeah. It varied. It varied. What happened was that my favorite subject was always whoever my best teacher was, I think. So, for example, in eighth grade I had a great, great math teacher. I love math. In ninth grade, I had a great, great science teacher, love science. And then in my junior year in high school, I had a great, great social studies teacher, so I love social studies. So, it just varied. I remember when I was very young in grade school, there were these, what, programed, independent study literature and social studies packets that you could work your way through. I can't even remember what they were called, but they had different colored levels. Right? You worked your way from green to purple to red to blue or something like that. So, that's where the competitive streak came out, that I made sure to read my way to the top of the pile before anybody else did.



- Anne R.: [07:40](#) Do you think that competitive streak has continued?
- Michael G.: [07:43](#) Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely, it has. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I don't like to lose. It's tempered. I mean, it's not the kind of strange, twisted thing that it used to be once upon a time. But I think I've got, what? It's mellowed and left in its place drive, I think, and questing for the best, but in a variety of other kinds of ways. I don't need the trophies or medals or whatever.
- Anne R.: [08:25](#) What was your family's religious background like? What was that like in your family?
- Michael G.: [08:29](#) Sure, sure, sure. We were Catholic. Mom was born and raised Catholic. Of course, I mean, at that time, you would say traditional, right? But that said, it wasn't as if she was extremely pious or devout. I mean, we never would've thought of missing mass on Sunday. Mom was sang in the church choir all along. That's the music legacy from her side of the family that I mentioned. Dad had been raised in a kind of vague Presbyterian atmosphere and converted during their early married years. I don't remember Dad before his conversion, so that must have been when I was very young.
- Michael G.: [09:20](#) But when they got married, they couldn't get married in the church because he wasn't a Catholic, so they got married in the rectory. Right? By Father Peters at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Dad was very, what, strong in his faith, and around at Thanksgiving time and Christmas, he would always pray grace out loud. But it wasn't as if we said the rosary on Friday nights as a family or hosted the traveling statue of Mary or something like that. We all went to Catholic schools until I was going into the eighth grade. At that time, all seven of us were at St. Jude's. It was the new school that was built on the west side of town to accommodate population shifts. And the schools back in Cedar Rapids, the public schools were very, very good. Still are. And so, there were any number of subjects in high school, for example, for which the kids from the local Catholic high school came over to the nearest public school, whether it was driver's ed or art or that sort of stuff.



Michael G.:

[10:47](#)

And so, Dad was a salesman, Mom didn't work, at least not when I was growing up, so they never had a lot of money. And so, the idea of paying tuition for what you also had for free in the public schools just didn't make a lot of sense to them, so we all shifted en masse out of the Catholic schools into the public schools. Which was terrifying to me at the time because I'd been indoctrinated by the nuns at St. Jude's. We had BVM, Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who told us of these horrors that happened in the public schools, that I would be locked into a locker by bullies if I was lucky and knifed if I wasn't. That kind of stuff. I discovered that it wasn't quite the case.

Anne R.:

[11:44](#)

So, in high school, and you were thinking about your future and planning, just like our high school students are looking at Xavier now, what kinds career paths were you considering? What led you to your undergraduate program? Where did you go? How'd you figure that out?

Michael G.:

[12:00](#)

Yeah, exactly. So, when I was a kid, I wanted to do all kinds of kids stuff. I wanted to be an archaeologist or an astronaut. Those were subjects that I read broadly, ancient Egypt, ancient Greece, lots of science fiction. Robert Heinlein was my drug of choice when I was in junior high. But I knew from a very early age, I'd say probably 10, that I wanted to be a teacher. It was just really clear to me that I wanted to be a teacher. Now, what I wanted to teach would change with who my favorite teacher was, like I said, so math when I was in eighth grade and so on. So, I went to college expecting to be a high school social studies teacher. That was what the plan was. I'll circle back around to the college itself.

Michael G.:

[12:51](#)

But then had a really bad experience, I mean a really bad experience, with a terrible education course my sophomore year. It was a total waste of time. I remember going to the class on the first or second day of a month, and the professor who was the chair of the education department asked how many of us had said, "Rabbit, rabbit," the first thing when we woke up that morning. Because there was a superstition that if you said, "Rabbit, rabbit," the first



time you woke up on the first day of the month, you would have good luck all month long. This led to this bizarre conversation that I can't even remember, and all I could think of was, "What in the name of God am I doing here? I'm paying money for this?" So, that was the end of that.

