Fr. John Marr, OP History Interview

Transcript

Interviewer: Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP | Interviewee: Fr. John Marr, OP

Recorded June 27, 1982, River Forest, Chicago (as stated at the start of the recording)

Approximate running time: 68 minutes

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:00:00] Again, a bit of brief information is now exactly three oh four of a Sunday afternoon. We're speaking from River Forest in Chicago and it's June twenty seventh, nineteen eighty two, and I'm in the presence, the August presence of Father Marr John Marr. Listen down the line. We have to ask you about the bunny where that came from. We've asked three different times and no one knows but Father John Ma, who was the provincial of the Saint Albert's Province from what year is now, father?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:00:28] From nineteen fifty six to sixty.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:00:35] One sixty four so that would be for eight years. Eight years?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:00:38] Yeah, fifty six to sixty four.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:00:39] So they could write. That makes it right. Mathematics. He's the engineer, so we can check on that. So father, first of all, could you give us a little of the autobiographical data? Where were you born? Father, parents, family, bloodlines, that whole.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:00:51] Well, I was born in Cold Spring, New York, which is on the Hudson, about sixty miles north of New York City. My father name was John, was a precision engineer working for a company who made engines for steamers, for vessels. He used to make the models from which they made the engines. And, he had been born in New York City, as had been my mother. And they had been transferred up to this little town of Cold Spring. Where my older brother, one sister was older than I, who died when she was six months old. And myself and my older sister were born. And my younger sister, youngest sister was born in Newark. My father had been transferred down to Newark at that time. But the parent company.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:01:57] Your parents were both born in New York City, both American. But where did the Mars come from in Ireland now?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:02:02] Well, the Mars are Scottish.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:02:05] Ah, now, this is interesting. This I didn't know.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:02:08] The m a m e a g h e r is the Gaelic spelling. M a h e r. The Irish M a r r is the Scotch. M o h r is German. And God knows what the rest of them are.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:02:21] But were they Scotch, Irish or Scotch?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:02:23] Scotch, Scotch. And my paternal grandfather was Scotch, but my paternal grandmother was Irish.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:02:33] What was her family name?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:02:35] Her family name was O'Connor.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:02:37] So she had to be from Kerry.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:02:38] Southwest. My maternal grandparents, grandmother name was Duffy. And they had been in the country before the Revolutionary War. So at one time, I said that I would bet anybody in the room, that I was more American than anybody else. And somebody said, don't put too much money on it. My my grandparents were Indian, so they could have immigrant Indians.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:03:08] So then up in New York, you're you're the second from the bottom.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:03:15] No, my self and my brother, the two oldest brothers, the oldest and myself and my two sisters living all living now. Yes, two sisters in new Jersey. My brother in Florida.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:03:27] Now, where did you meet the Dominicans? Up and up in New York.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:03:29] Well, that's. No, no, I was going to say I grew up in new Jersey, in Irvington, new Jersey, and, went to I went to Seton Hall Prep and College for every year. And then quit and went to work for the Prudential Insurance Company in Newark. And, After about a year there or a year and a half, my boss, who was a mason, said to me, I think you ought to go back to college, and I think you ought to be a priest.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:04:10] Now that is that is amazing. Amaze me.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:04:13] Yes. So I gave it some thought. About three or four months and prayed about it and went to my pastor. And he tried to persuade me that I should be a diocesan priest. And I said, well, I didn't like that idea. I thought that the religious life would be better. I wasn't exactly sure what the religious life was, but so I said, well, I don't know much about him. But does the priest, giving a retreat, a Jesuit giving a retreat at the convent in Irvington, why don't you go and see him? So I did, and I talked it over with him, and he said, well, if I had it to do all over again, I'd be a Dominican. My goodness, this is so outside of God. I'm a Dominican because of a mason and a Jesuit. My goodness. Now that's a story in itself.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:05:08] What was what was the Jesuit father's name?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:05:09] I can't even remember that. But he told me where to go over Lexington Avenue in New York. So I went over and very foolishly on a Sunday afternoon at two thirty, expecting to see the provincial. Well, of course, now I realize that was a very bad time, but it was. Father Raymond Ma was the provincial at the time, and he did see me at that hour. Took my history, as it were, and said, well, we have a college at Providence, and the students for the Orient go there. So why don't you go up there? The semester. Second semester will be starting shortly. So go up for that.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:05:48] So now what year was that, father?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:05:50] That was in Eighteen twenty six.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:05:53] Twenty six. And you were how old? Twenty five, I guess. And how old were you at that time?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:05:59] I was twenty one.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:06:00] Twenty one.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:06:01] I remember that very distinctly, because my father didn't seem very enthused about the idea. And I wondered because he was a very good man, a member of the Holy Name Society, an usher in church, KFC member and one of the founders of one of the KFC councils and all of this. But my mother said, fine. And I said, well, to my father, I said, well, I'm twenty one, so I'll take a shot at it anyway. Try it for a year. Well, the result of that was I went to Providence, then to Kentucky, Saint Rose in Kentucky for the year, and I packed up once a month at the beginning of every month for eight months. I couldn't stand it any longer.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:06:51] That's an authentic vocation. Those are the true vocations.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:06:54] So finally, I decided if I lasted that long, I could last a year. I had said that I'd try a year, so I did. And from that time on, I really had no problems at all.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:07:06] Who was your novice master and how many novice classmates?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:07:10] Father Johansen the great.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:07:11] Oh the famous. Now he's the one. We're all told we have to get all kinds of stories about him. And how large a novitiate class did you have?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:07:17] Well, we started with forty two, I believe. And wound up with, thirty four. Came here. And then, we finally wound up at ordination with twenty four. Twenty four or twenty five. Some had been ordained earlier. Because of sickness. Four of them.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:07:44] And how many of them still alive then, father?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:07:46] There are. Six of us.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:07:50] Alive. Alive.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:07:52] I'm the only one in this province. The rest are in Eastern Province. But at my ordination, reception, my father was walking around my cock of the walk, you know. And so I said to him, well, for a man who didn't seem very enthused when I wanted to join the Dominicans years ago. You seem to be taking quite a great deal of pleasure in this. And being very much the cock of the walk. And he said to me, well, John, he said, to tell you the truth, the reason why I wasn't very enthused was I didn't think I was worthy to be a priest, to have a priest for a son.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:08:31] Well, you know, I mean, to find out how deep that goes there. And your parents? Your mother was alive.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:08:38] We were both alive. And my grandmother, my grandmother, my paternal grandmother.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:08:43] So you were ordained when and where?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:08:45] Nineteen thirty four. And at Saint Dominic's in Washington, and the parents were there and the grandmother was there. And the rest of the family, the family, including, one niece who was six weeks old at the time.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:09:04] And so your philosophy was here in River forest, your theology in Washington.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:09:10] One year in Saint Joe's and in Somerset because Washington was crowded and the other three years in Washington, two years in Washington, really? Because I was sent over to Rome and my young dad, year after resignation, right after the ordination, during those years of study here.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:09:32] Who were some of the professors that you most. Callahan, whom you interviewed yesterday? He was your he was professor of psychology. And you must remember Walker.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:09:46] What's his name?

