

**August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014 – Sister Joan Laughlin speaking with Professor Mary Ellen Lennon at the Convent of the Sisters of St. Francis, in Oldenburg, Indiana.**

Abbreviations

SJL: Sister Joan Laughlin

MEL: Mary Ellen Lennon

MEL: This is Mary Ellen Lennon in Oldenburg, Indiana at the convent of the Sisters of St. Francis. I am very happy to be sharing this interview on August 4th, 2014, with Sister Joan Laughlin. Would you like to introduce yourself?

SJL: I will. I'm Sister Joan Laughlin, and I'm originally from Cincinnati, I grew up in Cincinnati Ohio And I've been a Sister, just celebrated my sixtieth jubilee last week, as a Sister of St. Francis. And I've done a number of things in community, I was a teacher for twenty-eight years, and then I went into, did a little parish work, working with adults. Then I was in the course of that sixty years I was asked to be director and to begin our associate program which is inviting people who feel like they'd like to be part of our mission and spirit, to become associates of our community. So in 1980 I was invited to consider beginning and so I did. It has made all the difference for me and for others too, so. So anyway so I was so that's been a really important part of my life. In 1986 that was elected to be on our council, on our general council, the leadership team of our community. And I must say that regarding Papua New Guinea when we first, it was in 1960 as you probably know, the Reverend Mother said, we are going to be going, going to be going to New Guinea. And none of us knew where New Guinea was and that's all I heard. Anyway, I never ever had any desire to go there, never. There were Sisters who just were biting the bullet to go, but I had no idea, and then no desire. When I was on their general council, I was on for eight years, and it was our role to visit our Sisters or wherever they are. Well when it came to deciding among the six five of us who would go to New Guinea for a particular year, I always said, you go, you go, you know. You, I didn't, I had no desire even to visit there. And but the last year, second to last year of our term the Sisters there would say, when are you going to come? Why don't you come? And so finally I came, I went with Sister Ann—she's Sister Kate now—Sister Annata, and we went for a whole month. In fact it was this time of year we were going. And so we so we were there for about three weeks that actually in Papua New Guinea, because as you probably heard that Papua New Guinea is a country, an independent country as of 1976 or something like that. So it's Papua New Guinea. So anyway, so I went and I you know, I really I really appreciated it. I really liked the people, it was just I was just very much I was very much at home there and enjoyed my visit. A lot of difficult times and so forth, but anyway when I came home I said you know, if somebody would ask say, well why don't you come you know, come we've got something that we could see you do, I think I would go. I'm mean I would discern about it.

So, somebody said why don't you just don't wait to be asked, just put that out there to them. Well, I did and then I got several letters saying come, you know. And so, I was I

thought what am I going to, I want to do something meaningful there. And so I had a year sabbatical too and which I did, spent at. Part of which I spent at Pendle Hill, which is a Quaker Center for spirituality. Anyway I, so I wasn't sure so what some of them wrote well somebody wrote, oh yeah you could come you could help with the census or you could do this. And one of the Sisters was home on leave at the time Sister Paulina, and she said, Joan before you go out, before you go on your sabbatical I want to just talk to you, I want to talk to you, she said. You know, what we would really like you to do is to come and to work with our Franciscan Sisters of Mary, that's that community a new community of Sisters that we had helped to form. And well, when she said that right away I was eager, because when I was there I really was impressed by them. I enjoyed I enjoyed them and really it was just they were just very lovely people. And so I thought well that's what I would like to do. And so in the course of the year that I made my plans I discerned prayed about it and prayed about it. And knew it was the right thing, right. And so everybody was surprised everyone on the committee was surprised, as I was going to PNG.