Michael G.: [13:50](#)

By that point, though, I'd also started falling in love with college life. I mean, in a good sense, not like the "college life" college life, and thought that maybe I'd like to teach college. I gravitated towards groups of guys who were likewise gifted academically and all that went on to like law school and medical school. Many of them got PhDs. So, it was a fairly natural transition. I went to a place called Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa. What we told ourselves was, well, of course, we were founded by the same family that founded the Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, but we had had our academic integrity and we refused to take the subpar granddaughter of Ezra Cornell, and so they got the endowment and we didn't. I doubt that there's a shred of truth to that.

Michael G.: [14:50](#)

When I was looking at colleges and high school, I didn't know what I was doing. In retrospect, the guidance counseling department in my high school was terrible. They gave you self-assessment tools like where you would punch things with a wire key, and then you decode the results for yourself. So, I didn't know what I was doing when I was applying to colleges. I didn't know. I knew I didn't want to go to the University of Iowa. That seemed too big and faceless. I had older brothers and sisters of good friends of mine who were there, and so I got a sense of that. But I also had older brothers and sisters of friends who were at places like Grinnell, which even then had the hippie school vibe to it. So, that was kind of appealing.

Michael G.: [15:52](#)

So, I was eligible for a scholarship. I applied to Cornell College along with other places that I applied, and they told me I was eligible for this big deal scholarship. And lo and behold, I became a William Fletcher King scholar, which basically meant that I didn't pay tuition at all. And so, just had to come up





with room and board and sundries. So, basically, they made me an offer I couldn't refuse, so it was really wonderful. It was just really wonderful in lots and lots of ways.

- Anne R.: [16:31](#) Did that scholarship free you to focus on your studies-
- Michael G.: [16:37](#) Oh, absolutely.
- Anne R.: [16:37](#) ... in a way that wouldn't have been possible?
- Michael G.: [16:39](#) Absolutely. Absolutely, it did. Well, let's see, as part of my financial aid package, included that I had a board job, so my first year I worked for the food service and the way we did things at that time was they had sit down dinners in the evening. And so, groups of four tables, I want to say, yeah, had a waitress and a bus boy. I was a bus boy. I majored in psychology and philosophy as an undergraduate, and the psychology department gave me a work study job. So, beginning of my sophomore year, I didn't have to do the waiter thing anymore.
- Michael G.: [17:27](#) So, as it happened, the table that my waitress and I happened to draw was this... They didn't have fraternities on campus, they had social groups, and the Owls were the biggest and baddest bunch of them all. And so, at first I was terrified of them. They called my waitress, whose name was Yvonne, Fifi, and they called me Lurch because I looked like the character from the Addams Family. But I was quick and I got them extra food, and so I was very popular with the Owls as a result. But it was still no tears shed when I gave up that.
- Michael G.: [18:13](#) It's interesting, like looking back on the philosophy and psychology that I majored in as an undergraduate, because both of them ask big questions... Psychology, it's how can I understand the world inside? And philosophy is how can I understand the world around me in depth? And so, those two fit together really well. I had this big curiosity. When I was in high school... How did this work? Well, I went to see 2001: A Space Odyssey when I was 13, and that was brand new, right? And was struck by the big



questions that it asked. That's always my favorite kind of science fiction movie now, not Star Wars, but Arrival or something like that.

- Anne R.: [19:07](#) Yeah. You're good.
- Michael G.: [19:09](#) I was good? Okay.
- Anne R.: [19:10](#) You're good. Yeah.
- Michael G.: [19:11](#) Good. Just want to make sure.
- Anne R.: [19:12](#) Yeah, yeah.
- Michael G.: [19:16](#) Anyway, so I read... Well, I learned that the opening theme comes from Richard Strauss's Also Sprach Zarathustra, which was from a tone poem that, I wouldn't have known what a tone poem was then, but against the background of Nietzsche's book, Thus Spake Zarathustra. And so, I went and got Thus Spake Zarathustra and read it when I was like 14. I'm sure it just went sailing over my head. But I remember there was a bookstore in town, Sanford's, on Third Avenue next to Killian's, where I would go and just sit and pull philosophy books off the shelf. So, I was reading Kierkegaard and all sorts of things when I was in high school. And when I went to Cornell, I fast talked my way, as a first semester freshmen, into an upper, a senior level seminar called Contemporary Religious Thought, where we read Freud and Camus and... Oh God, Tillich and Buber and all sorts of things. It was just fabulous. I really had to struggle to keep up, but I also got one of the only A's. It was fabulous.
- Michael G.: [20:39](#) So, at any rate, those were the big areas. I suppose, psychology was the after-clap of social studies in high school, was the part that I was interested in, not history or geography or that stuff. And then there was all the big picture philosophy stuff. The way that the philosophy major was structured was great, and it led to, I think, what was probably my single most impactful educational experience. It was a small department. It was a small college. There were less





than 1,000 people, right? So, there were two professors in the philosophy department. Not a lot of philosophy majors. You had to rack up a certain number of credits, like intro, logic, and then they had philosophy of this, philosophy of that, and you had to take a couple of those.