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:09:47] Vernon Walker.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:09:48] Oh, yes. Oh, yes. He was the prior and taught metaphysics.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:09:55] Rudy Vollmer.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:09:57] That's just the name for me now. He's been dead some years now. I can't remember.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:10:05] And then when you got to Rome, who were some of the professors there?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:10:08] Garrigou-lagrange. And, Merkelbach.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:10:14] So those are big names?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:10:15] Yeah. And silly. Or, archaeology.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:10:24] He was still alive when I was there, I think in forty seven, some years later. Duncker four.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:10:28] Oh, yes.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:10:29] He's going to out live us all still.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:10:31] Yes.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:10:32] And still be very active. So what years were those in Rome then?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:10:37] I spent one year in Rome. Thirty four, thirty five. Got licentiate and electorate and then got sick. I had what they called in those days Roman fever, which was a slight form of malaria.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:10:53] AM I? So that was swampland that Rome was built on, right?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:10:57] I was right above the, what would you call it? It was a little garden in the back or the place where they washed the vegetables.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:11:10] I know that part of the building.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:11:11] And they'd have the water above that. So all the nets and all the bugs came up and flew up to the window.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:11:17] And the pappataci. Wasn't it the pappataci?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:11:20] Yeah, I cut that. Cut that the day I finished my lecture on licensure exam. This was another one I had.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:11:31] You know, I arrived back in Rome in sixty nine in time to attend his funeral.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:11:34] What was that?