And so anyway, when I was there I lived in Kandla and Mendi is the, well, Port Moresby is right at the coast and that's where you come in internationally. Then you could take a plane and that's not a little dinky plane but some people would think that's a little dinky plane from Port Moresby up to the Highlands. It's a Air New Guinea and you know, those planes are a sizable you know like I imagined they're about sixty people passengers. So anyway so so we go to then we go to Mendi, Mendi is like the provincial capital I guess you'd say. And that's where our Sisters that's where our our mission was, in Mendi and that's where our Sisters that's where they started and that's kind of and also that's where people come for supplies and so forth. So from so I spent a week in Mendi and the Sisters were you know, we had we had a meeting or something that week. And so then it was time to go to Kagua and so we got on our little forza which is like a those small cars. Anyway, it just it's a small car but a good car. And so there we are, everyone piled up with our supplies and so there are so we drove to Kagua which is at this point about five, four hour drive. We go and the roads are just just nothing. They're bumpy and have holes, they have mud or they're like dry riverbeds. Anyway, so so we arrived at Kagua and I just felt at home as soon as, even though I thought, how am I ever going to get out of here the roads are so bad, I don't know if I'm going to get out of here.

So when I was there then I worked with the, it was delightful being there. So there were there were Sister Polly at that time there one of our Sisters, Sister Polly that who has since died. And Sister Laurie who is another community on the other missions community, and she's from England. So for a while it was the three of us is because Sister Polly—Ruth Ann and was on leave at that time. And anyway my role then was to work with the FSMs, the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, and when I got there they said Sister Maria Goretti, who was kind of the lead novice director, she was going on leave for six months so they said, so you'll, I need somebody in that place so that's so I became like the novice director of the at that time maybe two or three novices or four even. And so, so that's what I did there I was like novice director. Excuse me, I always am a little bit hoarse.

MEL: Would you like water?

SJL: I don't think so, I think I'm okay.

MEL: Could you describe where the novices lived and did you live with them?

SJL: Okay, so no. Novices, we had we had our house the Sisters, our Franciscan one, was built by the Brothers, by the Capuchin Brothers. Right on, early on early on Franciscan Sisters of Mary lived oh, let's see, I'd say just like I can't even figure out how many feet, but not that far away. They had the buildings that were I think we're once classroom buildings, and then converted to a dorm like dormitories for that. But they were you know within stone's throw you could get there in a minute. So that's where they lived and and then there was a house in the back here that one of the couple of the other Sisters lived so there you know there were that time there were quite a few there. So every day, so I was then like a novice director but I wasn't living with them. And so we would, and it was good, it was good. But I would be helping them with their code, code was the studies called distance studies like, like correspondence but that was really a, set, setup well you know by the government, Education Department. And so they would have lessons in, they would be writing out the lessons and so forth but we would be helping them.

So I helped them in that way and then also then we did sharing, sharing our lives and sharing of how at every Monday we came together and kind of talked about where God was, and kind of reflected on our life. It was a very good thing.

ME: They spoke, they talked, they shared?

SJL: Oh yeah, oh yes, they were very, yes they were very conversant and they were conversant in English. So from my, from my opinion they spoke well. I mean, you know they'd have to get stuck sometimes and go back a little bit to pidgin but yeah, they spoke English, you know they they were taught that in their schools.

MEL: Why did they become Sisters or why did they want to become Sisters?

SJL: Okay, they, it seemed like years before that and then you know you haven't met Sister Kate yet, hopefully she'll be coming but I don't think she's signed up yet. But and then Sister Noreen, see they were two of the first ones, and you met Martine she was well. Anyway early on they, like in 1970's was it, anyway. They were, they had to, they knew there were women who had a desire to become Sisters. They knew that there was you know from their working with them there were certain there were several of the several women who had this desire. And the bishop at that time was interested, he wanted a community of Sisters formed in the diocese. And he, but he did not what he did not want them to be attached to our, or like part of our community. His vision and their vision was to be a community by itself, of its own. And so and he wanted it to be Franciscan.

So I guess they had a number of meetings and so forth and they didn't they'd always they knew they were several women that were interested so. And when they announced it, well they called it the Franciscan Sisters of Mary and then the Sisters of the area they kind of talked and they voted who will be the leader of this, and first it was decided that our community would be the chief of the formators of this community, all of the others were you know, very supportive. And then they voted on who would lead it and the person they chose was Sister Kate, who was then Sister Annata, so she became the first leader. And she lived in Kagua and then but I think it began in Kagua, so we've been coming so you know we're coming just like this, anything that gets started was a little, kind of a rocky start some. And there would be women who came and maybe you know, had some impediment of some sort. But it grew, you know, it grew and these were so when I got there there were how many vibrant they were vibrant women, vibrant Sisters, young Sisters, and they had, I should have brought some pictures, that would have been helpful.