- Michael G.: [21:34](#) But what you mainly did is tutorials, so my junior and senior year, I would choose a path of study with my professor. We'd agree on texts that we would read, always primary texts. I would read a bit, write a paper, a three to five page paper, get it to him two days ahead of time, and then I'd come in and we talk about the paper. So, it was just the two of us, right? Once a week like that. So, I had to write a three to five page paper in philosophy every week for two years. So, I got to the point where I was thinking in terms of three to five page papers. I knew how to do that. Boy, a thesis statement, all that kind of thing. It was great. It was great. And so, I started out reading Hume. I remember eventually got to... backtrack to Kant. It was a wonderful. It was just a great experience.
- Anne R.: [22:40](#) That liberal arts background-
- Michael G.: [22:40](#) Oh, very much.
- Anne R.: [22:41](#) ... has served you well.
- Michael G.: [22:42](#) Oh, very much.
- Anne R.: [22:43](#) As a leader of a liberal arts school.
- Michael G.: [22:46](#) Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Well, and I think I fell in love with what the project of a college could be. Now, this was very small, right? Rural, 30 miles away from where I lived, out in the corn field. Beautiful little campus, like a gem. Still is. But there was a sense of community. I wasn't a part of the honors program there. I had friends who were. And part of the honors program every year was there would be... I don't know if it was four lectures every semester or four lectures a year, honors lectures they were called, where professors from the college would give some kind of a paper that



was fairly learned. People would pack into this little auditorium and we'd just cheer them on. It was great. It was just great. So, there was something about that sense of familiarity and community and the life of the mind, and all that sort of thing, that was just, for me, riveting, just riveting.

Anne R.: [24:00](#)

So, by the end of your four years, had you thought about a career path for after college? How did you transition? What was your next step?

Michael G.: [24:10](#)

Yeah. I knew that I wanted to go to grad school. It's just what you did. I wanted to get a PhD and thought that... because I wanted to be a college professor. So, I applied to a number of different graduate programs. I was going on in experimental social psychology. That was going to be my graduate degree. Because I'd had a terribly impactful professor in social psychology when I was there. I basically majored in Lindsey Schutz. Whatever Lindsey Schutz taught, I took. And then, as it happened, I didn't get into my top choice graduate school. I got into my number two choice graduate school, which was the University of Michigan.

Michael G.: [25:02](#)

One of the history professors who I had taken a course from, and he was an advisor for the men's honors residents that was founded for my senior year and I was the president of it as it happened. So, I got to know Bill really well, Bill Carroll. I got to know him really well as a result, and he had been... He's from the University of Michigan and had been part of something there called the Pilot Program, which was a program founded in the late '60s that hired graduate students to teach undergraduate courses and live in a freshmen/sophomore residence hall. So, he invited me to apply, and I did, and I got the job. And so, that was where I met, well, the guy who's still my best friend now who was my path into the Jesuits actually. So, I often wondered, what would have happened, where would God have found me had I gotten into my top choice? Which was Stanford. God had his ways and probably would have figured it out. He's solved larger problems before.



- Anne R.: [26:16](#) So, you moved from Iowa to Michigan-
- Michael G.: [26:16](#) To the University of Michigan.
- Anne R.: [26:16](#) ... pretty much directly after graduation?
- Michael G.: [26:16](#) Right. Exactly. Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I remember being in Ann Arbor for the staff orientation for the Pilot Program in the middle of August after having graduated. I painted houses in the summer in between. Yeah, that was a great experience. I had a work-study job for a social psychology professor, so that helped pay the bills and then room and board at Alice Lloyd, the name of the residence hall where the Pilot Program was. So, that all took care of everything. So, it was, what, slim, but it was fun.
- Michael G.: [27:04](#) And there were, let's see, oh, about two dozen graduate students who were hired by the program, I want to say. Maybe 28, something like that. And there were a number that we just didn't click, but there were about five or six where we really clicked and we were very close friends all the way through graduate school. I learned to play bridge when I was in college, for example, and I remember a number of nights where one of the guys taught music at University of Michigan Dearborn, he'd go there once a week, come back, pick up a bottle of scotch on the way back, and four of us would sit down to play bridge. We'd open the bottle of scotch and throw the cap out the window and play bridge until the scotch was gone. [Laughs].
- Anne R.: [27:56](#) Will you be playing bridge in retirement?
- Michael G.: [28:02](#) No, no. I haven't played it in years. But that's the kind of thing you can do when you're 23 or 24. Right?
- Anne R.: [28:08](#) So, the PhD then in American studies-
- Michael G.: [28:12](#) Nope.
- Anne R.: [28:13](#) ... how did you-
- Michael G.: [28:13](#) PhD in American culture.