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:11:35] He had died, I think, just about the day I arrived. And two days later we went to the funeral for as I attended afterwards, the funeral of Father Brown.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:11:41] Oh, yeah. Yes. Paul Brown was the rector magnificus at the time I was there. I didn't have in class, and the others I can't remember, but then I. I wrote to Steve and told him Steve McDermott was provincial at the time. Told him that I was sick, and that I. Doctor said I should get out of Rome. I was hoping I'd go back to the States, but he sent me up to Freiburg. Which meant that I had to put a year of residence in before I could go for the doctorate. So I spent two years there in Freiburg.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:12:15] Now, could I ask you, what did you write on for your thesis in the hands of Christian marriage?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:12:20] Oh, no. This is for the doctorate.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:12:22] The doctorate? So the electorate was.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:12:24] The electorate was, You know, I can't even remember what I wrote about because I couldn't develop it into a doctoral thesis thesis. I think it was something on the nature of imperfection or some such thing that Pete Lumbreras talked me into doing because he wanted to know what it was, and he wanted someone to do the work for him. But so then in Freiburg, it was the ends of marriage.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:12:49] So you were in moral theology under Benni Levo?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:12:52] Oh, yes. And there I had Horvath for dogma. Ramirez for moral goodness. There were some great names for church history.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:13:07] Was Marincola still there at that time?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:13:08] No, he had gone.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:13:10] But those are major names. Primer was still there.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:13:13] Certainly no primer was gone. And, Well, I didn't have any. I can't really remember who the other ones were. But it was a good, good school.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:13:30] So you had a one semester?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:13:31] I was the only Dominican at the university.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:13:34] I was going to ask, who were some of the other American Dominicans with you over there at that time?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:13:38] Nobody. It was never really that much. The Angelicum always inherited most of the Americans. See, my older brother got his doctorate degree from. From Freiburg. But I was working under Bohinski. That was.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:13:49] Well, I was many years later. I was there in Rome with Bohinski when he was. Matter of fact, I don't know whether this is relevant or not, but Bohinski was taking his doctoral exam the year I was there. And they flunked him.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:14:06] Now, this is this is something. Something. This is something for the archives. I never heard that one.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:14:10] The reason they flaunt them was because they thought he was too cocky.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:14:14] Well, I could understand that.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:14:15] But isn't that amazing? Yeah, but with all his brilliance. Then they gave him another exam, and he passed some of them.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:14:23] Of course.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:14:24] Major. Major scholar.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:14:26] Now, that's a marvelous story to come out. I'm sure no one's going to put that in his biography.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:14:32] He's still alive, I understand, or at least the last we heard. He's been flying his plane around the Alps at eighty five or something.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:14:37] And, probably at Eighty five feet above the Alps.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:14:41] Well, then. So you came back in, what, thirty seven?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:14:44] Thirty eight.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:14:44] Thirty seven.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:14:45] Thirty seven in the fall of thirty seven. I had finished my thesis in May, but one of the readers didn't finish reading it. So I couldn't get my exam in the spring. So I wait till the fall. And, by that time, the classes had started here. So I didn't get back until, let's see, Armistice Day. I remember I landed on Armistice Day by boat, of course. Pre-War days.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:15:19] You came back by boat, right?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:15:20] Oh, yes.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:15:21] Not by plane?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:15:21] No. As a matter of fact, I came back on an American ship. I wanted to come back on the Italian line, but I was afraid that the war would break out.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:15:31] I was going to ask next about that. You were right at the very beginning with the beginnings of it all. And they were very, very Touchy in Switzerland trying to keep their neutrality and yet trying to be prepared. Pessimistic, I would think.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:15:46] Yes. When I was there, only Catholics were allowed to be officers in the Swiss Army.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:15:56] Now, that's amazing because they were afraid of communism. Now, that is something else I never heard. Yes, because I always looked upon the Catholics as in a significantly minority type position in Switzerland.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:16:07] But they knew that they were reliable, reliable, and certainly contrary to like the FBI with us back here, if you're a good Roman Catholic, that's in itself enough to establish your integrity. And then at the same time, they mined every bridge. Both ends of every bridge. And had a guard down there.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:16:25] Yes, I heard.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:16:26] And every pass they said was. And they were ready to fall back.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:16:29] Fall back.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:16:29] And the whole country was really a citadel.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:16:31] It was. Those were momentous years. And so you were there during the whole Abyssinian type thing?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:16:38] Yeah. And the Spanish Civil War was just petering out towards the end. And this one was just beginning.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:16:47] So you came back sailing out of.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:16:51] Cherbourg.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:16:52] An American boat.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:16:53] Yeah.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:16:53] And how did the United States look to you when you got off that plane?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:16:57] When I got off after three years, the trouble was that black Jack Pershing was on board the ship, and it was Armistice Day, so we had to slow down the ship at noon so he could throw a wreath overboard. Oh, well, it took three hours to slow down the ship and three hours to speed up again.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:17:16] Speed again.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:17:17] So instead of arriving at two o'clock in the afternoon, we arrived at nine o'clock that night.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:17:23] And you people felt like throwing Pershing after his wreath overboard.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:17:28] So. And then they decided that somebody. When the pilot boat came out, They were afraid that one of the sailors had contracted some contagious disease, so they sent a physician out, and that held us up even more while they determined whether we'd quarantine the whole ship or not.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:17:49] And you were wondering if you'd ever see this time?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:17:50] You know, I'm half out of my mind wondering when am I going to get back into into business? So when I got back, they sent me out here to river forest.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:18:05] River forest.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:18:07] So I taught here for fifteen years.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:18:11] So that's from around thirty eight then to thirty seven to forty to fifty two.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:18:16] Fifty two. And last six years, of which I was prior here.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:18:21] So you really.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:18:22] And then went from that went from here to New Orleans as pastor and prior of Saint Anthony's.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:18:28] Oh yes, a marvelous parish. Marvis city. Marvelous.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:18:32] And in my second term I was elected provincial.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:18:35] So really, from fifty two on for the next twenty years about you were an administrative type.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:18:42] Well, for eighteen years in a row, I was in administration six years here, four years in New Orleans and eight years as provincial.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:18:50] Now, during your years of teaching here, was it, what were some of the courses basically in moral theology or.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:18:56] No, actually I taught, Tom Kane was regent when I came, and he decided that everybody had to teach philosophy before they could teach theology. Even though you had a degree in theology, you started teaching theology, our philosophy. So I taught apologetics, cosmology and as it was called in those days, metaphysics.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:19:26] So you were touching all the bases of philosophy.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:19:28] And, I believe one course in ethics. And then I graduated into theology.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:19:42] Now, this was the Renaissance man approach towards knowledge. Everything but engineering.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:19:48] Yeah.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:19:48] So what was a good experience?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:19:50] I mean, I still believe you'd have to have a good foundation in philosophy.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:19:53] I agreed all the way. We've kept that out in our way.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:19:56] And I think it's indispensable.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:19:58] We're getting back to it. May I tell you a little story about, by the way, he showed up in Europe when I was a Notre Dame student at the Angelicum in nineteen forty eight and nineteen forty nine, I got permission to spend three months in a little house behind the Bridgettine Sisters place in Lugano, Paradiso. At the last minute, Humbert said, can I go with you? He had just come out from Chicago. He didn't want to come back after one year.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:20:19] Oh, yeah.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:20:19] We spent three months together sharing the same room, double bed type little house by ourselves. And at the end of the three months, it was beautiful all the way through. But I ended up. I think I know him as well as any man, probably in this province. And it was a marvellous experience that time. And so when they mention his name here as a mythical name in this province, I can say, listen, fellas, how many of you have shared the same room for three months with him?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:20:44] That's right. So anybody who did so thirteen, fifteen years teaching here. And then then I went to New Orleans, as I said, and to Saint Pius as provincial.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:20:55] Now, during those years as provincial.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:20:57] Yeah.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:20:58] What years were they again now?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:20:59] Fifty six to fifty. Fifty six to sixty four.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:21:04] What were some of the major developments? Did you take over the missions during that time or.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:21:07] No. The well, the African missions have been taken over by Father Hughes, my predecessor. They were fairly well along. But we kept sending men, of course, building them up. But as soon as I arrived in Chicago as provincial, I got word from the Apostolic nuncio, papal nuncio in Bolivia, that he wanted to see me right away. Well, of course, I mean, he couldn't possibly get down to Bolivia in two weeks. So I kept pushing him off, pushing him off, and finally went down. In the meantime, his secretary, who was now Archbishop Marcinkus bodyguard of the Pope. He was the secretary for the nuncio in Bolivia. He had come to the States, so he stopped in to see me and he said, well, you may be wondering what you can do in a limited way. I would like to suggest that you take over our seminary major seminary, because it's not in very good shape, and we would like to have it put in good shape.

[00:22:22] So he said, when you see the nuncio, don't let him talk you into anything else. Try and get that. So I did. I talked to Denunzio. I took Gillis with me. He was. He was Regent of Studies, not Regent, but lector at Dubuque. So I took him with me on the basis that we were going into the seminary. So we talked to Dinunzio and he said, fine. Eventually, a wonderful man who loved to play poker.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:22:53] You're kidding.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:22:54] I'm not kidding.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:22:54] What was his name?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:22:55] Now I can't remember his name, but he was an Italian by extraction, but born in Buenos Aires. And, I've forgotten his name. He played an American type, aggressive, American type poker. He lost every game he ever played. And at that time, I remember one on one occasion when I was there. I think it was that first time. I'm sure it was. The Boliviano was selling at something like thirteen thousand to the dollar. So of course in a poker game, you know, you'd raise the guy five million, five thousand or ten thousand. And it would be something like monopoly, you know? Yeah, I remember I won, so many bolivianos that I had to stand up to deal over the paper money like that. All I won was seven dollars fifty cents, but it took a basketful to get these things out of the room. Anyway, we decided that we would go into the seminary training business, and fortunately we had two men studying in Spain at Salamanca.