MEL: Next time.

SJL: And they were intelligent, the people. I found the people of Papua New Guinea to be intelligent. And so there was a desire, excuse me. Then then they developed you know, they develop materials to teach them and to lead them in prayer, to teach them spirituality. And of course the Capuchin Fathers, were the Franciscan Fathers, and they too helped in the education. And then there were other Sisters too that that helped, and others who took them out with them in to their missions you know, and and taught them how to be catechists and all kinds of things, you know. So they, it really became they grew in number and they still are growing in number, and they're becoming you know, active and important or effective with they're working with their people. So I saw, I was there might have been actually the real the real reason why they wanted me to come, was to help them help that community have their first big meeting in which they would elect their own leaders you know, not just because we were the leaders we were they weren't part of our community but we were the leaders of the community. When I was there Sister Ruth Ann who was leader, she I forget what they called her. Anyway she was leader of that community for seventeen years I think. So, and then Ann eventually became, so.

But so, my thing was to prepare them to have their first chapter which would be the meeting that would elect their own leaders. So that's what I did, so I was able to lead the whole community in some ways through prayers, through retreats, prayer services each that I would create from good sources. And then we had meetings to lead up to that time when we would have that election. So so I was working with the novices and postulants and learning the ways of the people. It was just very good, very good, there were just many many wonderful things that I experienced, even though there were times it was scary it would get scary, you know. Especially drive, I never drove. When I went there I didn't have, I had not known how to do is stick shift. But before I left here one of our novices was giving me lessons, and I was beginning to learn when I got there and it's all those roads, there's no way. But at Christmas time we were at Mendi where we

were on our way to Tari, and the roads were a little bit, not quite this bad. So Sister Martine she took me out and she showed me, and she she had me drive. And I was doing pretty good but then when we went back to Kagua there's no way I would drive. But I got to thinking at one point, I thought, well, you know maybe I would drive then I would get in our car and just drive it around our mission area. I thought maybe I could drive, maybe I could drive up to [unintelligible]. I'm going out to [unintelligible], first of all going through these terrible sinkholes, mud holes, and a rickety old bridge and everything and maybe I could do it. I didn't have to go these roads, and the roads were like like dried-up creek bed, the ones that we'd have to go, and high mountains, were in the mountains. So but I came home when the it was I was walking around on this one particular Sunday afternoon thinking maybe I could do that and noticed that our car, our car was was not in parked where it usually has been although we have [unintelligible]. So that registered with me and I got to thinking and so the next morning I said, Polly, I knew she had been she had taken the Sisters somewhere on Saturday, I said Polly did you, did you put the car away? She said, oh no, I forgot I didn't put it away. I said, well it's not out there. We looked, it's not out there. And of course the Sisters they all you know, they're very excitable, oh the cars, I forget what were they used what was what pidgin words they used. "No can find the car", and all over the place looked and looked and it just had disappeared. And so, anyway that that was a story and what happened well.

So there was all this consternation and then the people get involved and everything. And later wasn't in the same I don't think was in the same week, but one night it was in the evening and so I said, the car the forza's back, the forza's back, the forza's back. So we went out, I can't remember who, well I guess the police they looked all over the country they found it that way down by the coast, in bad shape. And it was really a mess and so and then the story, over the year things just go on and on. So, the police had to keep it at first because they until it got settled, who did it, and all that, so. It ended up but being one of the young men who was part of the mission there, had been part of the mission. He, I don't know what got into him, but he took it and he drove and drove. And he had it repainted I think, and anyway. So that went on and on that eventually he had to go to jail, but the car was such a mess we you know, we didn't have it, we virtually did not have that car for almost a year. So we had, what did we drive then, well we had another car, no. We actually didn't have one. The Sisters from Mendi would come in sometimes and then bring what we needed, but we have did have a big one they called it a bus, it was a big van. But that was so, a van you know the cars we had that the tires were up up. So when you come to a hole but you're not just you know, you're able to not get stuck in it. But through the van was to explore, so that was really. Eventually we had to sell that because the roads the holes got deeper and the van just couldn't make them anymore.