- Anne R.: [28:14](#) In American Culture.
- Michael G.: [28:15](#) Exactly. Yeah. When I was in college, I was terribly interested in big picture ideas about history and philosophy of the sciences and all that sort of stuff, and so I think that I was shocked in going from the broad, wide-ranging intellectual environment of a liberal arts undergraduate degree to the narrow, focused, specialized - in my mind, tedious, boring, flat, dull, uninteresting life of a graduate student in experimental social psychology. I had friends who were in the program in American Studies, several of them were in the residence hall, that's how I got to know them. And I remember going to their parties, and they were fun. I go to the parties for the folks in experimental social psychology, and they were dull. Just these people were dull. I didn't want any part of them. So, I went through this like, "Oh my God," moment. Now, what the hell am I going to do? Because I just hated it.
- Michael G.: [29:17](#) I started taking courses, auditing courses, in American intellectual history, that I ended up doing more work for than I did in my experimental social psych courses. I mean, I remember suffering through a statistics course that was just one of the most painful things in my life. The professor was this whizzbang guy out of California- Berkeley, top of his class. He mumbled. I mean, he didn't know how to teach at all. And then you're trying to learn this very high-level statistics from him. It didn't work. So, I basically fast talked my way into the American studies program. I got a Master's in psychology as a consolation prize because I had racked up enough credits to get a Master's, and then got a Master's and finally the PhD in the program in American Studies there.
- Anne R.: [30:19](#) So, how does the Society of Jesus fit into such a demanding academic life? What led you to the Society, and how were you able to navigate both worlds?
- Michael G.: [30:31](#) Yeah. Grace, I mean, it's grace always. Right? So, when I was in college, I became like the village



atheist. I was this philosophy jock, after all. And I also was modeling myself after this professor in psychology who I took all the courses from. There was a group of faculty who would get together over lunch and we pretentious undergrads would eavesdrop on them. And Lindsey Schutz was the one who was always going after the several faculty members who were clearly Christian and didn't make any bones about it. In fact, Bill Carroll, the history guy, who had come from Michigan, was Catholic. He was one of the first intellectually sophisticated Catholics that I'd ever met. A pompous jerk in a lot of ways, but he gave me a lot to think about.

Michael G.: [31:35](#) So, when I was in high school, I had started to fall away, I suppose. I remember my aunt, when she learned that I was going to Cornell College, it's a Methodist school, said, "Oh, don't you lose your faith." And I thought to myself, "Susan, dear, too late. Too late." When I was in high school, for example, one Lent, I decided, well, rather than giving up a vice, let's take one up, so I started smoking. That's, what, my junior year. I wondered where I should write and to whom to renounce my baptismal vows. I mean, that's the kind of adolescent stuff that I was just so full of.

Michael G.: [32:20](#) Anyway, it was still very much a part of me, this claim that faith made, and so there was a way in which I could grapple with the big questions without admitting to myself that there was a part of me that remained a believer through psychology and philosophy curiously. My sophomore year, my roommate was a guy who ambited being a Lutheran minister, and through him, I got to know a number of kids in the... Oh, it wasn't the Campus Crusade for Christ, but it was something like that. And I remember finding it very attractive. I suppose, to some degree, it was the community aspect. And I even flirted with it for a while, but then snapped back.

Michael G.: [33:08](#) But towards the end of my college career, the plate tectonics were shifting at home in my family. Dad was going through a midlife crisis and there were some problems with one of my younger sisters. I remember being home once, and I don't remember what the



particulars were of the stuff that hit the fan, I just remember that the stuff hit the fan. And my mom was very upset and got up from the couch in the living room and went into their bedroom and sat down and was crying. I followed her in, and I put my arm around her. I was 18. No. No, no, no. I'm sorry, I was like 21, something like that. And she just poured her heart out, all this scalding stuff about how disappointing and bitter life had become. And then at the end of it, as if to say, after which nothing more could be said, said, "And I'm losing my faith too." And I said to her, unbidden, it just popped out of my mouth, "Mom, I'll go back to church with you if you'll go back." I don't know where it came from, it was just, boom, right there.

