

# **New England Jesuit Oral History Program**



**Rev. James J. Dressman, S.J.**  
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Editor: Richard W. Rousseau, S.J.  
Associate Editor: Paul C. Kenney, S.J.

Assistant Editor: Joseph V. Owens, S.J.

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Oral History Program  
Campion Center  
319 Concord Road  
Weston, MA 02493-1398  
781-788-6800  
[info@jesuitoralhistory.org](mailto:info@jesuitoralhistory.org)  
[www.jesuitoralhistory.org](http://www.jesuitoralhistory.org)

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF ORAL HISTORY

Oral histories are the taped recordings of interviews with interesting and often important persons. They are not folklore, gossip, hearsay, or rumor. They are the voice of the person interviewed. These oral records are, in many instances, transcribed into printed documentary form. Though only so much can be done, of course, in an hour or some times two, they are an important historical record whose value increases with the inevitable march of time.

For whatever reason, New England Jesuits, among others around the world, have not made any significant number of oral histories of their members. Given the range of their achievements and their impact on the Church and society, this seems to many to be an important opportunity missed. They have all worked as best they could for the greater glory of God. Some have done extraordinary things. Some have done important things. All have made valuable contributions to spirituality, education, art, science, discovery, and many other fields. But living memories quickly fade. Valuable and inspiring stories slip away.

This need not be. Their stories can be retold, their achievements can be remembered, their adventures saved. Their inspiration can provide future generations with attractive models. That is what Jesuit oral history is all about.

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Interview with Rev. James J. Dressman, S.J.  
by Rev. Richard W. Rousseau, S.J.  
April 2, 2008

**EARLY YEARS**

**RICHARD ROUSSEAU:** Welcome to our interview. We usually proceed chronologically, so I'd like to begin with your early years. Tell us about when and where you were born, as well as something about your father and mother.

**JAMES DRESSMAN:** I was born in Covington, Kentucky on June 29, 1930, the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul. I'm the fourth of five. My older brother is Father Bob, a Chicago Province Jesuit. Dorothy was second and Anne the third. Both of them are praying for us in heaven. My kid sister, Sue, born in 1931, is now living in Covington. Sue and I have been very close.

My Dad was one of five boys, my Mom was one of five girls and four boys. Her name was Steltenkamp, a wonderful answer when asked for a security name! We were always surrounded by family. During Lent we said the rosary together and always attended Sunday Mass together.

**RR:** Had the family lived in that area for a while?

**JD:** Yes, we were all from Covington as well as Cincinnati,

which is directly across the Ohio River from Covington.

I was always amazed by the financial crash of 1929. My Mom and Dad had five children to raise below the age of ten. Those days were pretty tough ones for my parents.

I missed all of my grandparents. My paternal grandfather died of renal cancer on May 15, 1930. I was born six weeks later on June 29. While my Mom was almost eight months pregnant with me, she was also caring for my paternal grandfather.

That strain was probably the cause of some medical problems I had in those first years. Before I was two years old, I had two tumors taken out of my left thigh, almost in the groin. And at that time, our family didn't have all that much money for treating me medically. I also had bad eyesight and wore glasses from the time I was two and a half.

I always regretted not knowing my grandpa Dressman. Many years passed, and at a family picnic old photos and newspaper articles appeared. I learned that he had gotten involved in Covington city politics as a public servant. At one point he was in charge of recruiting laborers to dig the Panama Canal!

#### HIS FATHER

RR: How about your father?

JD: My father followed his father as an insurance agent. But how do you sell insurance to people who don't have much money because of the Depression? I can remember the many times Dad was paid in kind. People would give him vegetables or similar goods. However, he had made a lot of friends that way.

He was also somewhat of a bookkeeper. He was bookkeeper for the Kentucky Livery Association, which had some hearses and limousines. I may have picked

up a bit of bookkeeping genes from my Dad.

He joined the Navy in the World War I, crossed the Atlantic fourteen times—and never learned how to swim! He met my Mom after the war.

#### HIS MOTHER

RR: Could you tell us more about your mother?

JD: It was easy to know her age, because she was born in 1900 and married in 1921. My Mom was always busy. When we children came along, she was always the housewife, and I'd say the disciplinarian. Dad always let Mom take care of problems or arguments.

When my grandfather died, Dad took his two brothers into our home. Both Uncle Elmer and Uncle Joe had ended up in journalism. I still remember Uncle Elmer's trying to teach me how to read, when I was in the first and second grades. When I made a mistake, I had to run around the dining room table! [Laughter].

#### OLDER BROTHER BOB

RR: Tell us about your older brother Bob.

JD: Until I was twelve, my brother Bob and I shared a bed in the same room. I remember how sometimes, when I was smaller, I would get kicked out of bed to wash my feet or for some other reason. But we always got along very well. He went to Covington Catholic High, taught by the Marianist Brothers. It was across the street from Mother of God Church.

My Mom thought that Bob walked on water. And, in a way, I grew up in his shadow. This was something that lasted while I was in the Society, even until the time I went to the missions. People knew Bob much more than me, so I found them addressing me as "Bob" instead of "Jim."

I found out this past year that there were only thirty-five seniors in his high school class. During grade

school we would go see him in the plays and other events. He told me that when he was the valedictorian, he was so high on himself that, when he came home that night, he kissed his face in the mirror! [Laughter]. I remember thinking, "How true to form! That really fits him." Bob was always very outgoing, and eventually became very successful in public relations work.

When I was twelve, Bob decided to become a Jesuit. It was a surprise for all of us children. He had worked at a radio station for two years after high school. He made up his mind in September, so he just missed the entrance dates for the Jesuit novitiate. He said nothing to the rest of us.

So for almost a year, periodically my Mom and Dad would suddenly shed a tear. Losing their oldest son for good was hard for my parents. But they did their best to cheer up the rest of us. He entered the Jesuits in Milford, Ohio, in 1942.

#### FIRST MEMORIES

RR: What were your own first memories?

JD: My first memory, literally, was of my father carrying me into the baby's ward of the hospital. I remember a white sink board with a black baby sitting on it. That must have been when I had a tumor taken out.

I also remember that, when I was seven, I had an operation on my eyes. They made an incision in one eyeball, drew out the muscle, and tied it. It was supposed to bring the eyes together, and it turned out to be pretty successful. It was done in Cincinnati by Dr. Derek T. Vale, M.D., a pioneer in such operations. My Mom gasped when she learned that it cost \$500.

#### COVINGTON

RR: How about the neighborhood where you grew up?



JD: Our house was a block and a half away from St. Elizabeth's Hospital on one side, while a block away in the other direction was the small Licking River, a tributary of the Ohio River. We were on the Covington, Kentucky, side, across from Newport, Kentucky. That whole area has really developed since then.

RR: Yes, that would be prime real estate.

JD: But then that riverbank drew us kids to explore. There were stories about tunnels leading to big houses a couple of blocks away involved in the Underground Railroad and the escape of slaves to the north across the Ohio River. I found it all very interesting.

I was about twelve when I swiped a pack of my Mom's Lucky Strike cigarettes. A buddy and I went down by the river and chain-smoked the whole pack! I got so sick I thought I would throw up my socks! The word in the family was that I suffered sunstroke. Talk about denial! It was a blessing in disguise. I haven't smoked anything since!

#### PARISH AND SCHOOL

RR: What about your parish?

JD: Our family church was the very beautiful old German Church of the Mother of God. My parents were married there, and all of us children were baptized there. Actually, there's a lot of Dressman lore around that parish.

RR: Was that church nearby?