So we just—so anyway that was just one of the things that happened there that was that ended up being a long deal. And then this fella who did it the Sisters knew him and, and he had to go to jail I think and then, but he eventually when he got out and then I think he was repent, in fact he was one of the last persons I said goodbye to when I left there. So anyway that was my, so I never drove in Papua New Guinea. Because we

wouldn't go out by ourselves either, anyway. You know, the roads you know, we wouldn't travel by ourselves, there were too many, what they called them, funny I can't, anyway they were just guys around on the road who would hold the car who would stop the car and want something. And sometimes they could be satisfied, say like giving them some popcorn or something. But they could be pretty mean, and you know so I didn't have any big big question or concern. I mean we got stopped and but but Sister Mari, when she was coming home she was up in one little car, Father Jim was in the other car, and they got stopped and they they just, inside the whole, both cars, took everything out. And we're all waiting for them to come back because they have the supplies all the food that we need and all everything that we need, they came back and their cars were empty. These guys have made them, had stolen everything from their car.

MEL: I'm curious how you, well how you feel about or how you felt about that or how the community would talk about that.

SJL: About the—

MEL: People ransacking the car, and the community outside doing that, for food, or for—

SJL: Oh, they would be the community like our parish, people, many of the people were really really upset about it. And apologetic, yeah, and of course they want to go after those others, those guys and. So it was it was quite, that's how people people would get upset, and want to do something.

MEL: So how would you all talk about it? Because I mean, those people were very poor, right? The people who stole were probably very poor?

SJL: Well, see I never I never think of the people of Papua New Guinea as being very poor.

MEL: Okay.

SJL: You know I talk about, the Papua New Guinea is a developing country. Its ways are very simple, and so sure, they don't have the, especially where I was in Kagua was much further away from the, even where there was more development. And so, but people, I don't know that they're poor. They, now they want money for getting drugs, there were drugs in the country at the time, and these were these guys called rascals, and the rascals would stop the car for, but if they were wanting money and it was not because they were poor, I never you know. They were doing, getting money for maybe for drugs or for cigarettes or something like that, you know. Because, this was not a, I want to say a commercialized place you know, and people made their living by, through their gardens, and through their pigs, growing the pigs. And so I, this is kind of jumping the gun but a few years ago two of our, two of the FSM Sisters came to the United States for our meet-up, it was 1990. And they came and they were there with us for

about two months. And you see that this country through their eyes I mean, it's just you know it was just, whoo, a total total total difference.

But one of the things that one of the Sisters, Maria Goretti would say, always say with what she could not get over on our streets, they had homeless people, they had people living on the streets. That's what she would go back and tell the folks there, they had people living on the streets. And they were just shocked at that, because you know surely and [Panji] they have huts, and no electricity where we were there was no regular electricity. And telephones, and all that. So but they were, there was a contentment but there was a restlessness and as always, in young people not having enough to do. And so that's why they you know, did some rascal stuff. And and they did some, well they're could be some pretty nasty things done, especially around election time. Election was, anybody who wanted to run for Parliament was was able to if they had a certain amount of money, I think maybe five hundred dollars or something, or maybe less than that. They had that money they could be considered a candidate. Excuse me. And so, they would threat, and then they so here are these candidates going around the country, vote for me, on the back of trucks with their foghorns or whatever you call them. Vote for me, vote for me, so there could have been five candidates in one area, only one would be elected.