[00:24:08] Father Burke and Father Muller. And one was in philosophy and one in theology and both getting their doctorates.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:24:16] Perfect timing.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:24:17] And we had another studying at the Angelicum Jordan Bishop. In canon law.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:24:23] Perfect.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:24:23] So we had a perfect faculty, all of whom knew Jordan Bishop was a man who knew, like the present Pope, could pick up languages with no problem at all. So he picked up Spanish in no time. So we had three Spanish speaking doctors to start this off. So that's the way we started.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:24:47] They themselves were quite prepared to do it and willing to take him a little by surprise, I would think. Did I expect it to come back here?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:24:55] But they were very willing. And one of them is still there.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:25:00] And one became the Bishop, didn't he? Is that the bishop?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:25:03] No. That's in Africa.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:25:05] Oh, that's the other one.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:25:06] That's the other one. So later on they changed from. The seminary to social work.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:25:17] Was one of the. Your father's been in charge of the seminary, too?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:25:21] Oh, yes. The father. Burke. Jim Burke.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:25:23] So he'd be the rector.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:25:25] He was the equivalent of the seminary.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:25:26] My goodness, that was the sudden responsibility thrust upon someone. Just a young man like that.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:25:32] But he was a solid citizen.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:25:34] So did you send other men down besides those three?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:25:37] Yes, we sent men. Later on, after they got. We sent. Let's see, Pete Houlihan. I can't remember exactly who we sent, but we sent Roach and, What's his name again? Both down there now in social work. But they gave up the seminary and went into social work.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:26:03] I see.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:26:04] On the basis that they would train, not do the social work themselves, but train the, lay leaders in social justice. So that was the beginning in part of that whole shift going on in Latin America.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:26:20] What was the reaction of your province to taking you on a second mission? Now, after you know, your major, major commitment to Africa?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:26:26] Well, nobody seemed to object. The manpower seemed to be there, and they were all willing to do it. They felt they had home missions and we had Africa. So if the need was in South America, well, then.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:26:40] But you're talking the province was set up in thirty eight, thirty nine, thirty nine. So you're talking within twenty years two major missionary fields. So there was enormous growth in the province during those twenty years.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:26:52] Yes. Mostly due to the fact that, throughout the Midwest, the Dominican sisters ran a great many high schools. And they would invite the vocational director in to talk to the students each year. So that was one of the primary sources of vocations.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:27:10] Now, this I had never heard either.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:27:12] So we had a very good growth.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:27:15] And then to the fact that you had a province in the Midwest was more of an incentive for people in the Midwest to join the Davidians rather than to go all the way to Washington.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:27:26] And they used to have to do.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:27:28] Because when we're talking the other day with Father Walker, he had mentioned at the time that the province was set up, that basically river forest, was it?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:27:36] Oh, it was everything. That was the whole province.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:27:39] And when you consider in the twenty years time or look back now, we're talking about, well, thirty nine and here we are forty years later. And when you take in the whole part of the southwest, that had to be one of the fastest growing parts of the Dominican Order, any place in the world. It's extraordinary. Forty years, an extraordinary forty years. Well, it was at that time, I mean, the several of the generals mentioned that, you know, this was an exemplary province for the rest of the order. See how they grew?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:28:06] Yes.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:28:07] Because they expanded, didn't stay in one place.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:28:12] I think one thing I can take a little bit of credit for anyway is expanding to the southwest. In my first term as provincial. We had many offers for high schools in the Chicago area and in Illinois in general, but I didn't want to have another high school this close. And I thought that we were too concentrated in Chicago. So I was in New Orleans on visitation when my secretary called and said, a priest from the Dallas diocese called and wants to see you. When can he come? And I said, well, I'll stop and see him on my way back. So I did. He was a pastor of Saint Pius Parish in Dallas, and he wanted to know whether we'd be interested in taking over a high school in Dallas. Well, I knew that they had just started the University of Dallas. The diocese had started. So I said, well, we would take the high school on the condition that we would be allowed to have a house on the university property.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:29:32] You're a poker player. You're no wonder you're beating the delegate down there. Shift your package and.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:29:39] Yeah. That's so. Well, he couldn't do anything about that. But, he got in touch with the director of education for the Arts for the diocese who came up to see me. Whose name, by the way, was ma m a h e r. That would soften it up to you. So he came up and saw me and wanted to know what he could do to foster the idea of our presence on the university campus. So he said, we'll give you a, I don't know, a hundred acres or something like that. My goodness, if you'll build a house. And I said, whereabouts on the campus? And he said, well, on the far end. And I said, how big is the campus? He said, eleven hundred acres. My goodness. I said, we don't want to be that far away from the center of things. So anyway, we began to dicker and we finally wound up by giving up the hundred acres or three hundred acres, whatever it was, and took three acres in the center of the center because I said, this is the Dominican ideal, is to have a house on a university that's right in the center of things where people can be influenced and we can influence them, and they can be influenced by coming to our priory.