JD: No, it was about a fifteen-minute drive in downtown Covington. But Anne, Sue, and I went to nearby St. Benedict's grade school. It was much closer—about a twenty-minute walk. But Bob and Dorothy went to the LaSalette School in downtown Covington.

#### GRADE SCHOOL MEMORIES

RR: What do you recall about grade school?

JD: My first grade teacher, Sr. Scholastica, a Benedictine sister, told me that I had almost flunked the first grade, because I was always looking out the window, watching the trains go by! In the second grade, my teacher wore a dress and a funny kind of hat. When she moved up to the third grade with us, she had taken her vows as a Benedictine sister, Sr. Lea, and wore their habit.

At that young age, I had a crush on Sr. Lea! Luckily, she took a shine to me, too. She was the parish sacristan, and I helped her on Saturdays clean and polish things. Actually, my being so close to the Lord and the Blessed Sacrament was, I think, the start of my vocation.

My contact with Sr. Lea let me start serving Mass. Those sisters were from Covington; the priests were Benedictines from Latrobe, Pennsylvania. They were high on liturgy.

At one point, the parishioners chose the design for refurbishing the whole church. Many of the decorations bore pictures of Benedictine traditions. Every Sunday all the children had to come at 2:00 PM for an hour of instruction. I learned a lot about liturgy, and this led to my getting into parish activities.

As I went through grade school, my eyes had a touch of what we call dyslexia today. It made learning how to read rather difficult. Another problem was that, while I was in grammar school, I never had a very good memory. I remember, when I was in the third grade, I was asked to go to my sister Anne's sixth grade class and recite something or sing a song. Standing before the class, I stayed absolutely silent. I didn't even know why I was there. I don't think that shyness has ever left me, nor has my memory improved much!

## HIGH SCHOOL YEARS

RR: Where did you go to high school?

JD: My Dad insisted that I go to St. Xavier High School in Cincinnati. Getting there was not too bad. It only took me about half an hour by bus plus a ten-minute walk. But I enjoyed playing basketball more than the books. I had a lot of fun. I got into a good group of friends, so we enjoyed dating one another.

When my Dad had an operation in my sophomore year, I got a job working after school and during summer. I was making \$22.50 a week, and my Mom's youngest brother, Uncle Bob, said to me, "You're making money than I was when I got married!" [Laughter]. I was a stock boy, and earned enough for clothes and other necessities.

During the summer after my junior year, it just hit me like a ton of bricks that I was going to be out of high school in a year and I didn't know what I was going to do then. At that point I hadn't even thought of college. So I really got confused.

As a senior, I was playing varsity basketball. We were basketball co-champions in our Greater Cincinnati Catholic League that year. A fellow on our team a year behind me, Jim Bunning, became a major league pitcher, who pitched a no-hit game in both the National and American leagues. He later eventually became representative and then senator of Kentucky in Washington.

## VOCATION

RR: How did you find your vocation?

JD: I made a senior year retreat, which turned out to be an important milestone in my life. It was then that I finally decided that I wanted to be a priest to help people get rid of their sins. That was my real motivation.

But I didn't turn to the Jesuits right off. I read about Dominicans, then the "Brown" and "Black" Franciscans. I felt that, if they couldn't agree among

themselves, I wanted no part of their order. The Trappists really drew me.

I went to visit my brother Bob in West Baden, Indiana, where he was studying philosophy. So I got the opportunity to ask some of the other scholastics, “Why did you become a Jesuit?”

Finally I realized that a priest should be as much like Jesus as possible. Jesus didn’t remain in the desert all the time. He worked among people. It seemed to me that the Jesuits fulfilled that image—very prayerful and yet involved in active apostolic work.

RR: When did you make your decision?

JD: It was April 22, 1948. I was walking down the corridor one afternoon, and Fr. Shea, the student counselor whom I had been talking to about spirituality, said to me, “Hey, Jim, on Saturday the Jesuits are giving an entrance exam for Milford, Ohio. Do you want to go?” I thought, “This is it! He’s pushed me over the edge.” [Laughter]

RR: How did you tell your parents?

JD: Usually after supper our family would sit around talking before we headed off to homework. But that very evening, my Mom and Dad went immediately up to their room while the rest of us did our homework.

I went upstairs into my parents’ room, closed the door, and flopped down on the bed. I told them what Fr. Shea had said about the Milford exam on Saturday. Then I said, “If you don’t have anything against it, I’d like to take that exam.” Phew! Silence for five minutes! Then my mother started crying, and my Dad said, “Well, why don’t you wait a couple of years after graduation, like your brother did?” And I said, “No, I know what I want to do. That would just be wasting my time.”

And my mother said, “Your brother has been gone six years, and we’re just getting used to it now.” Fi-

nally, they said that I could go ahead! So I took the exams.

#### THE GREAT ADVENTURE

JD: Then, on June 6, my sister Anne, was married. We had the reception at home. That was also the day that I got the call from St. Xavier's telling me that I had been accepted into the Jesuits.

I had the option of joining in July or in the middle of August. I asked my brother about it and he answered, "What's the difference between them? It's only a question of seniority in the Society." I said, "I know what I want, so I'll join on July 24."

And that was the start of my great adventure. When I walked through the front door of the novitiate in Milford, I felt like I was coming home. I had no question about what I was doing. I entered the Jesuit novitiate of the Chicago Province with forty-seven other young men in 1948.

#### CALL OF THE MISSIONS

RR: How did your interest in the missions develop?

JD: OK. I had finished one year in the novitiate, when I told the superiors I would like to go to the Patna Mission in India. One month after that, I got a letter from my brother Bob, who was finishing his philosophy. He said that there was a man in his class that was supposed to go to Japan but couldn't, for one reason or another. And in my brother's typical fashion, he thought, "If I were provincial, I'd like to have someone in the pipeline." He sat down and sent a letter to the provincial offering to go to Japan. And he was accepted!

I knew immediately what was going to happen to me as well. Superiors would hold on to me as long as possible so that my parents could see my ordination.

At the time, the Chicago Province scholastics working in Japan were going to Australia for their theology. That meant that it was unlikely that Bob would come home for ordination. But in fact it eventually worked out that my brother, somewhat of a wheeler-dealer, worked it out so he came back to West Baden, Indiana, for his theology. There we were: I was in philosophy on one side of the house, he was in theology on the other. But we're jumping ahead a bit.

#### GEARING UP FOR THE MISSIONS

RR: I gather that your brother and you had always been interested in the missions?

JD: Yes, though since I knew I was no linguist, I wanted to get out there as soon as possible. Even in grade school, I was selling Christmas seals for the Patna Mission and other missions. My brother Bob would send them to me, and it made me want to go on the missions even more. Fr. Leo Sullivan, the provincial, had said to me, "Offer to go on the missions again once you take your vows." So I did that in the juniorate.

In the class ahead of me, there were two guys I was pretty close to who were sent to Patna. I thought, "Man, that's exactly what I have in mind to do." In my final year of juniorate, I was eating my heart out to go to the mission. I wanted to get out there early, so I could learn the language. But that was the year they sent five brothers to Patna Mission. No scholastics were included. I headed for West Baden, Indiana, for my philosophy. I think that the rector at that time, Paul Kavanaugh, really wanted me to go, but couldn't push the provincial to send me just then.

I did not find the study of philosophy easy. While I was talking to Fr. Tommy Byrne, the metaphysics professor, he remarked, "Isn't this metaphysics a lot of baloney!" [Laughter]

How human! I still had a chance of getting through this stuff! Surprisingly though, it was during this period that I enjoyed the best course I have ever attended. It was a comparison of Greek and Latin cultures, especially through art and archeology.

RR: Tell us about it.