Michael G.:

[34:45](#)

Well, this was late in my college career. I was rescued from having to do anything by having to go back to school and so on. But what was interesting was that when I went to Ann Arbor, there was one other person from Cornell College at the University of Michigan, and he was two years ahead of me in an entirely different program. We met once and we... I recognized him. But I was free to completely reinvent myself. I didn't have to make embarrassed explanations to anybody if I chose to start going to church again. And so, I did.

Michael G.:

[35:22](#)

This guy who I said I met at the Pilot Program in Ann Arbor, who's now my best friend, he was the guy with whom I started going to mass. We were right near the hospital campus, and so the university hospital was a stone's throw from the front door of the residence hall. And we would go to the chapel there because they had mass at noon, it was right there, you get up hung over after Saturday night and just go over there. But it was meaningful. I wouldn't have thought of missing it. I remember telling myself, early in the process, that if I'm going to do this, I'm going to do it seriously. I'm going to do it seriously. And so, it was cooperating with some kind of grace that cracked open, it had manifested itself along the way, it had gone underground. I swear to God, one of the ways that I kept in touch with the infinite when I was in high





school and college was listening to The Moody Blues for God's sakes.

Michael G.:

[36:30](#)

Anyway, this friend, Tom Flynn, was a good judge of product. So, he had two uncles who were Jesuit priests, his father had abandoned the family when he was a boy, he didn't see him after the age of five, so Uncle Frank and Uncle Joe were the dominant male figures in his life, in addition to his grandfather, his mother's father, with whom the family lived, him and his mother. He was an only. He went to Boston College High School, Boston College. The family parish was the Jesuit parish right at Boston College, St. Ignatius. I think it's St. Ignatius. So, when I met Tom, he was wondering if he should enter the Jesuits. He was thinking that through. So, he contacted Uncle Joe, Uncle Joe got in touch with a Jesuit priest at Loyola Chicago to work with Tom to set up retreats for him to go to, since that was just a train ride away. Tom said, "Hey, would you want to do that?" I said, "Okay." And boom, there we are.

Michael G.:

[37:50](#)

My first weekend retreat, at the end of it. It was a good experience. I asked this Jesuit, whose name was also Tom, "So, how did you decide to become a Jesuit?" And he said, "Oh, we'll have to talk about that sometime." And I thought, "Well, what, is it that complicated?" Two years later, after I'd made any number of retreats with him and was moving towards application to the Society, he said to me over dinner—he took me out to this Italian restaurant, I had my first Negroni, it was fabulous—he said, "Do you remember the question you asked me our first time?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "What was it?" I said, "I asked you why you became a Jesuit." He said, "What did I say?" I said, "You said, 'Well, we'll have to talk about that sometime.'" He said, "Do you understand now why I said that?" And I sat back and thought, and I said, "Because my real question was, Tom, I'm thinking..." —I'm getting chills—"Tom, I'm thinking about being a Jesuit. How do I think about that?" And he said, "I thought that was the case, and until you could ask the question that you really had to ask, I wasn't going to answer the other question." So, it was wonderful.



- Michael G.: [39:28](#) Another kind of like... moment was I had a girlfriend, and that was very serious. She had followed me to Michigan from Cornell. That was the big deal, like what to do about her and how to navigate that and all of this. Eventually, that took care of itself, the painful night. But at any rate, I remember I called... Things had gotten to the point where I figured I'd better tell my parents that this was in the offing, entering the Jesuits. So, I called home, and literally the conversation went like this. I was talking to mom, we were making small talk, then I transitioned by saying, "Mom, I have something serious that I need to tell you." Mom said, "You're thinking of being a priest."
- Anne R.: [40:31](#) Wow!
- Michael G.: [40:32](#) Yeah. She just-
- Anne R.: [40:33](#) She knew.
- Michael G.: [40:33](#) Exactly, exactly. That she had seen something going on in me that told her that something was happening. I also was really fortunate that my major advisor, not the guy who was the official dissertation chair, but the guy who I really worked the most with who's a terrific younger professor, John Owen King, just a godsend to a number of us. He was a Catholic convert himself and was really instrumental for me in terms of trying to figure out how to push or pull together the academic calendar and the Jesuit stuff.
- Michael G.: [41:14](#) So, I talked to John about this a lot. John told me, I didn't know, that once you achieve candidacy status at the university, finished all your lower level coursework, were freed up to do the dissertation and so on, and the signal for that was passing all your comprehensive exams, prelims we called them. You could walk away from the university for two years no questions asked, show up at the end of two years, write your tuition check to the Rackham School of Graduate Studies, and be accepted back with open arms. Those two years equaled the first two years of mandatory training as a novice. So, it would be possible to put those two things together.