[00:30:57] So we built the house on that three acres.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:31:00] And that was your first real major development in the Texas area then?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:31:03] Well, we had had a parish in Houston, but nothing of such substance as this.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:31:07] No. Nothing substantive. So psychologically, that must have been a major shift of attention.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:31:11] It was because another reason we wanted. We took The high school in Dallas was that many of the men had been many years at Fenwick, and they didn't want to do anything else but teach in high school. But they were, I thought, getting a little bit too comfortable and not doing as well as they might do in new surroundings.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:31:34] So another challenge.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:31:35] So another challenge, at least in different places. So we took the high school, which the diocese built and maintained, but we built the house on the I see university property. So that was ours.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:31:53] And again, out of that, because some of the other developments took place later in the southwest, was that kind of opening up other.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:32:00] It was, in a sense, it was the opening up of the southwest to.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:32:04] So in a certain sense, it really laid the foundation for the present southern province, in a way.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:32:09] Yeah. See, we had been thinking about Establishing a Vicariate in the South. And I examined that possibility by talking to all the provincials of the various orders in the South. And they said, this is not the time to do it, because we have to rely on the North for finances and for personnel. So if you want to do something, do it on a smaller scale, but don't start over. Carry it right away or a province. But we built the house on the university property in the hope that someday it would be the provincial headquarters for the southern province, which would be split off from ours, not the present southern province, which is part southern area eastern.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:32:57] Ah, yes. That's interesting. So the mine again, I say poker player as the ante goes up and the it was rather interesting that way. Well, good. Then what were some of the other things that transpired during those eight years. The years. Well, you had the, those were the years. The Vatican two, of course. And years of incredible change happening.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:33:21] Well, not so much during my time. It was mostly after I got out that the changes came after fifty fifty five to sixty four. Well, now, I was rather fortunate that I got out while things were still relatively calm.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:33:37] Now, then, about how many houses really were opened during your eight years? New houses. You mentioned Dallas. You mentioned the mission in Latin America.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:33:46] Yeah. Well, there were three houses in Bolivia. And what we did at that time was to. Put our men into teaching at various colleges and establish a house. I would take a college, for instance, on the basis that we would have ultimately have three men within a year or two.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:34:10] So a community I lead to have a community.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:34:12] Otherwise, no, we wouldn't touch it. So we had men at. Saint Catherine's and in Saint Paul and Saint Teresa in Winona. In, trying to think of the Dodge City of all places. Matt Dillon, Saint Mary of the Plains and Dodge City. We had men at Xavier College here, Rosary College, Loyola. DePaul.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:34:47] My goodness, old DePaul.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:34:49] We had been at DePaul for years. I taught there myself.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:34:52] We just walked by it today when we were in downtown. The first time I've seen it.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:34:56] Well, it was in bad streets in those days. It was there was right after the depression. And we were teaching. I taught down there for eight years until I was provincial hear our prayer here. We were teaching for two and a half dollars an hour.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:35:15] My goodness, if you can imagine that.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:35:18] Just about.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:35:19] Take care of the calf here.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:35:20] Just about. I remember the president coming from O'Malley saying to me one day, ask Pete O'Brien if you'd like to buy the place for a dollar. So I told Pete, and Pete said, tell him I wouldn't take it if he gave me a million dollars.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:35:35] Isn't that something? And now it is. Now it's.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:35:40] Very, very much better than it was in those days. But we had six or eight men down there that many.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:35:48] So that was a major commitment there.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:35:50] It was.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:35:51] And let's see, I think those years. Do we have Dubuque now. The building and the move. Was that during your time or just before your time?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:35:59] It was just before my time. I was during this time, but Dubuque was opened.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:36:05] What year then?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:36:06] It should be. It must have been about fifty sixty two, I guess sixty one or sixty two because I was in my second term as prior here when they opened it.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:36:19] I remember Father Carosella, who was out with us in Los Angeles going back.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:36:23] And that's I always it was during that fifty six to sixty one, sixty two period.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:36:27] It was, I think around sixty. Yeah, sixty one, sixty two.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:36:31] Yeah. It was in that period.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:36:32] And so that was a massive shift. Now tell me a little bit about River forest. Prior to that, river forest was so crowded with.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:36:37] Yes. We had the novitiate on the second floor of the south wing here, and the students were on the third floor. The young dads were on the third floor north, and we had a petition down the center of that corridor with the young dads on that side and the students on this side.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:36:59] Good old categories.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:37:00] Oh, yes. And they were all over in the north wing, outside of the top floor of the south wing.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:37:08] So how many altogether in the community?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:37:10] There were about one hundred and twenty.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:37:11] It must have been just bursting at the seams.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:37:13] It was. It was bursting at the seams. And that's why we had had to go to Dubuque.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:37:18] And then you had something like twenty two, twenty four out with us during that same period. Well, you were waiting for Dubuque to be to be built.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:37:26] To be built. Yeah.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:37:27] An incredible period.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:37:29] It was.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:37:30] So then, father, any other special developments or experiences during those eight years that you'd like to share? It must have been. I met you know, during that time. It was in fifty eight, right? We had the we walked by the hotel today, the Palmer Hotel. My mind was back because the big bank with nine hundred, the National third Order group.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:37:51] And yes, I had to leave that, as I remember, because two of our men died and were both being buried in the same day in Winona. So I had to go up for the funeral for a double funeral Johny Pitts, who was one of the original Dominicans from Poland, came here.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:38:15] Were you back on Sunday because we had the mass of the Holy Name Cathedral?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:38:19] Yes. And it was Cardinal, Cardinal Stritch. And it was about a month after that. He went to Rome a short time after and died before he could take over as head of the congregation of, what was it? It was, it was a major appointment of an American cardinal. I think it was the congregation for the. Selection of bishops, whatever they call it.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:38:43] It was a major one. Everyone was reflecting. And then he had died before he ever could.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:38:46] Yes, he lost an arm. Leo Kelly, one of our priests who's dead now, God rest him, said one time. That's the trouble with the Italians you offer. You have. Offer to give them a hand, and they take an arm.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:39:01] What were your. What were your relations with Cardinal Stritch. He seemed like a lovable person.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:39:05] He was a little lovable man. And we got along famously. One time, one of our men who was teaching at DePaul, was a mariologist of the First Order. In fact, he went overboard. He's no longer with us, but he had written a paper for DePaul for the students down there on Mary. And in the course of it, he more or less indicated that Mary was more responsible for the redemption than Christ was.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:39:43] So he loved his mother more than his father.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:39:45] That's right. So I was prior here at the time, and this priest was stationed at Saint Pius. So Sammy called me up and said, could I see you, father? He said, I have a problem and I'd like to talk over with you. I said, certainly remnants. I'll be down anytime you want. He said, well, how about tomorrow morning at ten o'clock? So I said, fine. So I went down and he said, I don't like to bring this up. He said, but it's a matter that I think you should know about. I don't want to bring it up to the provincial, he said, because I don't want to get the man in too much trouble. I want to go that high. So I think you could handle it. So he showed me the thing and he said, what do you think? And I said, well, it sounds kind of heretical to me. So he said, well, would you handle the matter? And I said, fine, I'll take care of it. Which I did.

[00:40:42] Actually, I was the vicar provincial because Pete was over in Rome. I had a chapter. So in fact, he did hit the top with that. He did without knowing it. But he was a very lovable man. But I could never stay awake while he talked. As soon as he'd start talking, I'd fall asleep. So one time I think it was when Cardinal Tien, the SVD, was visiting at Techny out here, and Pete said to me, I was praying he was provincial, and he said, let's go out together for this. And I said, fine. So we went out and I could see that he was going to be in the row behind me. So I turned to him and I said, if I fall asleep and I surely will, when Sammy starts talking, poke me. Well, in the middle of the thing, I wake up and everybody's laughing. And I thought to myself, oh, what did I do? Did I yell out? Did I, what did I do? So I put my head down like this, you know.