JD: The professor was Fr. Ray Schoder, a Chicago Jesuit, who developed a Homeric Greek course for high schools. Our course compared cultures through art and archaeology. He gave us two hour-and-a-half sessions a week. He showed slides that he had made himself. It was a most marvelous experience.

He gave tough exams! You would come into the exam and find yourself looking at a slide of a beautiful green lawn with three broken Grecian pillars on it. We were supposed to identify this type of architecture and say where it was located! With this course and a couple of summer courses, I finally received my M.A. in Latin from Loyola University, Chicago, just before shoving off to the missions.

#### THE MISSIONS OPEN UP

RR: What happened?

JD: Well, that last year of philosophy, we had a new provincial, Fr. Bill Schmidt. As I went in to talk to him, before I could even sit down, he said “Jim, you offered to go to the missions.” I thought, “Wow! Something is happening!”

What happened was a visit to West Baden from my parents. We never talked about my interest in the missions, when, out of the blue, during their visit my Mom says, “You know, Jim, your father and I don’t have anything against you going to the foreign missions, if you want to go.” Wow!

I told this to the rector, Fr. John McGrail, who happened to be a consultor of the provincial. He told

this to the provincial, who said, "Could you put that in writing?" [Laughter]. So I thought, "Someone is interested in my going." That is what sealed the deal for me to go on the missions. My Mom wrote a beautiful letter to the provincial. She wrote that God had given them the two boys, so they wanted to give them for whatever the Lord called them to.

RR: Things were starting to happen?

JD: Yes. I met the provincial who said, "I'll send you to Cincinnati, Ohio for a year of regency. During that time, we'll try to get visas and whatever else you would need." So my regency year was in '55-'56 at St. Xavier's High School in Cincinnati. I really enjoyed the students. I was teaching first and second year Latin. I also helped direct the school play, "Room Service," with Mr. Glenn, who had taught me English as a senior.

Then one day the rector called me in and said, "You've been assigned to Patna." As I left, he said, "Call Jim Donnelly down, will you please. I want to see him also." Jim was a year ahead of me, but I had no idea that he was interested in the missions. I eventually found out that I was the only one in my class that volunteered for the missions. Jim Donnelly and I were assigned to India.

#### INDIA AND NEPAL

RR: That was about what year?

JD: We went through the process of trying to get visas in 1955. The Indian government had just dropped the curtain on all visas for missionaries, so we were refused visas. The problem was connected to a Protestant missionary getting into politics with tribals up in northeast Assam.

The provincial asked me, "You can't go to India. What do you think about going to Nepal?" I didn't know anything about Nepal except that we Jesuits had



opened our school in 1951. I said, "Sure. I'd crawl if I have to." If Jim Donnelly had gone to Nepal at that time, he would have been there for just six months and then been ready for theology studies. So he began theology at West Baden a year early. And I, at the tender age of twenty-six, was assigned to go to Nepal all by myself! [Laughter] Man! Just getting there was a saga.

#### START OF JESUIT EDUCATION IN NEPAL

RR: Were there Jesuits already there in Nepal?

JD: Oh, yes. This involved a considerable amount of pressure, since Nepal had been closed to the outside world for 105 years. The Rana family of prime ministers were running the county instead of the king. The kings, though powerless, remained in the palace. But in 1950 King Tribhuvan went on a supposed vacation to New Delhi. With the help of the Indian prime minister, Nehru, the Rana prime minister went into exile and the king triumphantly returned to Kathmandu.

In 1949 the principal of St. Xavier's School in Kathmandu, Fr. Marshall Moran, made many contacts with board members of Patna University. The only university in Nepal was affiliated with Patna University and needed a proctor for their exams in Kathmandu. They asked Fr. Moran to be proctor. When he went to proctor, the minister of education asked him to open a school for boys, so they would not have to send their boys to India. It took until 1951 to gather a team of four Jesuits to start the work.

#### FR. MORAN'S HAM RADIO WORK

JD: Let me add a very interesting aside here about this extraordinary Jesuit, Fr. Marshall "Marsh" Moran. Besides founding Jesuit education in Nepal, Marsh was also an internationally known ham radio operator.

Once set up in Nepal, he was the only such operator in the country. Every ham operator around the world wanted a contact postcard from him in Nepal! His call sign was “9N1MM,” so he was known as “Nepal Mickey Mouse”!

He was also a local contact for the first American expedition to Everest in 1963. Word came that four climbers were higher than the highest campsite. They would have to spend the night exposed to the high winds without any cover. That night at benediction, Marsh prayed especially that the winds might be stilled for the climbers. The next day a report said that inexplicably the 100-mile winds died to calm that night! The men were severely frostbitten, but they survived. Marsh was also instrumental in getting help for many other emergencies around the world.

RR: An extraordinary Jesuit indeed!

#### SCHOOL OPENING

JD: Yes. Back to the school opening. An old summer palace residence with a swimming pool, which had belonged to a former Rana prime minister, was given by the government for the boys’ primary boarding school. The site is Godavari, a village about twelve kilometers outside Kathmandu in a government forest preserve. With its front gate at 5000’ above sea level, it sits between two sets of springs. The myth is that every twelve years, the Godavari River in south India flows underground to its source at one of these springs. So every twelve years over 100,000 pilgrims visit this spring near our school.

Within three years, there were so many students that the Jesuits bought an old Rana palace in Jawalakhel, a suburb of Kathmandu. The primary section moved there to accommodate both boarders and day scholars. The Godavari part continued with classes

five to ten. The senior O-Level exams came from Cambridge University in England.

#### TREK TO NEPAL

RR: What was your trip to Nepal like?

JD: It was a saga! I flew to New York, my first-ever flight. The mission office asked, “Hey, why are you as a scholastic flying from Cincinnati to New York?” Somebody had just bought the ticket for me!

Then I sailed on the *Queen Elizabeth*; it took five days to get to England. I had a ten-day layover, so I went down to Lourdes. Not speaking French, at the lodge I kept asking for the “baths.” They kept saying that I already had a “bath”—my room! I should have been asking for the *piscine*, the healing pools. I dedicated this whole trip to our Blessed Mom. On my way back from Lourdes I stopped at an American Air Force Base to meet a couple I had known since grade school.

Back in London, I stayed at Southwell House, a residence of Jesuit writers. Our ship, the Pacific & Orient *Strathmore* (38,000 tons), left from Tilbury Dock. The first thing I did was to ask the bursar if we had a Catholic priest aboard. Going down the list, I spotted an OSB—a Benedictine! I finally found him down in the hold in a tiny room under a stairway. He opened the door—a very small Indian priest in a black cassock. I introduced myself as a Jesuit scholastic. He said, “But I’m an Anglican.” My jaw dropped. No Catholic priest on board!

RR: So no Mass for a long time!

JD: No. We passed by France and Gibraltar into the Mediterranean. The second day we passed Malta, heading for the Suez Canal. We spent most of the time trying to get news. This was October 1956 and the Hungarian Revolution had broken out. We were very disappointed to hear that the Russian tanks had rolled in.

#### DETOURED AROUND AFRICA

JD: We were just one day away from the Suez Canal, when Anthony Eden's war started with Egypt. Egypt scuttled ships in the Suez Canal, closing it down. We turned around to stop at Malta harbor.

All Saints Day 1956! Church bells rang all day long. No one was allowed off the ship because we had Egyptian passengers aboard. Hot? I've never been so hot in all my life. We were broiling under the scorching sun. Here I was, a scholastic, twenty-six years old in first class, with no priest on board, and seven Irish Christian Brothers down in the hold somewhere!

RR: How did you deal with all that?