But so, then they would barter, they would bribe people you know, bribe people with. Bribe and threatened people to vote for them. And so election time was a very dangerous time, we tried not to be on the roads. I guess it was every three years for elections. So that was a dangerous time, because they type of thing would be going on and then when the election was over, there was one man elected and four not elected. Those ones that were not elected they they they did some some of them, did terrible damage. They would burn people's gardens or their houses, or paint their women. So that would happen you know, at election time and, it's the few but that's, you know. There's that because their custom is you know, they had the custom of payback. So if you do something to me then if one of our clansmen gets hurt then we have to go out and get this other, somebody from your tribe. And sometimes it was many you know, that could go. That could be really serious very serious, so there was an example of a man who was he was a member of Parliament, and he would, they were driving the early on the mountain road to go to the airport in Moresby, and he the car went over and he was killed. And so, and he was a nasty fellow, but you go, ah. But he his clan then, they had then, oh, we got to payback, because I don't know how many people were killed, to pay back for his death. And then again, that went on and on and on. So those are the things that are not nice, about you know, about the culture about that country. But so that was what would be the thing that you'd fear when you were on the road.

MEL: Did the Sisters in the community, did you talk about that or pray over it?

SJL: Oh yeah, yeah. Mostly I guess we do, be talking about being safe, how to be safe. What we could do to protect ourselves. And we have not I mean, we were you know some have had had some altercations. I think Ann had a couple, more than more real than for my experience. But we just we tried to be safe, that's the thing. And there were

a lot, and we were mostly you know, the people were, loved us, I think. So they they come crying as something happened or whatever, so. But so it was yeah, that was good being there even though like I said they were scary there were some scary times. And we all came out alive.

And their church, I mean their parishes, the thing the reason why I was interested in going to Papua New Guinea was how the religion is enculturated, with their culture, you know. And like they said, but then we began after the highlands where we were, the southern highlands, was just developed and kind of opened up to priests or to missionaries in 1950, 1955. That's when the first Capuchin Fathers, Capuchin Franciscan Fathers went there. Now there were some, there were some missionary activity but that's basically when they established the mission. And so our Sisters in 1960 you know, and but it was getting close to time when the church was opening up more, you know. And so, those kinds of concepts of shared responsibility and the leadership in the church and lay leadership were coming. And enculturation so, you know. If you went to Mass, we go to Mass here and we come out on Palm Sunday or something, and oh, was an hour and a half, that was long. My first Palm Sunday there was, I again, Kagua was right in the midst of the rural, it was very rural. And here's our house across the street as the church. And then there's a little road here and one plan one group of people the way down there, and there. Well, on Palm Sunday we all walk down to this other area the Southern Cross Road is about two miles I guess. And we met the others coming, and one was a man was on a donkey and so it was really palms, you know. So that their and their palms were palms right there, green palms, and they were waved. And had flowers made of, flower woven to them. Oh it was real, and Hosanna Hosanna Hosanna, the whole real reality of the what Palm Sunday was all about. That's that's true of other other feasts, too. Yeah, so. I said, felt like I was in the event, that's what I remember riding home. I was in the event, yeah. So those were some of the.

MEL: You said the liturgy was, I'm sorry, the liturgy both took some of their traditions as they learned—so can you describe normal Masses, not just Palm Sunday, but a regular Sunday?

SJL: Well, first, let me see. First of all I would say that, usually the Mass, it was probably said in pidgin, in pidgin. But in a homily or the gospel the readings and so forth, were they call [turnim tok], so that somebody was turning the talk into the language of the people, which was a very complic—I mean I never did understand the language, that's really you know difficult to say, you know to recognize words and all that. So there would be somebody up there doing the [turnim tok], so the gospel would be read in pidgin and then would be read for the people and their language. And then the homily also, the priest would give the homily and their many cases give it in pidgin, which you could really—when you're there when I was there in the country for a while I could begin to understand what pidgin—because it's you know their language is just it's not, it's a simple language. So the priest would give the homily and then this may be the deacon over here, was he called here, anyway he would give the interpretation to the people, yeah. And then and then the singing, the singing was was a lot of times it was their

chants you know first particularly some parts of the Mass and the people would chant their language. And then the Mass the Mass went on pretty much like it is, and when they had some kind of ceremonies with, a couple of times they had, they would have the gospel book up here on the stand, and there being a rope, pulley kind of. And so when it came time for the gospel they would pull the hook down you know, and presented and that the priest would receive it. Now that was brought on other occasions but it was interesting to see it just really always struck me as being special. The special-ness of God's Word.