[00:41:47] Afterwards I said to people, why didn't you wake me? He said, I didn't know you were asleep. I said, what was everybody laughing about? He said, the guy next to you fell out in the aisle.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:42:02] So much for the living, vital voice of the church.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:42:04] Putting everyone to a wonderful man. But that was one of his rather sing songs.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:42:09] Not as strong.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:42:10] No. Very humble man. I remember one time I was deacon of Honor at some graduation or confirmation or something. And he gave a talk, and he came back and he leaned over and said to me, how was it? And I said, fine.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:42:26] Oh, I'm glad he said it. Well that's good. We need more of that. I'll tell you. Well, listen. During those years you've been in the diocese for about thirty, forty years now. So the Dominicans really must be a major presence.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:42:40] Yes. Those students, mostly due to helping priests. Mostly due to family.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:42:45] I think that has had a great influence on the Chicago Dominican. Presence in Chicago.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:42:55] People got to know Dominicans and then the. We always went out for Sunday help and daily help to. Between Fenwick and this house. We send out sometimes on Saturday everybody. From this house and from Fenwick would be out on the job, so half the Chicago diocese was being serviced by the Dominicans. There was one parish that was practically a diocese in itself. Saint Mills and an Upper Lower church. And we would send down ten men would send down ten or fifteen minutes every half hour, up and down weddings and funerals and regular masses.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:43:40] So I was discussing with my brother in law earlier today the extraordinary character of the diocese here. It is, isn't it, the largest Catholic diocese, not only in the United States, in the United States.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:43:51] It used to be in the world, but now it is in the United States.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:43:55] Now, what percentage of the people are Roman Catholics?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:43:58] I would guess over fifty percent. I'm not sure that's at all. I mean, I'm not up on the figures now, but it is a very, very Catholic diocese. When we first came to River forest here as students, that was in nineteen twenty eight. This was a very anti-Catholic section of River Forest and Oak Park. So that we'd be walking around the grounds and young kids would be driving by in cars or on bikes and be yelling mackerel, snappers and such. Now River forest is, I would say sixty five percent or seventy percent Catholic. And Oak Park is quite Catholic now too.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:44:50] Well, now, when you came here to get back into that history, did the order purchased this land? What was the genesis of the.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:44:59] Reymond Ma purchased eighty acres. This forty that we're on, and the next forty acres north of here. And then sold forty acres several years later to get the money to build this place.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:45:14] He was wise, very wise investment. That was Rosary College already there.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:45:19] Rosary College was already there and Trinity was just beginning. Trinity High School.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:45:27] So you really felt you're moving into a there were there were roots in the area already for the Dominican presence.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:45:33] And then in nineteen thirty one, I guess Fenwick no. Twenty nine. Fenwick was.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:45:41] That was a great year to open a school, wasn't it?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:45:43] Yeah.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:45:43] So then, father, any anything else of those eight year periods?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:45:47] There must have been so many things happening, of course, but just if anything, pops, there's so many things happened that I have really made up my mind that I'd forget most of them if I possibly could. Not that they were all bad, sure, but that.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:46:00] Did you keep a journal or any kind of diary for the archivist?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:46:04] No.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:46:04] It's a shame to let that history slip away.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:46:09] I mean, I'm sorry I didn't, in a way, but at the time, you know, you're rather busy. And sure you don't think of those things.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:46:20] Well, now, when you when you're finally freed of that responsibility, was it back to teaching or what?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:46:26] No. I went to, Saint Vincent Paris to live. And I was. Appointed regional director for the Saint Thomas Aquinas Foundation, collecting money.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:46:41] So I remember that. And that's been going on since then.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:46:45] Yes. That's still going.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:46:46] Probably the more most important significant American Dominican effort in the line of serious, in-depth scholarship cooperation. That was important.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:46:55] Yeah. So I spent the next four or five years just traveling around the country, the Midwest, visiting bishops, presidents of colleges, and so forth. And, of course, I had a very good entry to the bishops because I knew most of them having been provincial for so many years. And one of the interesting features was that they had just come back from Vatican two and were amazed at what happened to their dioceses in the meantime. Because they'd been away for practically two years. And all sorts of things had happened that they knew nothing about. And they didn't want to talk to people of their own diocese. So I was a willing subject, provided they would give me a little money. I would spend time listening to their woes.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:47:48] So mutually beneficial relationship.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:47:50] Yes. But I enjoyed that part of it. I mean, meeting all these bishops again and they'd say, well, why don't you stay overnight, you know?

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:48:00] So they really wanted they really wanted to talk it out and find out what was happening all around.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:48:05] And of course, I had been around and they knew that. So they'd say, well, you know, how's what's happening in Saint Paul? What's happening in Chicago? What's happening in Rockford?