JD: Well, we finally left Malta and went back to stop at Gibraltar. P&O flew back anyone who wanted to return to the UK. The rest of us would have to go all the way around Africa to our original destinations! From Gibraltar, we sailed to the Canary Islands. I got in touch with a Bro. Drew to see if we could get to Mass. Docked way out at the end of the bay, we caught a taxi and found the Jesuit church.

Mass was just starting. After Mass a Brother insisted that we come for breakfast— my first European breakfast. It was a great big bowl of heavy grey coffee, which looked like the kitchen wash, with a large piece of bread. Neither of us spoke their language, so to communicate we had to settle for Latin! Brother was better at it than I was. After breakfast, Brother broke out some cognac to celebrate our coming!

#### IN INDIA AT LAST

RR: Were you getting closer to Nepal by this time?

JD: A ways. We went from the Canary Islands to Capetown, South Africa. For three days before Capetown a violent storm had our boat swishing around like a corkscrew. Almost everyone got seasick.

The Irish Christian brothers wanted to visit their school there. This was the first time that I had experienced apartheid. Signs all over: "Whites only."

Three days later we landed at Durban, and from there past Madagascar into Bombay. What a unique experience—Bombay! We docked at 2:00 AM. I got to the top deck at 4:00 AM. A crimson sunrise lit the sky. Temperature, pleasantly warm. But the odor!!!!!! A combination of incense, human excrement, salt water, and dead fish. I thought, "Lord, if this is India, you can have it!"

RR: But you had got to India.

JD: All this while I had been accompanied by my duffle bag and trunks full of materials for the mission. A priest from Patna met me and saw me through customs. The inspector must have been an alumnus of St. Xavier's College. Every turn meant a new experience.

Early next morning we went out through the college gate and I had to jump over a bundle on the sidewalk—people sleeping all around.

#### LOST AND FOUND

JD: The trip to Patna by train proved to be another saga. I had never been on a train with the corridor on one side and six bunk compartments on the other. Train signs read, "UP" or "DOWN." A mystery!

About half way to Patna, I wanted to stop at Allahabad to meet some of the sisters at the Motherhouse of the German Sisters working in Kathmandu. The only Hindi they taught me in Bombay was, "Bara ghirja," "The big church," meaning the cathedral. I left my duffle bag in the first class waiting room.

My English and two-words of Hindi meant nothing to the ticket-taker. A young lad of about twelve years motioned to follow him to his rickshaw. I had a

little over an hour between trains. After twenty minutes into a very pleasant neighborhood, he stopped at a corner with a street sign—just like the States! EDWARDS ROAD. My heart sank. I needed EDMONTON ROAD! Just then through tall green trees I spotted a spire—the cathedral.

The sisters served me breakfast, gave me a box lunch, and then said I had better hurry back to the train. In the station I got my bag from the waiting room and saw the train right there begin to move. UP and DOWN meant nothing to me. I threw my bag in the first open door and jumped on. A gentleman said, “Oh, Father, I saw you get off here this morning. I’m going to New Delhi. Where are you going?” I said, “New Delhi!? I’m on my way to Patna in the opposite direction!!! What do I do?” He said, “See that red handle up there? Pull it.” So I pulled the emergency chain—and stopped the Delhi Express! [Laughter]

We were already outside the station limits. I jumped down about six feet. From both ends of the train men in black coats and white trousers approached. One took my name and ticket number. I told him I was going to St. Xavier’s in Patna. St. Xavier’s must be the magic word! He said, “Don’t worry, Father.”

I had my bag with me, so I put it on the head of a thin old coolie who looked like Methusela’s uncle. We trotted back into the station, up the stairs, over to Track 2. Going down the stairs to the track, I saw a man in black coat and white trousers waving a green flag. I shouted, “Wait! I’m going to Patna.” His only sung reply, “Not todaaay!” The train started to move slowly. I jumped into the very last open door. I reached out to get my duffle bag from the collie’s head, when the train took a jerk. I was off to Patna with my bag still in Allahabad!

The Anglo-Indian ticket-taker said, "Father, at the next stop I'll wire them to send your bag on the next train. You get off at Mogol Sarai and wait for it. Mogol Sarai was over an hour's ride away, and the longest rail station in India, about a mile long. Once there, I told the station master my plight, and sent a wire to Patna telling them I'd arrive late.

The station master was very gracious, so I got the "chair treatment." From his office he brought out a wooden armchair and put it right next to the door of his office. This was my seat of honor for almost three hours. There I sat in black clerics and black hat, in the middle of India, just like Cincinnati! The people must have wondered what planet I came from. Soon a semi-circle of shoeless men wearing dhotis formed around me, just staring at this strange sight. Not one smile. Gradually, they drifted away.

Then suddenly from quite a distance down the platform, I heard strange music—sounded like the flute of a snake-charmer. It got closer and closer until I saw a small band of musicians led by a man carrying a long round garland made of flowers. They stopped before me as they continued to play. I must have been extremely self-conscious at twenty-six years. I thought, 'What a station master to put on such a show for me!' The man with the garland headed towards me—but then walked right by me into the office to garland the station master. He was retiring from his job that day! Eventually, the train from Allahabad arrived. Miracle of miracles, my bag was there in the guard's compartment. As he gave it to me he said, "Father, you're very lucky. This does not happen very often around here."

#### FINALLY IN PATNA

JD: In Patna, Fr. Ed Niesen, the Jesuit superior of Nepal, met me. At St. Xavier's they celebrated my arrival a

bit. I tried a local soda pop drink. It was in a specially made bottle with a marble inside the neck. When the bottle filled up, the gas inside forces the marble up to seal it. All you have to do is hit the marble down and there's your drink. The next day, I came down with amoebic diarrhea. Actually, it wasn't from the soda pop. I brought the bugs along from the ship trip.

The next adventure was getting a visa for entrance to Nepal. Fr. Niesen drove me through the narrow back alleys of Patna to a run-down-looking house—the Nepal Immigration Office! He dictated the visa: "Good for entrance to Nepal and staying until he is on the staff of Godavari School." Eventually, it worked.

RR: How long did it take you to get to Nepal?

JD: Altogether about one month. The quickest way to Kathmandu was by airplane. "Jumbo," the head of the Indian Airlines pilots was a friend of the Jesuits in Patna. He called me up to the cockpit of our DC-3 as we approached the Himalayas. We could see only great white fleecy clouds.

I was kneeling between the pilot and co-pilot as the co-pilot said, "Captain, I think you'd better take this." The captain takes over controls, and asks, "Where shall we go through the clouds?" He looks around and then says, "There's a hole over there on our left." We took a sharp swing to the left and then a sharp turn to the right through the hole in the white clouds. As our vision cleared, there were mountains right off our wingtips!! We were flying through a pass into a beautiful green valley of terraced rice fields. The plane landed on an asphalt strip just like an aircraft carrier—both ends were steep drop-offs! So that's how I started my new life in Kathmandu.

We visited the town school in Jawalakhel and then drove in a jeep over the dusty road to Godavari, which I have already described. I was out there for eighteen



months teaching grade school, prefecting a dormitory and games.

#### THEOLOGY IN INDIA

RR: So after all that you were there in Nepal for eighteen months before theology. How did that go?

JD: Here is what happened. Two scholastics, Lud Stiller and Bill Schock, both one year behind me, had come from the States and were already at Godavari. But I was the first one ready for theology. Relations with India were always a bit confused in Nepal, and we didn't know how going there for theology would work out. Should we ask for a four-year visa or one for five years, which would include a year for tertianship? Remember, I had been refused a visa for India in 1955. The superiors decided on asking for a four-year visa for the time I would be at St. Mary's College in Kurseong, up among the tea estates of West Bengal.

