Br. Thomas Martin, OP Interview

0:00:02 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Did you work for the pastor in 43?

0:00:02 - Br. Thomas Martin, OP

41, yeah 43

Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

You went to the House [of Studies] in 41, then? In the early days, who were the people you remember?

0:00:16 - Br. Thomas Martin, OP

Oh, I suppose at that time you had the young dads, you had the full house there, young dads, novices, and probably the first ordination class in those that would be about my time, which would have been Tony Nadeu, Tim Friendoff, Benny Ashley. They had entered just before I had entered. We came in singly at that time.

0:00:44 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Who would the characters be?

0:00:46 - Br. Thomas Martin, OP

The characters?

0:00:47 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

The ones that really stand out in your mind, out of the whole house.

0:00:52 - Br. Thomas Martin, OP

Oh, I suppose Ambrose Jura, Mike McGrill

Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Can you tell any stories?

0:00:52 - Br. Thomas Martin, OP

No, not really.

So many on Ambrose, I suppose, his actions, his words he used. When he got flustered, he would use the German words.

Of course, Giles Waskowski was there, Ron Waskowski.

0:01:28 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

Who were the brothers who were in the province when it was founded?

0:01:32 - Br. Thomas Martin, OP

When it was founded?

Oh, Louis Bertrand.

There was Brother Dominic at Minneapolis. He was quite a character, a long beard. He came down, and he had ingrown eyelashes. And he had, I believe, a couple operations on which were not successful. Then he came down and had one, I think, at Loretto Hospital that was successful. And then he died about six months after that. But he lived with all that.

He would tell stories. Some of the older men from Minneapolis would probably know Brother Francis up there. The Blessed Virgin was supposed to have appeared to him once or twice. This I got from Brother Dominic.

Then there were Giles that were in the order. Andrew Sloan, who is in the western province right now.

Brother Conrad, Brother Henry.

There was a young lad, Albert Fleury, took the name of Jerome, who left, came back, left again. And I saw him a couple years ago, and I said, if we had the freedom then that we had now, he'd probably still be in the Order. He never married. He works for the city in Grosse Plaine Farms around Detroit.

0:03:10 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

What was it like for the brothers in those days?

0:03:15 - Br. Thomas Martin, OP

A little strict.

Fairly confining for us compared to what it is now.

The house itself had one, maybe two cars. This was the House of Studies where you had all the including the provincial living there, Father O'Brien.

Wednesdays would be generally an afternoon off, and we would get a dollar maybe from the novice master and go out and bowl. At that time, you could bowl for about 25 cents a line. And we did a fair amount of bowling. I think that was probably our main activity outside of maybe baseball or walking. I used to get in a couple games in ice hockey with the brothers, some ball games with the brothers. We used to play the novices also. On a Wednesday, Father Walsh would get the novices out, and Father Barron, Bob Barron, our novice master, would get the brothers out.

I think we looked forward to going up to camp in those days. We got two weeks, I believe, up until Solemn Vows, and we got a month wherever we wanted to go. And my first vacation after Solemn Vows, Brother Henry and myself, we went out to Mederlin up in Denver. That was 1949, and I've never been back, but I hear it's really something now compared to what it was then.

0:05:05 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

I entered in 1941.

0:05:11 - Br. Thomas Martin, OP

I was on maintenance, laundry, the rest of it, until 1946.

From 1946 to 1949, I was assigned to Fenwick High School. It was during that period that we had the big fire.

0:05:29 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

What was that like?

0:05:34 - Br. Thomas Martin, OP

It was on a Sunday night. Actually, it was a Monday morning when the fire actually took place. But Sunday night, we had a party for Father Sadiba, who belonged to the Holy Rosary province, had worked in the Philippines as a missionary, was caught up in the war, was in a prison camp there, saw many of his compatriots killed.

And he came back, and he taught at Fenwick for about a year or two. He knew English fairly well.

But he was going back to Spain. And we had a party for him that night and cleaned up the place afterwards, which is seldom done after a party, but it was done after that one. And then at about probably 1:30, 2 o'clock in the morning, a woman across the street who had a sick child saw flames in what was our recreation room. And she never recalls seeing it there before. And she had called the police or the fire department. And they had come out. And by that time, the flames were very heavy.

At that time, Father Lawton, later Bishop Lawton, was on the first floor of a room. And he had gone upstairs at the sight of the flames and warned the men up there, knocked at the doors.

And ran out.

Father Morgenthaler, who lived in the school, there was a room over there at that time. He was the athletic director.

The telephone boxes for the house were over there, the junction boxes. And he heard the noise coming from the from the spitting of the fire and, I guess, breaking up the lines. And so it made a lot of noise over there, short-circuiting everything out. And that's what got him up and had him come over.

I was in what was called a Jones house, the house next to the main house. And in my bedroom, there were no windows. I had a little turret of a little parlor of about six feet round, small windows.

And I looked down. from there, and I could see the flames looking out of the recreation room. Father Sadiba lived upstairs with me in the attic, and I had knocked at his door, hammered at his door, because he was always afraid of fire. I always told him, I said, Father, if there's ever a fire, I'll wake you up.