Yeah, so I mean those are just, I'm rambling on now but maybe you have some questions or something.

MEL: No, anything you want to talk about, Sister, that you remember. Anything that you were feeling. I mean you talked about at times feeling scared and then at times feeling joy. When did you feel most, you said it felt like home. When did you feel like it was home when you were there?

SJL: Well it didn't take me long to feel like it was home, actually. Then I came home on leave after two years. I had said that I would go for two years and then kind of, think about coming back for two more years. And so I came home for after two years and I was at home for six months kind of on leave, and when I then I went back and I can remember being in our house, I think, only a week or so or two weeks and I just really feel like I'm home. You know, it's just I just felt like it, and then partly was because of the Sisters I lived with you know, we had a nice community. And then just the rhythm of being with the FSM and then being by ourselves and just enjoying different things. We would, we would pray with them they had their chapel at Kagawa. The chapel was like a hut, a round hut like the people lived in. And then it was big because so that's the community they could sit in it, and then in the center usually in their homes that in the center they had a fire and they were that's where they would put their coals and at night they'd let them to go out. Next morning they would blow and fan them again, and that's where they prepared their food. And their big their food was kaukau, was sweet potatoes that was a big thing.

Anyway, so their chapel was in the center in the chapel was the tabernacle. So and then and so everybody so when we were in that chapel we'd pray, we sat around the round chapel and prayed. And that was good, that was very so,—oh my I couldn't get down so I got, they brought me a chair to sit on, everybody else's on the floor. I'm sitting on the chair. Then gradually I graduated and I could finally sit on the floor, and pray. So that was good. A lot of laughter, you know there was a lot of laughter, among them. And we had a nice time.

MEL: You're describing the community of Sisters, so you had the community with SFM but then you would come home to the community of Sisters. Could you describe your life together, did you call it a convent, or?

SJL: Well, we didn't call it, it was a convent. I mean we're talking about just right now with in Kagua. Like I said, there were just three or four of us.

MEL: Okay. Would you have meals together at night? So what was it after a long day, what would it be like, together at night?

SJL: We were, we had a nice house it was a good house and we so sometimes we were doing work in the house like, you know, making lessons for the Sisters or whatever so. And Sister Marni, the Irish, did I saw she was English? She was Irish, Irish. She would be doing in-and-outdoing work with catechist and all kinds of things. And then we would come together at, let see, but we would come together at four o'clock and pray our office together. At time at one point where the pastor had us we all went to church around that time. Anyway and so after prayer then we would have our supper, and actually because of I was busy and we always needed to have bread baked and things like that. We had a girl, Doris was there all the time, Doris was one of the girls and she, so she prepared the meal plus doing a lot of other things. And then someone, one of us would take care of getting it on the table. And so so we after our prayer we come out to the kitchen and we sit down, have supper, share our stories. And that was good, and we always had nice food. We we were able to get, I'll say again, when I was there, I was there in 1995 to 2000, so we're talking about much less primitive than the first Sisters. So and we were able to get our food from when we went into Mendi or the Huim, was another town that was again far distance and we'd go there for supplies, too.

But so, we'd have nice meals, simple, nice simple meals. And then a lot of times afterwards we'd play cards for a few, you know. We had this card, threes wild is what game we played. I guess it would take it's less than an hour but was just kind of fun to do that. And then we just go about doing what we had to do, preparing lessons or praying or reading or whatever. And then yeah the next morning we'd get up early to go to Mass, Mass was pretty early and then and then to come home have breakfast and be off.

MEL: And you would go work with the Sisters. The young Sisters.