RR: For theology?

JD: Yes, theology. There, just as I had dropped Greek during my juniorate, I did just two years of what they then called the "long" course, followed by two years in the "short" course. Taking exams in Latin was a real chore, to say the least.

I didn't find theology very eventful. I did do a little teaching of moral science and counselling of students in schools around Kurseong.

#### ORDINATION

RR: And where were you ordained?

JD: After my third year of theology, I was ordained in Bettiah, Bihar State. For ten years they hadn't had a vocation there. The other three ordinands were an American, Bob Hagee, Norbert Rai from the parish we were ordained at, and another Indian. My sister Dorothy and an aunt and uncle came out for the ordi-

nation. My parents certainly couldn't make it.

#### TERTIANSHIP

RR: And then tertianship?

JD: Yes, after theology I headed for tertianship south of Patna in Hazaribagh, Bihar, the mission of the Australian Jesuits. Quite a trip! China had recently invaded parts of India, so on the roads we saw three-ton trucks, filled with Sikh soldiers in their green turbans, pulling howitzers up to the hilly front.

My tertian master was Fr. Louis Schillebeeckx, whose brother, Edward, was the famous Dutch Dominican theologian. I made tertianship with the noted Indian Jesuit, Tony de Mello, who wrote many books on awareness prayer. I then started my thirty-five-year adventure in the Hindu kingdom of Nepal.

#### JESUIT EDUCATION IN NEPAL

RR: Could you tell us something about how the Jesuit schools and ministry in Nepal worked out in practice?

JD: Yes, I started at St. Xavier's Godavari School. It was our main school at that time. We followed the Cambridge University educational system, which comes from Britain. After ten years of study, the students would take their O-level (ordinary) exams, as set by Cambridge University each year. We always included a Scripture course in what we taught, because it was easier to get a high grade in it. One of my students practically memorized the Acts of the Apostles! He eventually went to Cambridge University, wrote a book comparing the Chinese and Indian economies, and became the press secretary of His Majesty, the King of Nepal.

#### ALL INSTRUCTION IN ENGLISH

RR: Was all this in English?

- JD: Yes, and that was one of our difficulties as foreigners. Everything except the Nepali language course was taught in English. Picking up Nepali was sort of catch-as-catch-can for us Americans. When I returned from tertianship in 1963, I spent six months studying Nepali privately. Not much progress. I'm no linguist!
- RR: Did that mean that students had to study English before entering the school to start their courses?
- JD: Well, the kids in our high school were coming to us through the grade school, where English was used. Their only study of Nepali was the Nepali course itself. Our teachers liked this very much.

#### STABLES BECOME CLASSROOMS

- JD: From '64-'68 at Godavari I taught moral science, speech, and crafts. I was also assistant scout master, as well as moderator of the student council and school newspaper. Hostel duties included prefecting dorms and games, assigning walks, and coaching seasonal debates and one-act plays.

In a storeroom, I found an old Craftsman table saw, which had been used to make windows for new classrooms. We converted elephant and horse stables from the prime minister's time into classrooms! So I built a craftsroom around the saw.

Manual dexterity helped boys learn better. Here is where we made our beautiful 4' x 5' school crest. One of the boys won the contest for the school motto: "Live for God, lead for Nepal."

- RR: You had many jobs.
- JD: Yes, and at that time I also helped Fr. Saubolle bottle our Mass wine made from raisins. When he died, I produced all of the Mass wine for the country. Fascinating hobby! Great product!

## SCHOOL'S GROWING PAINS

RR: How large a school was it?

JD: There were about 350 students in the Godavari school. But this has to be put in perspective. Every year we could accept only one out of every twenty applicants. There was tremendous pressure to get into the school. In 1968 I moved into the town school at Jawalakhel as minister, builder, and community treasurer. We relocated the older students there and sent all the primary school boarders to Godavari.

From '70 to '74 I moved to the Godavari Alumni Association near the royal palace across town, where I became its moderator. We wanted to keep in contact with our old boys [alumni]. Eventually, we put up a three-story building with a basketball court, a few small offices, and a library on the second floor.

We also put a Jesuit apartment on the third floor, where Gene Watrin and I lived. Gene was from Cincinnati and worked with the alumni for many, many years as moderator. I commuted over to the high school for teaching until '74.

## COUNSELING COURSE

RR: You were quite busy.

JD: Yes. An ecumenical prayer group developed, which offered a "Life In The Spirit" seminar. I made a monthly chaplain's visit to the British Gurkha army camp in east Nepal. Taking a counseling course in Vellore, south India, turned out to be something that developed nicely. Shy "gentleman Jim" [laughter] blossomed out a good deal, going in a different direction. A semester of Clinical Pastoral Education in Cincinnati led to my developing a course called "Adventures in Attitudes." It's a dynamic approach to motivation for students and business people, and can even be given as a ten-day retreat. It turned out to be something that really grew.

## **SUPERIOR OF THE MISSION**

**RR:** About how many Jesuits were there then?

**JD:** We were about twenty. When six became Nepali citizens, we were allowed to form the legal entity, the Nepal Jesuit Society, so we could own land. This decision was to give the Church more stability in the country.

**RR:** And where were these other Jesuits from?

**JD:** The other Jesuits came from America and India, plus one Canadian. Eventually we were joined by a Japanese priest, Fr. Ooki, who opened a center for disadvantaged children in Pokhara, a beautiful valley and lake at the foot of Mt. Annapurna, west of Kathmandu. He became the Catholic priest for everyone in Pokhara, including two convents of sisters.

**RR:** What was your own job at that time?

**JD:** In February '76 I became the rector of St. Xavier High School in town. We had two rectors at the time, with one of us at the Godavari School. Our works were expanding, so we felt it necessary to have only one superior of the Nepal mission. This was a provincial appointment, and on July 24, 1976 I was named "Overall Superior of the Nepal Mission." Sounded to me like someone running a factory making Levi pants! I'm more of a support person, so this job called for a lot of adjustment for me.

## **NEW CHAPEL AND NEW PEOPLE**

**RR:** An unusual title!

**JD:** Yes. After that appointment, I continued living there at the high school in Jawalakhel. Right out in front of the school there were four bungalows owned by others. We had a so-called "lawyer," who was supposed to help us with land deals and whom I inherited from the previous rector, Fr. Tom Gafney. For our registered entity, the Nepal Jesuit Society, I bought one of those

bungalows for a superior's residence.

We made a number of changes to it, including adding a second story, which became the local parish church. Until then, the only parish church was a very small chapel inside the school grounds. It looked like an oversized bus. In the new chapel, the altar was beautifully carved wood, Tibetan style, in three sections. The middle section could be removed and the top lowered for a sit-down Mass.

The tabernacle resembled a pagoda-style Nepalese temple. The ambo looked like a dove with wings extended, sitting over seven-tiered rings, symbolizing the seven sacraments. A real gem!

I was happy to turn over the pastor's work to an Indian Jesuit. As Overall Superior, however, I invited the first person from the Jesuit Volunteers International to join us from America as secretary to the superior. Eventually that superior's office became the residence for Sisters of Charity of Nazareth of Kentucky from India, whom I invited to join us in school and parish work. This was the time, too, that Maryknoll priests asked to come to Nepal to work.

## LAND PROBLEMS

RR: Did you do more expansion of this kind?

JD: At this time, we were looking around in Kathmandu for a place to build a church. We were offering Mass on the weekends in a hotel in town. We wanted to set up a site where Catholics could worship. Hopefully our Nepali Catholics would open some sort of social center and be more accepted by Kathmanduites. Most of our Catholic Christians were from Darjeeling in India and spoke a different type of Nepali.