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:48:16] They had to be really wrestling to discover what way to go.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:48:18] That's right. They were completely flabbergasted.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:48:21] Well, this whole last twenty years has been an incredible.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:48:24] And that was the very beginning of it. Yes. So that was a very interesting experience. And then when that five year period ended, I was helping out. I was in the parish at Saint Vincent's and then moved over to Fenwick and then moved here.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:48:42] Any teaching at all going on since then?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:48:45] No.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:48:45] Basically administrative out of teaching for.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:48:49] Well, twenty years practically at that time. You know, I'd been out of teaching for twelve years after I.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:48:56] I forgot to ask you, what year were you born in now?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:48:59] I was trying to. Nineteen oh six nineteen oh six.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:49:01] So you're talking about seventy six, seventy six in August. And like Ronald Reagan, you don't use Grecian formula either. And I can't see a gray hair there. You certainly have a few there coming out from underneath. You don't look seventy six and that's not being said.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:49:16] That's how good my father was rather young looking, too.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:49:20] How long did your parents survive?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:49:22] Well, my father lived to be seventy seven, and my mother lived to be eighty four.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:49:29] So she outlasted your dad?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:49:31] Yeah, by ten years. She was younger than he was. Yeah, and she was in fairly good health to the end.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:49:35] Yes, up until the last year or so. And you mentioned that the brothers and sisters are still alive.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:49:40] Yes. I have two sisters in new Jersey. One is seventy four and the other will be seventy two in October and my brother is will be seventy nine in September. Solid, solid lifelines except for the one little child and I.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:49:58] I'm sure in the old days that six month old mortality, infant mortality was so common.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:50:02] I think if they had been in a big city, she probably probably could have saved her. I don't really know what it was. I never wanted to ask my mother too much about it because she felt it was.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:50:14] I guess those would go deep. Those were good. Listen. Now, when you look back over the years, who are some of the. The men that you most remember? Dominicans, American, not American, who really stood for something very special in your mind. You've met so many.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:50:28] Yeah.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:50:29] That's true.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:50:31] Well, one I remember very distinctly as having a great influence was Father Callahan.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:50:37] Ah, that's nice to hear.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:50:39] He was a prior here in my time, also a professor. And then I lived with him when I was prior. He was a professor here, very intelligent, capable and loving me. And really.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:50:59] Well, see, you know, he was four years with us as provincial and everyone out in the West always remembers for kindly.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:51:08] That's right.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:51:09] Compassionate years. And so he left a very nice. Plus, I didn't realize until I was talking to him the other day that it was under his regime that the Saint Jude shrine began out in Saint Dominic's in San Francisco. And that is still flourishing. And that is the prime support to the school. If that Saint Jude shrine did not exist, the school wouldn't exist right now. So delighted me to say to him the other day that certainly one of your most lasting contributions of major, major proportions to our province was he sent back Bill Lewis, to check out your shrine in Detroit, and he came back with the whole idea. And so.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:51:46] But I had not connected that with Father Callahan.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:51:50] So that was that really was a major contribution in four years time.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:51:55] Well, among the men I lived with, I mean, probably Joe Reardon wouldn't be one of the more or less a contemporary, Jim Mclarney from the Eastern Province who was here when I first came here, who preached at my first mass, by the way.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:52:14] Oh that's nice.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:52:15] And helped me out considerably when I first came. Father McIntyre was pastor of Saint Vincent's. And of course, in those days, the youngest man got the late masses. So for something like fifteen weeks in a row, I got the eleven and twelve at Saint Vincent's.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:52:36] When you couldn't drink a glass of water.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:52:37] When the fast and everything still held. So He introduced me every Sunday as this young priest who just came back from abroad, and he doesn't know anything. So after about six or eight weeks, I said to him, now, father, I'm very much convinced that everybody in the parish knows that I'm a moron. So would you please not introduce me any more? He was a real character. He said to me one time when I was going over there, what are you going to preach about? It's a forty hours starting tomorrow. And I said, well, preach on the indulgences of forty hours. What are you going to say? So I very naively told him everything I was going to say. Next morning he gets up. He was exactly everything I told him. You heard your sermon, I heard it. So I got up. Then he said, now, father, I will preach. So I got up and I said, after that masterful exposition of the indulgences of the forty hours.

[00:53:42] There is nothing more I can add. And turned around and said. He didn't like that very much. But what else could you do?

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:53:53] And who are some of the others now?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:53:55] Doc Shea, for instance.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:53:57] Now, his is the name we had here out West.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:53:59] He was a character. I had had him as a professor of homiletics when I was here as a student. And then he was a professor of homiletics when I was prior here. And he was a Southerner through and through from Memphis, Tennessee. And he. Loved Memphis, so much so that he had taught one one semester at DePaul, taught logic, and I was to follow him teaching psychology to the same class. So when I walked in the first day, I said, well, as you probably remember from what Father Shea taught you. And some kid puts up his hand and says, father, if you want to know anything about Memphis, you can ask us. But don't ask us anything about logic. Another. This is in no particular order. Peewee McManus. Justin McManus, who was my prior in Washington. Ramirez. In Freeburg.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:55:21] Quite a man. Personality wise. Personality wise.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:55:25] Certainly a great mind to crack jokes in Latin.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:55:28] Now, that's a test of your of your classical training.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:55:34] And Benny Lavoe, probably of all of them. I remember Benny the best because he was a prayer. He was a superior at Freiburg at Saint Hyacinthe when I was there. And of course there were very few of us at any time. One semester I was the only student in the house and there were two lay brothers, Perry Jack, who was a fribourgeois, who was the procurator and a missionary, and Benny and myself. Then we had the next semester we had an Austrian and two more Swiss. But Benny was a wonderful man. He was director of my thesis. And a very kindly man. I mean, he. But he didn't know much about the constitutions. So he could pull the wool over his eyes without any trouble.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:56:33] The best kind of superiors.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:56:34] He said to me one time, the first Christmas I was there, Julie McKenna from Eastern Province was at Oxford, and he was coming over and we were going skiing with Gus, skiing in general. Later on, he was teaching canon law at Freiburg. At the time we were going up skiing in Davos, Switzerland. So I said to Benny, I'll be leaving tomorrow to go skiing. He said, well, you can't. This is a house of the master general and you have to have his permission to leave. And I said, well, I'm not assigned to this house. And he said, you're not. And I said, no, I'm assigned to my province. I got permission of my provincial. And he also sent money for me to go away. And he said, fine. In that case, yes. He actually was a member of the House.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:57:29] But they are the best kind. What about Father Johansen? You know, this is probably the most fabled personality in the history of the Americans.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:57:37] I think most of the stories that are told about him, he actually made up or allowed to be made up. I don't think it was as simple as they made him out to be. Although he was a very simple man, he was the Israelite in whom there was no guile really. But some of the things that happened, I mean, are so fantastic. I remember, for instance, we had a ball team and we were not allowed to play anybody off the ground. We had to play on our own ball field so we could only get teams that came in. Well, Bob Quinn of the Eastern Province, father was manager of the Red Sox, so we used to get their uniforms the year previous uniforms. So we were the Red Sox of Springfield, Kentucky. So Penny rates, a classmate of mine who is now up at Dominican sister there as chaplain. He was the captain of the ball team. So he went and said, father, we need a pair of shin guards for the catcher and we need sliding pads to go with the uniforms.

[00:58:50] He was one of those brown handsome bats and balls. So he said, well, how many shin guards do you need? And he said, well, we only need one. He said, if one gets shin guards, everybody gets shin guards. There'll be no discrimination on this ball team. Then he said, I don't understand why you need a half a dozen or a dozen balls. Why don't you buy one good one? Well, of course, Laszlo was a Cartwright Creek. Anybody hit a homer? That was the end of the ball. That was it.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[00:59:22] So they tell me he had a brother in the order who was. They said very proper.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[00:59:28] Oh, yes, very, very proper. On Thanksgiving day In a year I had done something. I don't know what it was, but. Myself and somebody else had done something that displeased Johansen. So he said, well, you're you're confined to the Priory for the rest of the day. And his brother was there for Thanksgiving Day. And I'm standing up in the window looking out. Everybody else was out playing ball and so forth, and he said, what happened to you? What's the matter? He was sick. And I said, no, your brother is. He said, what do you mean? I said, well, he put us in the house. We can't get out on Thanksgiving Day just because we did some silly little thing. So we went to his brother and talked to him and he let us out. But I had one time he sent us out. He had borrowed a rock crusher from the county, and he wanted to put a road in around the Priory, a crushed stone.