SJL: Yeah, we had class with them, or whatever over in their classroom. I'd be, I'd be with that most of the morning and then part of the afternoon too, yeah. And I'd come home at lunch and we had lunch. Always had a nice lunch. And one of the things that was, is the communication, you know. We were, again I'm talking Kagua, so we had no telephones, we had no telephones. We had so what mode of communication was, shortwave radios, I think there. And so that all the missions had these shortwave radios, maybe that's not the exact, technical name for them but anyway. We called we called the sked and every day at 8 o'clock every mission all throughout our area the whole Mendi diocese, and this was true of other dioceses in PNG also, so we would turn on this radio and we would go over to the priest's house, that's where it was. And we turn it on and then there's somebody in Mendi who was kind of leading it all, and he would. So we would all have our code names Bravo Sierra was Mendi's name and Charlie Alta

and Hotel Tango, Hotel Whiskey, everyone had its own name which is common in communicating over such things.

So that's every good morning that we'd go to, and we had a box at our room we in our house we could listen to. And if we had a message that we wanted to give we would go over to the priest's house and give our message when our time came up. So every day at eight o'clock that would happen. That would be that little communication and then he'd say it's Charlie Alta, any business, no nothing from here. And so, no yeah I want to anybody going into town I want to get, you know, I need to get something from town. Another would be yeah, we had a bad night, last night. You know so it's all these the things that were said over the sked now that was kind of interesting. And then, again at six o'clock that would the same thing would happen. So we were in touch with each other, we were in touch with all of the missions, yeah. So, that was interesting. One time I had a couple of things well one time was my niece and her, my nephew and her and his wife were expecting a baby so I got that message over the sked. "Joe, your brother called. It's a girl, they'll tell you more". So that type of message came.

One time I was on, saying something that for some reason I was at the microphone and I was saying talking to one of the missions and I was saying, this priest was supposed to be taking care of somebody else's pigs I think, and so I was just giving him a message that somebody gave me. And another priest from another or another mission came on and said, it's not permitted to talk about animals on the tell, on the sked. He was serious, that was so. But then there were the sad things when people got messages of deaths, over the sked. And that was sad, it was hard.

MEL: It must have been hard to be away from home at times, to be so far away from home at times.

SJL: Yes, but people wrote, and it was good to have some good letters and a couple, one of my friends and my brother also made tapes, you know, an audio tape. And then every once in awhile I'd get an audio tape, and I'd make an audio tape and send it back to them. And that was, that was good, yeah. So we could keep in touch, yeah. And they miss the mail, like mail we didn't get mail at our place, so we'd have to wait until folks came from Mendi with the mail. Now if nobody had gone into Mendi say for two weeks or three weeks then they'd come with a lot of a lot of mail so when the car came we were so excited because you know there would be mail. And that was a highlight, because otherwise we'd go without hearing for could be two, three weeks, you know, without getting any letters or anything.

MEL: That sounds challenging.

SJL: Yeah, that was challenging. Yeah, it was. So, but it was very good, it was a good experience. I think we have done well in PNG, I think. We've touched a lot of people you know, our Sisters had and the other missionaries. Very impressed with the caliber of missionaries in the country. I was fortunately, fortunate enough to be able to go to a national meeting. Sister Ann was coordinator and she was on leave and so she couldn't

go and nobody else wanted to go. So I was able to go to the like of the National Conference of the Sisters of Religious and that was a place called Madang, which is on the coast. And and so but they have a wonderful like Alexis Haven, German foundation a nice conference center. So I was able to go to a conference there and so I could meet and see a lot of missionaries from all over the country, and really impressed by by their intelligence and their, their zeal, and humanness. It was great, I was able, the conference was about a week I think, so that was a real pretty place, right on the what's on the Bay of Bismarck? Anyway it was an, and it had history with this area, this particular area which is far from where we were. But it had a lot of history of World War II you know, Germans, no Japanese. The Japanese had camps there and our soldiers had camps and though the likes of [unintelligible] itself kind of they had just built this big, this was right on the sea, they had built this big church, German style church because these were German, German missionaries. And it got bombed, entirely.