So I found a piece of land that was a 30' hill above one of the main roads from the airport; from there you could see straight ahead across the valley to

Kathmandu. If a church were put there, everybody could see it. I spoke to three prime ministers about this. I told them that I knew that, according to the country's constitution, it was against Nepali law for someone to change their traditional religion. But what we were doing would not be proselytizing. Since foreign tourists provided the biggest income, allowing religious services for them would be a very positive thing for everyone.

RR: How was your proposal received?

JD: These 3.14 acres of land would have provided ample space for our plan. Our so-called "lawyer" bought the land for us; it consisted of about a dozen plots. He brought us official government land deeds in the name of our Nepal Jesuit Society with government stamps on them.

But eventually I found out that he would then go out into distant land offices, slip some money under the table to the clerk, and get an official land deed saying that our Nepal Jesuit Society gave the land to him as a gift! In this way there is no tax charged. Then, the crook would go and sell the same plots to two or three other people! It became extremely complicated.

I engaged a Hindu Brahmin lawyer, who was a bloodhound on land cases. On his own, he would search out documents in various offices. We placed some twenty cases against the crook. I had to go to the courts once a month to sign the book for each case. If you missed for three months, you lost the case. It took me a long time to learn that Nepali law was based on compromise more than justice.

One of our cases set a precedent in the Nepali Supreme Court over an obscure point of land ownership. The chief justice sided with the opposition, but the other two judges took our part. I spoke in Nepali twice. The judge mercifully cut me off after a couple of sen-

tences. It took eleven years for these cases to be decided! I was able to prove that an Indian businessman bought a nearby traffic island from the crook, instead of his buying our plot!

Eventually, we got the front half of that land. Another plot in the back portion allowed us to erect a residence for Jesuit faculty. The choice front section became St. Xavier College. This is a two-year junior college before the students start the five-year university courses. It is the only school in the country to award bachelor of social work degrees.

#### OTHER SUCCESSES

RR: Were there other significant events?

JD: One of the other achievements of my time as superior was the Godavari Ashram on the compound of the Godavari School. I revamped a teacher's house for a much-needed retreat house. Next to it, I also designed and built a small chapel, the first self-standing chapel in Nepal. Octagonal in shape with a pagoda-styled roof, and mostly windows on the sides, the building became quite popular. Another gem!

RR: It was a time of expansion and development?

JD: Yes. Let me mention another great development. Four of us, a Canadian and three Americans, developed a pre-novitiate for Nepal. We started out in a rented house. The first seven young men were recruited from India. We eventually bought another house, and next to it, as minister, I oversaw the building of a three-story juniorate. During the first year we tried to get as much English into them as possible. After novitiate in Patna, they returned to Kathmandu for college studies.

Another new work began in the mid-'70s. We set aside three of our best Nepali-speaking Jesuits for research work. They started a Human Resources Devel-



opment Center, concentrating on Nepali history, the Newar Buddhism of Kathmandu valley, and anthropology (faith healers). Wonderful scholarship on the country!

#### TROUBLED TIMES

RR: What about the Jesuit who was killed in Nepal ?

JD: Fr. Tom Gafney from Cleveland, Ohio, was the rector of the high school before me. We were always careful to respect the climate of local opinion towards foreign religions. For example, for the first ten years in Nepal, we didn't even go out trekking in the local mountains, so as not to give the impression that we were proselytizing. Actually, there had been some earlier demonstrations in '51 against our opening the missionary school!

Tom started a Social Service Center in a house we bought, right up the street from the school. This was our first effort in this field. In 1970 he started taking kids off of the streets, many disadvantaged, and got them into schools.

Back in the '60s, hippies started coming to Kathmandu, bringing their drug-addicted culture with them. Tom ended up with five houses for detoxifying Nepalese on drugs. He did this for about ten years before the government would even acknowledge the fact that they had thousands of drug addicts in the country.

At an international meeting on drugs he let it be known that he knew some of the drug money was going to people very high in the government. On December 14, 1997, he didn't show up for Mass at the Sisters' convent. When they went into his house, they found him in bed with his throat slit. The police, however, never did much about it, so the murder was never solved. He seemed to be a victim of the drug trade.

#### SUPPORT FOR THE MISSION

RR: Does the money for all this development and building come basically from abroad?

JD: Oh, yes. It comes mainly from the Chicago Province and donations we solicit among our friends through the Mission Office.

RR: I imagine that in Nepal a little money goes a long way?

JD: It certainly did—for a while! [Laughter] But now I think the total amount of money we paid for that land would buy only one or two plots.

#### HOME VISITS

RR: What about any home visits?

JD: After ordination I didn't go home from Nepal mission for eleven years. My parents had never seen me as a priest. So when I arrived back home the first time, I was picked up at the airport and taken to St. Elizabeth's Hospital up the street from our house. I said Mass for my parents there. It was a great moment for us all.

On another of my home visits, I attended the 40-day Institute for Ignatian Spiritual Exercises at the Jesuit spirituality center in Guelph, Ontario. This also was a wonderful experience. But what changed my life as a Jesuit priest was my '93-'94 sabbatical. Simply fantastic!

#### VINCENTIANS' PRAYER SERVICES

RR: Tell us about it.

JD: OK. I felt burnt out after being superior and minister at Godavari. It was time for me to do some renewal in the States. So I asked a couple of our men about their experience of renewal courses. They told me about the best ones they had found.

RR: Where did you go in the States?

JD: I went to St. Xavier's Church in Cincinnati. It was May '93, and I slept for the first month! [Laughter]

But I should first mention something that happened shortly before I left Kathmandu.

Some Vincentian priests had a very specialized healing ministry in south India, where they have a center. They have given retreats to as many as 5,000 people. They came to Kathmandu in February 1993. This was the first time we ever had a group of this kind come to Nepal. When the praise of God gets very strong (and loud), all sorts of cures take place. Then the leader of the team, Fr. Michael, announces what healings have occurred.

One night they were on the stage at the convent school. Now I had had a lot of sinus trouble that year, which had prevented me from ever getting a good night's sleep. My superior, Fr. Leo, was sitting next to me. He thought that these healings took place just because of "suggestion" when Fr. Michael announced them.

RR: What happened?

JD: Towards the end of that prayer session, Fr. Michael was up there praising God energetically. Suddenly I experienced something like electricity— "chi-chi-chi"— go down my chest! I sat up and thought, "My God, what's happening to me?" Again, "chi-chi-chi" down my chest! Then, about five minutes later, Fr. Michael says, "Two people with sinus trouble and chest congestion are being cured." I thought to myself, "That's wonderful. I wonder who they are?" When I went home, for the first time in six months, I slept straight through the night!

So at breakfast the next morning, I said to the superior, "Leo, when this happens to me first and then Fr. Michael announces it, don't tell me that it is by suggestion!" After that, I prayed with their team for a couple of days, and apparently I pray the way they do.

## HEALING MINISTRY

RR: How did you follow up on that experience?

JD: When I got back to the States in May '93, I discovered that these Vincentians came to the States every summer to collect money for their center. They knew where I was, and asked me if I would join them touring the States. I did that in the summer of '93. I went with their healing team to seven different cities around the United States. What a fantastic experience! Then in the summer of '94 I again went with them to five different cities. I did not go with them to Mexico City, because I was traveling on my Nepali passport.

Most of these retreats were held on weekends for communities from India domiciled here in the States. No decisions were taken that did not come out of prayer. We would pray together for an hour or two each morning. Like a bunch of cooks, each one threw into the pot what came to them in prayer. Out in Phoenix, we saw these things in prayer: 1) a water fountain; 2) a large banana leaf; 3) a high tower; 4) our planned trip to the Grand Canyon half in light, half in dark; 5) supper with an American family; 6) our meeting with a group of doctors.