And as it turned out, he thought I was joking because of the party and everything, and he was going away, and he didn't believe me. But finally we got him up out of there later on. He came out that front door of the Jones house, all dressed up to go back to Spain. He had his black suit on, his two suitcases. He was ready to leave. This was about 2:30 in the morning by then.

Nobody was hurt? In the main house, Father Demick went down the back stairs and jumped the flight of stairs.

And when he landed, he landed on burning linoleum, and his hands went right into the tar, right into the burning tar, and he got out. Father Myers, Chester Myers, who was out of the house once and went back upstairs to make sure the rest of them were out, he warned Father Demick But when he tried to get back downstairs again, he was cut off. And he went out the front window of Father Lux's room, which was over the front door. And the only windows in the house that did not have a ledge around it.

All the other windows had ledges around it, the house. And so he was hanging on. And he eventually tried to pull the window down so that the heat was not so bad. And the firemen got the ladder up and got him down. But he was badly burned around the eyes, the face, I think the second day. His eyes were completely closed, and his hands were all badly burned. Father Luke Lyons, those were the three that were living up in the top floor. Luke and Chester lived in one room, and Demick had another room on his own.

Brother Conrad was up there, and he got down all right. Fire Department took Father Tucker out of his room through his window. And I heard it described by some men as quite a sight.

I didn't see that part of it.

Eventually, that's how we got the third house, what was known as the dog house in those days. It was owned by a woman in the mental institute. And the children would not sell the house until she died. But when they read about the fire, they had come to us then and offered the house to us if we wanted to buy the house. And then the fourth house was the Woods House. That's where Father Robinson and Father McGowan were living at that time.

Then from there I went, do you want to, okay. In 49 then I was transferred to Winona, Brother Andrew and myself, and I thought, boy, this is the end of the line for me.

I won't go any further. Because we both went up there early, I, to oversee the boilers and a lot of the equipment that was being put in, and I would be on the maintenance crew there. And Andrew went up there to oversee the laundry. He was going to take charge of the laundry.

And as it turned out, that was my shortest stay. I was there two years, and I handed over the stub, and then Jerry Pitcock, I think, finally got it.

51, I was transferred down to St. Pius in Chicago to relieve a brother, Patrick, there. And I was, again, on maintenance. And that's where I got involved in running bingos and that. I used to run them with Father Verschure carnivals and that.

And it was at that time that we accepted the African mission of Nigeria, 50 or 51 it was. And our first men went over in 51, Bishop Dempsey and Lawton and Art Kinsella.

And the provincial had sent a letter out asking for volunteers before that.

And my recollection, I heard later that 80% of the men had volunteered for the foreign missions, which is very good because it's almost all of them. Figuring you had some of the older men who probably knew that they wouldn't have a chance, or sick men who wouldn't have a chance, or they didn't volunteer.

But there was something like 80%. And a provincial told me at that time, I had volunteered, and he had told me at that time, he said, well, Father Hughes, it would be maybe four years before they'd need a brother over there.

And since he was the provincial. He made his prophecy come true. It was just four years later, in 51, that I was assigned there.

Monsignor Father Lawton went up on tour at that time. They had a parish of Yaba, which we have now.

And he took a tour of the northern region of the Kaduna Archdiocese, and it was agreed on at that time, or he had looked at that time, the Province of Sakato and Katsina, which comprised part of the Archdiocese of Kaduna.

And then Father, I think, O'Brien had gone over, and Father Hughes had gone over there. And they again went up in the north to look it over, and they sort of decided that we would accept that mission. And Monsignor was made a prefect apostolic in 54 and went back. And then I went up there in 1955.

We left on St. Patrick's Day in 1955, left New York. And that was my first plane ride from Chicago to New York. The day before St. Patrick's Day. St. Patrick's Day, we flew off to Lisbon. And in those days, I suppose that flight probably took about 12 hours. There were prop jobs then, probably DC-7s or something like that.

And we landed in Lisbon, Portugal, where we stayed for three days. The second day, by car, we went to to Fatima via two interesting places that we had passed through. One was called, one of the towns, Alacobra, that had a Trappist monastery there, that has a Trappist monastery there. It had 999 cells for the monks and 1,000 cells for the king of Portugal, and he went up there for a retreat.

The kitchen was about the size of a football field, tremendous. A river ran through it, the kitchen, and the brothers would catch fish and wash the dishes and everything right into the stream as it went through there.

At Portugal, up in the north, we had stopped in to see the parents of the two children of Fatima. They were living at that time, and they are now up for sainthood. So we went to the home of the children and saw the room they were born in. There's relatives, I think, living in the house at the present time. And we stayed in the convent that was then run by the Canadian Dominicans. They were just starting up the province again in Portugal. And now it's all been taken over by the Portuguese.

And we returned back to, that was St. Joseph's Day. We had the mass at the little shrine at Fatima.

And we returned the next day. And then we flew down to Africa. Via Dakar, Monrovia. I got in there at night, Monrovia.