There are a lot of stories about World War II in that area, because the people experienced it. In fact, last night Kate was going through the TV and she was got on to Think TV, and here there was a little story about what about one incident or one thing about PNG in the World War II. Yeah, and they were talking about how the people you know, Japanese, Australians, Australians too. Australians were you know, in the war and they were hurt or they or they were hiding in the bush, and they talked about how they saw, they met the people, they saw the people and how they would, the people with the men would carry them and they call this was one particular place they carried these Australians to safety. And in writing about them, thinking about them, they refer to them as the fuzzy wuzzy angels of Papua New Guinea. Because their hairs is real fuzzy, real fuzzy. So it's interesting, there's just so many stories are so many braver there, in World War II. There's a ship that was all a lot of missionaries were on it, was supposed to been like a Red Cross ship. Apparently wasn't marked, and it was destroyed, everybody was killed. So there are a lot of martyrs, and there's one official martyr Peter ToRot who was canonized by the Church. He was a catechist, a layman, and he was teaching catechism I mean teaching the religion and all that, told to not do it by the Japanese, and he did. And he was killed. So, so there's you know that's war.

MEL: I'm interested, Sister, in your relationship with the community that you were serving. So you worked with the Sisters, but did you meet people outside of, you know, the people in the village?

SJL: Yeah, yes and no. I mean, certainly I met them not on a, well, we had neighbors and I always would walk and I always took a walk or something so I'd meet people, you know. And and we talk to people, but and they knew with different people but not on a real you know, deep level because of because, well partly because of the language and partly because that was not my ministry. My ministry was to be more with the FSM. So I didn't know the people as much as some of the other Sisters have did.

MEL: But you knew the FSMs.

SJL: Yeah, right. And heard their stories.

MEL: Why did they, you told me a little about why they became Sisters. Did they all have very different reasons for coming into the formation?

SJL: Yeah, I don't even, yes they did. I mean there were some that they had a relationship with God, and that was something that was driving them. Yeah, so I'm trying to think of some specific, and then that actually, that was a real struggle for them to come in many cases because in PNG, families you know, the girl, the woman when she gets married they pay a bride price. The man's family pays a price for the woman, their bride, and that price might be twenty, thirty-five pigs. There's no cash, pigs were a very important. So anyway, when a girl went to the convent to become a Sister that would be, that bride price would be lost for that family, so. So there are stories, some just ran away from home, so yeah really, it was it was difficult. It wasn't like, oh you know, just a very peaceful type of thing, it was a struggle for them, yeah. So—

MEL: They had a cause—

SJL: Yeah. But I do think they—they knew other missionaries, I think too. Probably missionaries who came to their areas, and so they were attracted by that, you know, by their lifestyle, by their spirituality, and so forth. So so I'm sure it's various reasons I bet Sister Noreen could—

MEL: Oh no, but you're—

SJL: She could probably because she she actually her role for a while there was to meet the young women who were interested and who—and she would go out to their villages and you know, talk to them and talk to the family. So she really was very much instrumental in that.

MEL: Um, when did you come back, Sister?

SJL: I came back in 2000, the year 2000.

MEL: The year 2000. Was that difficult to come back?

SJL: I was, I was happy to come back and come home. But by the same time I, I really you know, missed it. I was sad to leave, sad to leave, happy to come home, you know. Whenever I have a mission appeal sometimes I'd talk about how I felt. I came home, I mean I came home by myself, I don't mind traveling by myself. So you'd travel, you know, to Australia and then you, first to Moresby, stay overnight then Australia. And then my camp was in California overnight, in a hotel I remember. How I felt, this is the image I had an image of myself with you know, my two arms, see. The one is extended you know, home welcoming home, and the other one is not there, because I was I would never see them again, you know. And so that kind of a feeling that I've had, yeah still have at times. Yeah so while I was living at home I was also sad to leave, but wonderful. A wonderful spirit and wonderful people. And so.

MEL: Thank you. Do you have anything else you want to tell me about, today?

SJL: I think that I probably could go on but right now the call is pretty much that's not, that's only the circus. You know—

MEL: Of course, but that's beautiful. Thank you, Sister, thank you very much. I'll shut it off.