- Michael G.: [42:03](#) And I remember saying to him, "Well, that's great." But I was thinking of taking prelims summer of 1979, and this was in spring of 1978, early on. He said, "Mike, that's silly. You could take them now. It'd be painful, but the point of passing prelims is not to do your life's work, it's to pass them. That's all you need to do." In his view, he said, "What you need to do is enter the Jesuits because that iron is hot. Strike." So, I made the plans to take prelims, finished them up July 31, 1978, feast of Saint Ignatius as it happened. How's that for divine humor? And entered the Jesuits on September 3.
- Anne R.: [43:16](#) Where did you go for your novice training?
- Michael G.: [43:18](#) Yeah. So, it was in suburban Detroit. At that point, there were 10 provinces, we come to four, and so there were two provinces, Detroit, Chicago, which shared the novitiate in a former convent at a parish in suburban Detroit. So, I was there, basically, for two years, but I spent time at various places. I did one experiment, so-called, at Loyola Academy in Wilmette, Illinois. I'd never been in a Jesuit high school in my life. It was just assumed that I was going to go on and teach at a university, obviously, and so getting experience as to what a high school was like. I was in St. Louis for the early days of Boys Hope Girls Hope. It wasn't called that then. It was called Jesuit Program in Living and Learning, JPLL. And so, I worked in the first house with the first director, the founding director of that, Paul Sheridan. Great man. Prison ministry in Detroit. Of course, the main thing you do is the long retreat. I have no memory of it whatsoever, unlike my Tertianship retreat, which was, what, 1999/2000 that I recur to every day of my life.
- Michael G.: [44:39](#) So, it worked out very well. And then there was a question at the end of that. So, will he go on, go back and go on with graduate school? Or should he be mainstreamed with the rest of his class? And I had an opinion in the matter, but it didn't matter that I had an opinion in the matter, but they chose to send me back. And so, that worked out really well because down the road, after I was ordained, I had friends who went on to grad school. I was done. I could start a



career. So, when I got tenure and was transitioning into the vice president's office, subject for a later conversation, friends of mine were just coming out of graduate school and beginning their teaching careers, so the timing just worked out really, really well.

Michael G.: [45:31](#)

So, I was at Loyola Chicago for a year because while I was in the Jesuits, I rethought what I wanted to do with the dissertation and so needed to do a lot of secondary work on it and then get my hands in some primary sources and so on. The primary sources were widely available, and of course, if you're in Chicago, you can access just about anything. So, I spent a year doing the background work there. There was a guy up at Marquette who did the kind of stuff that I was interested in. I would need to be near Annapolis to access all the primary work, the real primary work that I needed to do, primary sources. And so, I went there a couple of times to meet some people and talk and ended up going to Georgetown.

Michael G.: [46:25](#)

I was sent to Georgetown as a place to live. That was a real experience, a big Jesuit community. There were 80 some Jesuits in the place and high powered academics that I had heard of, some who were very kind and wonderful men, others who were just bizarre or just so full of themselves. It was just kind of a strange place. But I remember arriving there, unpacking my car. It was a hot August afternoon. Getting cleaned up. I had heard about Georgetown in the network. And I walked downstairs to the dining room where I was met by an African-American man in livery, who said, "Good evening, Father. My name is Parker. How may be of assistance?" And I thought to myself, "You've got to be kidding me." But some mornings I'd come down to breakfast and have breakfast with Bob Drinan, who had been a representative, but then the Pope told him to get out of politics. And he was a professor at the law school, he was a huge hero for my father. I'd call home and go, "Dad, you'll never believe..." So, there were those kinds of experiences as well.

Anne R.: [47:59](#)

Well, I think we are at our time capacity today.



Michael G.:

[48:03](#)

And this is actually a good breaking point, so we can pick up with Georgetown because it was from Georgetown that I came here.

Anne R.:

[48:11](#)

Okay.