We visited a church in Scottsdale, Arizona, where Our Blessed Mother reportedly had appeared. Entering the churchyard, we saw a TV tower in the background, water pouring from a fountain, and a large green leaf with flowers at the foot of Mary's statue. After lunch at McDonald's, a young American woman came over to speak with the "Indian retreat team." Her mother drove up and invited us to their house for supper, where we were invited to meet several doctors the next day! So our trip to the Grand Canyon started in light and ended in dark. We never made it! Amazing! All of these were seen in prayer.

RR: Were there more healings involved?

JD: Oh, very much so. What a tremendous experience! Healings occurred every place we went. In Washington, D.C. a woman who could not bend over due to a bad back, touched her toes! Praise God! That's what it's all about.

It really taught me the power of praise. When the praise of God gets very intense, which is what it always should be, it simply pulls down graces of all kinds, including healings. Since then, praise has become a great part of my prayer life. What an echo of St. Ignatius! We are "created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord."

#### ROLE OF PRAISE

RR: How early did praise strike you?

JD: I had been interested in a healing ministry even when I was in Kathmandu in the early '70s. The Charismatic Renewal started in the US in '69. Our ecumenical prayer group in Kathmandu always prayed especially on Pentecost eve for the gifts of the Spirit. I had never heard anyone pray in tongues before. As they prayed over me, the Protestant lady next to me seemed to be clucking like a hen. I felt nothing different.

Getting up the next morning I knew something was different. The whole atmosphere was charged. Colors were brighter, and everything seemed to have sharp-edged outlines. This feeling lasted until evening. After the Mass for some Sisters on Pentecost, they remarked that something must have happened. I felt that I had been brushed by the Spirit.

#### SURPRISE RETREAT

RR: Were there other influential people in your life at that time?

JD: When I returned from one of those weekend retreats, I had an invitation from a Mrs. Kathleen Keefe from

New York, a perfect stranger. She asked me to go on a priests' retreat at San Giovanni Rotundo in Italy, where St. Padre Pio's monastery is. She added that I would go with all expenses paid. That was a great opportunity, so I took advantage of it.

In August, I met them at JFK airport. There were sixteen priests from all over the United States. Fr. Bernie Bush, a Californian Jesuit, and Kathleen Keefe directed the retreat. Kathleen had been there a number of times, because she was a good friend of Fr. Joseph Pius Martin, who was American. At the time, he was the only English-speaking person in the Capuchin monastery to guide visitors.

It was a retreat like no other I've ever made. Fr. Bush at one time resided in the Diocese of Norwich, Connecticut, working in child-advocacy for the bishop. He has many degrees in psychology. While there, a number of survivors from satanic cults came to him.

RR: What was so special about this retreat?

JD: Due to the contacts with spirits that I just mentioned, the sixteen of us in the retreat got a mini-course in evil and the need for prayer of deliverance. Kathleen Keefe had dealt before with satanic activity in the hills behind San Giovanni. That's one reason why she and Fr. Martin prayed together. She has a gift of the discernment of spirits. So the idea developed that every year priests from the United States would make a retreat at San Giovanni.

A little more about Kathleen Keefe. She has developed a Divine Mercy apostolate aimed at the renewal of the family and the priesthood. Her story is amazing. When her sixth child was just a couple of days old, she insisted that the boy be brought to her. While holding him minutes later, he stopped breathing. She and her husband, Marty, found a picture of Jesus, Divine Mercy, pinned it in the boy's crib, and promised

God that if the child were spared, they would spend the rest of their lives promoting devotion to the Divine Mercy. He was spared and they kept their promise. This was my introduction to Divine Mercy.

#### A FEARSOME MOMENT

RR: Were there any other developments?

JD: Yes. Kathleen and I gave a retreat to the priests of Providence, Rhode Island. I also prayed with her on pilgrimages to San Giovanni and Poland. But let me tell you about my experience in Lowell, Massachusetts.

Some years ago, a weekend conference was sponsored by the Boston Archdiocesan Charismatic Renewal Office and the Marian group of Sr. Margaret Sims. This was the first such conference held after the sexual abuse scandals in Boston became news. A couple of survivors of abuse spoke. A number of prominent people in the healing ministry were there also.

RR: Didn't you mention earlier that something very unusual happened there?

JD: Yes. There were five hundred people at that Saturday evening Mass. After Mass, there must have been about seventy-five people who remained in the hall. I was talking with some people in front when a woman came rushing down and said, "We need a priest back here!" I was the only priest around!

In the back I found a woman of about forty lying in a fetal position on the floor. She was making deep guttural noises and trying to cough up something. I said, "Go get Kathleen." She was in the lobby selling her books on Divine Mercy. I knew we needed her gift of discernment of spirits. So Kathleen came. By this time another woman was cradling the one on the floor.

Everyone prayed. Kathleen mentioned a spirit of cynicism. As I spoke the prayer of deliverance over this spirit of cynicism, the woman got to her knees.

She came straight at me—red-eyed, fingers like claws, tongue hanging down to her chin with guttural cries. I was startled, but not afraid. The woman quieted down. Then the spirit of sarcasm came up. I again said the prayer of deliverance over the spirit of sarcasm, and the woman came screaming at me again, her eyes burning red again.

RR: So how did this extraordinary scene end?

JD: Well, they continued to pray. I was on my knees praying in her ear. Then Kathleen said, “Let’s pray to our Blessed Mother.” As soon as we said the name of Mary, bam! The woman got up, said, “Oh, Father,” in her own natural voice and gave me a big hug. She began to talk about her parish life. She said, “We’ve got such a wonderful parish, but our pastor is so sarcastic and cynical!” I almost fell through the floor! My great question—how does such transference take place in a parish?

I asked many people in the healing ministry to explain this for me. Many don’t know how this happens. The best explanation I heard was that it is like someone with an open wound. They are likely to get infected if they come into a contaminated atmosphere. I also found out later that this woman had been sexually abused when young. But I’ll tell you, that’s the first time I’ve ever heard such a guttural voice growling at me and seen red eyes glaring at me like that!

#### MARIAN APPARITIONS

RR: It sounds like you found enrichment in new ways of praying.

JD: Let me add here the third wonderful experience of my sabbatical in 1993–1994. It revolved around Marian apparitions and messages.

In 1992 a woman in Batavia, Ohio, began to receive messages from our Blessed Mother Mary. One



said that Mary would appear in “the church of her spouse,” in St. Joseph Church in Cold Springs, Kentucky, the night of August 31. That night the church was full of people, when close to midnight lights were seen flashing around inside the church.

The following year on August 31, 1993, I went there with the couple I had met in France on my way to Nepal. As we entered the back of the parking lot, a 5' statue of Mary was weeping tears. A heavy scent of roses permeated the air. At the side of the church and parking lot a white banner hung from a tall tree with Mary's picture on it. By 11:30 PM the crowd of a thousand quieted down and began to pray.

Five minutes before midnight, POW!!! A great white light exploded before the banner and streaks of white light flashed throughout the crowd—for thirty minutes! I thought: “Photos!” But it was not that kind of flash. The light seemed to pass through three or four people at a time.

The following year, August 31, 1994, I again attended with the same friends. The white statue of Mary was weeping tears. No scent of roses. Someone asked me to hear confessions on the lawn behind the church. At 11:45 the three of us were again in the same spot in the parking lot. Five minutes later, “POW!!!” A pointed oval of blue light burst before the banner, then flashed throughout the crowd of 3,000 people! This went on for thirty-five minutes. The following night on the evening news, they showed about thirty seconds of these flashing blue lights. So it was not a case of mass hysteria.