[01:00:31] So he sent us out to Cartwright Creek to pick up the rocks, which would be put in this rock crusher, and that would make the road. So we went over. The night before there had been very bad rainstorm and windstorm, and a lot of the trees had blown over and their roots were hanging over the creek. So we were going up the creek and I found a spot that looked good for swimming. Deep enough. So I was climbing up over the roots of this tree, and it broke. And I grabbed a hold of two of the roots and pulled all the tendons in both hands. Well, I didn't know what to say. I put it off as long as I could, and just before I went into his room and had the habit on like this, and I had my hands in that habit, and Nick, sir, who was the infirmarian, had bandaged the hands. So I said, well, you know, father, today I was going to tell them the truth today when we were out picking up the rocks at Cartwright Creek.

[01:01:35] I said I hurt my hand. Oh, brother. Oh, brother. Please. Are they broken? I said, no, no, they're not broken. Well, everybody was standing out in the corridor waiting to see what he would say. When I told him that I did this on the way to swimming. Swimming? Well, I knew I'd get murdered if I told him the truth at this time. And he wouldn't let me talk anyway. So right away I had to get down to the doctors. He said, take off your habit. No, don't take off your habits. Have somebody take it off. He looks me in the car. He takes me down to the doctor, and the doctor bandaged him up again and put some stuff on, and he put Brendan Sullivan in the same room with me to help me to dress and oh.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:02:20] More attention than you'd want.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:02:21] But yeah, I couldn't couldn't tell him that.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:02:25] Did you ever later, years later, tell him. Do you know what really happened?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:02:29] Later on, when I when he was here and I was here, he came on a visit here when I was a priest. But at that time he said, I'll never send anybody out to pick up any more rocks. Well, of course, with all these guys standing out in the corridor cheering, how could I say it was my fault? So anyway that was one experience.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:02:50] You were the hero of the class for a short time.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:02:52] Another time. Of course you probably heard this one about Tommy Chang, the Chinese. No kid. They sent him to Saint Joseph's. Had the Chinese missions at the time. So they sent Tommy Chang over to study here, and Tommy was down in novitiate. And Johansen had a habit of saying, if you don't like it, take the next bus home. So he said to Tommy Chang, if you don't like it here, take the next bus home. And he says to China. And he was a real character.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:03:24] Then one last thing. What about the sisters? What are some of the Dominican sisters that you.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:03:28] Yeah, we had the sisters from Saint Mary of the Springs cooking for us here at Sister Hedwig, who was the. Did the laundry. They did the mending. Deaf as a. Haddock had a hearing aid, which turned it off if she didn't want to hear you. And, there was another one in the laundry who did the laundry? What was her name? I can't remember. And then we had three in the kitchen cooking. So there were six altogether. Well, the other one was a housekeeper, I guess, over there. They lived in this little house on the other side of the street there. But they were a wonderful group. And they did all the cooking, all the laundry and the mending. And the enormous example. See, we still have the sisters with us and they're working away and praying. Does more to keep the quality of life on a high level with us than anything else I could. Well, when I was prior, one of the.

[01:04:32] They had a new mother general. The other one had been in for years. I knew about the general, and she decided that she couldn't afford to let the sisters here any longer. So I got busy and went up to Racine and had them send some sisters down here. They took over for quite a while. I guess they were here until the Dubuque move. Then when they wanted to redo this building, they moved all the students to Dubuque. And this was empty for a while. So then the sisters left. So when we moved back from Fenwick, we didn't have any sisters here at all.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:05:09] So now you have. So now we have lay help?

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:05:11] Yeah. Does President Cook was the assistant cook at Fenwick? Oh. So when we moved over here, she came over. The other one retired. She was sixty five when getting Social Security. So she retired and this one took over. And it's been a marvel ever since with great women around.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:05:34] Now what? This will really let you go. But, father, you mentioned, you know, years ago, thinking about the vocation.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:05:39] Yeah.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:05:39] Now, you look back how many years? Twenty five you're talking about.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:05:42] I'll be forty eight years or I was forty eight years ordained in on June fourteenth.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:05:47] So how do you kind of sum it up in terms of had you any idea when you entered? Just what those years would mean and.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:05:56] No, actually I didn't. I had very I knew no Dominicans whatsoever until I went to Guzman, to Providence. I don't think I've ever met a Dominican that I disliked. And some I didn't agree with.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:06:11] Naturally.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:06:12] I mean, of course. And many, I'm sure, disagree with many of my decisions as provincial. But I can't say that I ever met one whom I really disliked. I've always found something good about him, and particularly, I think. The openness and the camaraderie that the Brotherhood, which is powerful. Very powerful, I think.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:06:42] We're talking.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:06:42] Never regretted a moment of my Dominican life.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:06:46] We're talking to Father Burke yesterday, ninety four years of age. And it was my nephew who said to him, you know, what would you say to a young man who was thinking about being a Dominican? And in substance, what Father Burke said? Well, at least one aspect of the life he loved is that you could be what you really what God created you to be.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:07:03] That's right.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:07:04] If you wanted to study, the order would allow. If you wanted the. And it was a very beautiful, simple little statement about letting grace build upon the nature that God gave us in the first place.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:07:14] But it is an incredible brotherhood.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:07:19] Another thing I like about it, too, two of them. You say you can do almost anything you like. It's an article in the Saturday Evening Post years ago entitled The Free Wheeling Dominicans. I don't know whether you remember that.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:07:31] Yes, because we all. He did a very good job on that aspect of it. That there are so many things you can do as a Dominican that nobody can say, I can't do my own thing.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:07:43] But it's marvelous to hear a ninety four year old say that.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:07:45] That's right.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:07:46] Well, listen to father. Thank you very, very much. And thank you. This really has another further dimension to our little project. A little bit more precise. This is marvelous.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:07:57] My recollections.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:07:58] This is exactly what we're looking for. And I'm just hoping fifty years from now, someone pulls this out. It'll be used before then. But the beauty is, fifty years from now, it won't be just Father Ma provincial.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:08:09] Yeah.

Fr. Antoninus Wall, OP (Interviewer)

[01:08:10] Fifty six, sixty. It'll be someone saying there's a. There. There he is. That's the way he looked.

Fr. John Marr, OP

[01:08:16] Yeah.