I remember getting out of the plane that night. It was humid. It felt like you just came out of a shower. It was so humid outside. And then we landed in Accra, Ghana. And Bishop Lott met us there. And we were told by immigration we could not leave the airport grounds. They had a hotel there at the airport. But that night, we slept there. And then Monsignor took us into the American SVD place in the morning.

And they had mass there. And then we went back out to the airport and took off for Nigeria. There were five of us in our group at that time.

Fr. Hughes, Dolan, Clancy, Marr, and myself, they were going over for the election of Michael Brown, I guess. I think he was after Suarez. Suarez had been killed a couple of months before.

That chapter was during Easter week in Rome. Yeah, that's right. We were—Pan Am fouled things up, and they had no reservation, no flights for Rome for these people.

It was book solid, and they said they couldn't get them on.

But through influence of Bishop Lawton, they got two on a BOAC flight.

Those that had to go, that was Clancy and Father Hughes. and they could get Marr and Dolan on a week later or some days later. So Bishop Lawton flew them up to Kano, and they had a little run of our mission up there, who saw one or two of the stations that we had, and then they flew out of Kano a couple days later. So they made it to Rome, all right. They were all there in Rome.

I stayed in Lagos about three weeks, then I flew north and met Monsignor in Kano.

As far as Dominicans went for the diocese, it was just the two of us. There was one Society of the African Mission Father, Father Gilroy, who was at GUSO at that time.

He stayed on for about six weeks. He was on a building project then, and I had taken over from him.

We finished the church then. The church was finished, and then I started on the two-story father's house.

When that was near completion, we received land about two miles away at the airport, and we started building the Sisters' Convent Maternity Hospital dispensary there.

So that filled up my first tour. I was sick the second year I was there, bad malaria and run down, and I came back home.

I think Vic Nadeu at that time had gone, was up there then.

I think Louis Shea probably was the next man to the north, and then Vic Nadeu came up after Vic was in, Louis Shea had taken Lawton's place, but he was made prefect apostolic. And then in October of 54, Natto and Pabbie McHatton had gone over to work at the parish in Yaba. After that, I traveled around a lot in the north from late 57 when I got back to Africa again.

I relieved Father Nadeu on the building. He was building his church and house in Sakato.

We finished that up. And then we received land in Yelwa.

for the hospital, Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital. And it was on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes that we received permission from the government. You leased this land. All land over there is leased. In the early days, it was 99 years. Now it's probably, it could be a lot less. At our time, it was 33 years. And I would say it's less than that right now. But it's even the farmer's land now.

Like at Yelwa, when we went at the hospital there, the emir would say, what land would you want?

Pick out some sites so they would be picked out. And if it was being farmed and the site was what the land you were going to get, they would just compensate the farmer and give him some other land, some other place, and chase him off.

You would have to pay compensation for each tree. a special compensation besides the land. And if it was like a place up around Mellon Fascia, you might have to pay for each piece of fruit that's on the tree, if it's a fruit tree.

0:23:45 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

So it's... That's amazing. What year did the sisters come over?

0:23:50 - Br. Thomas Martin, OP

Sisters came over in 56. 56, 56, yeah, late 56. Because they...

It was a tricky situation.

because of the thinking of the Muslims and our own thinking in that regard, in that we didn't want to be on the same compound as they were. And at that time, we only had the father's house built. So we gave them the father's house, and then...

0:24:34 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

How do you perceive the Brothers' vocation in the province, just very briefly, now, as it's evolved?

0:24:42 - Br. Thomas Martin, OP

As it has evolved now, we're a dying race, I think. As I see the Brotherhood as I came in, I don't—if I was coming in at the present time, I would have a little hesitation about the order right now.

Particularly, I was I came in as more or less on maintenance and that type of a work. And as it is now, we have not received or not had a brother come in in that type of work for a number of years. And I can perceive this as going to be a downfall for our larger houses.

Two things would bring, say, the house at River Forest down.

Lack of brothers and having to pay lay salaries and utilities, which are going to go sky high wherever we're going to be. Because right now, that's going to be very. But well, St. Pius would be, and probably Dominican Institute would be the same way. Now, a house like this could be taken care of easy enough, or it has been in the past, by a priest. Most of our houses, I suppose, there isn't that much buying in that. And you have one salary a cook, generally a cook cleaning.

But it's a little hard for me to see a brother entering and going into teaching, say.

I would say, well. There are communities of brothers, Christian brothers and other ones, that this is their vocation.

I'm sorry to see this go by the board, so to speak. I've talked it over with Paul and Arthur and Henry, and there's just no one entering.

0:26:56 - Fr. Cornelius Hahn, OP (Interviewer)

If you had one minute to talk to the whole province, what would you like to do?

0:27:10 - Br. Thomas Martin, OP

Well, for all of us to probably work harder, live a better life, maybe that would draw the vocations which we need. And the other would be our main aim of the order is preaching. And I can see that as, I think, failing badly. We have very few really good preachers. And there again, I was talking about that with someone the other night, that the preaching end of it, even 25 years ago or so, they had a preaching institute in Washington, I remember, and men going out and preaching it.

And this is the aim. We're the order of preachers. We ought to be tops, and we're not tops.