Soon after the first events of '92, the pastor, Fr. Leroy Smith, left the diocese and moved over to Norwood, Ohio, to the old St. Mary's Seminary. This was the former Cincinnati archdiocesan center, a huge H-shaped building which had not been used for twelve

years! Water had leaked down through the walls all the way to the basement. I thought it was two million dollars of falling plaster. Actually, one afternoon one section of the “H” totally collapsed! The four-story wing was empty. I told them, “Rejoice and be glad. That’s one wing you don’t have to renovate!”

Fr. Leroy and his priest friends bought the whole place from the archbishop for \$100,000, one-fifth of the original price. The archbishop’s old “palace” stood next door. With volunteer contributions and labor, these two buildings became Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Spiritual Center. It was meant to be a retreat and retirement haven for priests. In time, many other programs developed it into a thriving spiritual center.

Kathleen Keefe and I gave a presentation on healing there. The administration even asked me to come back from Nepal to be director of the place. Our Lady wanted to be known as Our Lady of Light. Spectacular light displays took place right there in ’95 and ’96 before 5,000 and then 10,000 people. Mary asked that September 1 become a day of prayer for healing and peace. Our Lady of Light ministry has spread throughout the world with pictures and medals. Healings and cures have taken place.

With my niece, I also visited Conyers, Georgia, where Mary was visiting as well. At the apparition time, I saw flashing pink light amidst the group of priests and religious. There, Our Lady was asking for prayers especially for America.

#### **BRIEF RETURN TO NEPAL**

**RR:** What about your contact with Nepal?

**JD:** Then in December of ’94, I was called back to Nepal, where I spent the next two years giving retreats. I was also giving guidance in India. That was when I met Mother Teresa many times. I gave her Sisters retreats,

and became confessor to them in Kathmandu.

Our superior finally said, “Hey, we have to decide where you will go in the future.” Both in Nepal and in the US I was advised that I should return to my original culture, where I would not experience so much stress. At this time the 34<sup>th</sup> General Congregation of the Jesuits was being held in Rome, so the Chicago provincial was in Rome.

#### COMING TO NEW ENGLAND

RR: So his absence made it difficult to sort things out then. Where did you go?

JD: Well, the impression I got from the Jesuits in Chicago was that they didn’t know how I would fit into the province. I had had so many different experiences. Being Director of Our Lady of Light Center in Cincinnati would not fit, because the archdiocese took a wary approach to a place developed because of private revelations.

So when I got back to Nepal, I prayed about the whole Society. When I prayed about the New England Province, my gut feeling was that it ‘fits.’ Great peace and excitement resulted. The Lord leads in strange ways. One of the draws to New England may have been the fact that the national center for Divine Mercy is in Stockbridge, Massachusetts—right along the line of my interest in Divine Mercy!

I wrote the New England Province Provincial, Fr. Bill Barry, who said, “Come ahead.” In May ’97 he met me at the airport. I spent a few days in the Boston office. Then I came here to Campion Center for about three days. From there I went to Storrs, Connecticut, to St. Thomas Aquinas Parish on the campus of the University of Connecticut for a weekend. I extended my visit a couple of days and then went back to the provincial and simply said, “Yes, it fits.”

## STORRS, CONNECTICUT

JD: I was there in the parish in Storrs for ten years. I loved the parish work. Each year I guided a parish group through the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius for nine months. I did the same for three classes of men preparing to be permanent deacons in the Norwich Diocese. Working with the elderly in an assisted living facility and visiting a nursing home proved delightful.

While there, I also helped with the move of the Jesuit residence from the parish house to our newly acquired house nearby. I got back into keeping the books for the community. That's "keeping," not "cooking"! [Laughter]

I've been here at Campion Center since August 2007. It's been great! I love it here, and know that the Lord called me here. I'm deeply moved every time I come to Mass and find so many Jesuits in wheelchairs, on walkers, and using canes. To think of all their years of dedication to Jesus and the Church! It's moving!

After six weeks in the house, the rector asked me to be the treasurer of the community. So it's back to the books! I've been gone from my Midwest roots for so long that I know few in the Chicago Province. In 2001 I joined the New England Province, and expect to be planted in our cemetery right here.

## GOD'S PROVIDENCE

RR: Let me ask you if in these and other experiences you have had over the years as a priest, you have been able to see God's providence, support, and guidance in your life?

JD: Very definitely! All the way through! No doubt about it. That's why I'm sitting here now. Mother Mary has been a great part of it all. That's why the "Magnificat" is my favorite prayer. It typifies her spirituality of thankful praise.

RR: We are all happy to have you here! Please remember  
all of us with your obviously effective prayers.

JD: Thank you. I sure will.

### Magnificat

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed:  
the Almighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.

He has mercy on those who fear him  
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm,  
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,  
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel,  
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,  
the promise he made to our fathers,  
to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning, is now,  
and will be for ever. Amen.

**Rev. James J. Dressman, S.J.**

- Born:** June 29, 1930, Covington, Kentucky
- Entered:** July 24, 1948, Milford, Ohio, Sacred Heart  
Novitiate of the Chicago Province
- Ordained:** March 20, 1961, Khrist Raja Parish, Bettiah,  
Bihar State, India
- Final Vows:** April 22, 1978, Kathmandu, Nepal, St.  
Xavier School, Jawalakhel
- 
- 1944 Covington, Kentucky: St. Xavier High School/  
Cincinnati, Ohio - Student
- 1948 Milford, Ohio: Sacred Heart Novitiate - Novitiate,  
juniorate
- 1952 West Baden, Indiana: West Baden College - Studied  
philosophy
- 1955 Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Xavier High School - Taught  
Latin, moderated Drama Club
- 1956 Kathmandu, Nepal: St. Xavier's Godavari School -  
Taught grade school; prefectured dormitory; coached  
sports
- 1958 Kurseong, Darjeeling District, India: St. Mary's  
College - Studied theology
- 1962 Sitagara, Hazaribagh District, Bihar, India: St.  
Stanislaus Hall - Tertianship

- 1963 Kathmandu, Nepal: St. Xavier Godavari School -  
Taught Senior Cambridge Scripture, moral science,  
English literature; hostel prefect; moderated games,  
craftswork, speech, drama, student council, student  
newspaper; Assistant Scout Master
- 1968 Kathmandu, Nepal: St. Xavier Godavari School -  
Superior, minister, factotum
- 1970 Kathmandu, Nepal: Godavari Alumni Association -  
Moderator; taught Scripture and moral science,  
counselor at St. Xavier School, Jawalakhel
- 1974 Kathmandu, Nepal: St. Xavier High School -  
1974-1984 Taught Scripture, moral science;  
counselor  
February 11, 1976 Rector  
July 24, 1976-1981 First Overall Superior of Nepal  
1981-1984 Also court work
- 1984 Kathmandu, Nepal: Jesuit Pre-Novitiate - Minister
- 1990 Kathmandu, Nepal: St. Xavier Godavari School -  
Superior
- 1993 Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Xavier Church - Sabbatical
- 1994 Kathmandu, Nepal: St. Xavier High School -  
Pastoral ministry, retreat ministry
- 1997 Storrs, Connecticut: St. Thomas Aquinas Church -  
Pastoral ministry
- 2007 Weston, Massachusetts: Campion Health Center -  
Community treasurer, pastoral ministry

### **Degrees**

**1954 Bachelor of Arts, Philosophy, West Baden College,  
West Baden**

**1956 Master of Arts, Latin, Loyola University, Chicago,  
Illinois**