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University of South Florida – Special Collections
Oral History Program
50th Anniversary Collection

Interviewee: John Iorio
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MG: This is Mark Greenberg, the Director of the Florida Studies Center in Special Collections at the University of South Florida Libraries. And today is March 12, 2004. I have the pleasure of being with Dr. John Iorio who was a long time professor here. And we are speaking as part of the project to commemorate 50 years of USF History.

Dr. Iorio, thank you for coming in this morning. I appreciate you being here.

Jl: I'm glad to be here.

MG: I usually start the interviews by asking for a little bit of biographical information. Can you tell me where you were born and grew up?

Jl: I was born, according to the best evidence [laughs], about 10 [to] 15 miles north of Naples, [Italy] in a small village in 1925. And I was brought to this country by my father and mother in 1927. I was really born an American citizen because I was included in my father's papers. I was born there; I was born an American citizen. Which means I can still be president. [Laughs] I may have a chance at it!

MG: What precipitated your family's departure from Naples and coming to...?

Jl: There are conflicting stories. The one I like best is that my father refused to honor the portrait of Mussolini. As it came down the street, he was supposed to hang out a lantern. He refused to do this, and the next day the Blackshirts came in and gave him Castor Oil and he was a very tempestuous fellow. And before he got into trouble his relatives told him to go back to America. He had been here three times before, and they told him to go back. And that precipitated.... That's the story I like best. But different family members differ on the reasons.

MG: Was he married at the time that this was going on? Had he met your mother?

Jl: Yes, he was married, that's right. He was married. He had served in the Italian Army for six years in the whole of World War I. Making a trip over there wasn't a good thing

for him. He went at the wrong time, and they grabbed him into the army. He had come to this country in 1901 or 1904.

MG: Where did they settle in the United States?

JJ: They came to Trenton, New Jersey. That's a large Italian community. And that's where he first settled. There were relatives there and so that's—again, to the best of my knowledge, that's where he settled. Because I grew up there.

MG: What did he do to make a living?

JJ: Initially he was in a grocery business. That's what he wanted to establish. He sold his portion of the business and then he became a factory worker. The Depression hit and we had—he had eight children, and so it's not easy to care for eight children during the Depression. And not knowing the language as well.

MG: Now where do you fit in, in that group of eight?

JJ: I was number two. My sister is first, an older sister who is ten years older. And so I'm the first boy.

MG: Did your mom work outside the home as well?

JJ: No, no. No, she had enough to care for eight children [laughs]! Just to make the meals was a challenge!

MG: How were you educated? Did you go to public school? Private school?

JJ: Public schools from the very beginning. I didn't know English and so—but I was thrown into the public schools. And we did the best we could. And I think the public school system was fantastic. We had a fantastic system. The teachers were great, they turned me around a number of times, and all the way through high school they were just marvelous. I think there's been a degeneration in the school system since then, but that's another matter. But when I went through they were—they were great. It was, you know, the public school system. [It] turned all these immigrants into Americans, essentially, you know.

MG: When you were in high school, was going to college something that was a foregone conclusion for you?

JJ: No. Not at all because my family would not have been able to afford it. I think the important element is the GI Bill. That was absolutely decisive—not only in my life, probably in the lives of millions. [The GI Bill] made it affordable to go to any college I wanted to go to.

MG: Now, I know you did serve in the military in the Second World War.

JJ: I was in the military, yes.

MG - Where did that fall in your life? Was it after high school and before college?

JJ: Actually, I was restless. I quit high school, went into the military, I was 17. And I ended up in the paratroopers. And I served—it's a long story. Which is not germane to what we're going to do here. But I ended up with the paratroopers in York throughout the whole Battle of the Bulge. And we jumped across the Rhine.

MG: Were you involved in D-Day at all?

JJ: No.

MG: Or post D-Day?

JJ: I missed—I missed that. I—gladly, I missed that!

MG: You needed to finish high school then? Following the Second World War?

JJ: Then I came back, and finished high school, and taking something like eight or nine courses. And then went on to Columbia.

MG: Why Columbia?

JJ: I took a tour, I remember of colleges. I went to Rutgers, I went to Princeton, I went to Columbia. What I liked about Columbia is that as I walked around, people were talking. They were—a great deal of animation on campus. And one group was talking about Arabic culture. Another group was talking about Shakespeare and the playwrights around Shakespeare. And this one person was talking about [Thomas] Dekker, and [Francis] Beaumont, and [John] Fletcher and so forth. And I said, *my gosh, how do they know so much?* You know? And others were talking about current politics in New York City. I said, *this is the place I want to come to.* It was alive with all kinds—fermenting with ideas. And I found it to be true once I got there.

MG: What did you want to study? When you started what were your goals or ideas?

JJ: English and philosophy and I stayed with that.

MG: Why those two subjects?

JJ: These are the—I think when you came, well mine... Not all of them, but when I came back from the war, for me it was a crisis—spiritual and otherwise—of all kinds of things. I was trying to look for answers. I thought the books would have the answers. I had had enough of experience. And now I'm searching in philosophy particularly, for answers to

many questions that I had. It was natural, and I enjoyed it. And literature was another place where I was looking for these kind of answers. I never found them.

MG: Were there specific—without spending hours on your World War II experiences—were there specific incidents or events during your war years that really caused you to have these yearnings or needs?

JJ: Oh yes. The death of many of my French people who would pray, and were very, very reverent and so forth—within the hour, part of their heads were off. And other things like watching refugees, which is always a moving thing. At midnight, children, men, women, moving out during the bombardment not knowing where they're going. This is a very moving experience. There's hundreds of experiences like this. The freeing of camps—people had been held in prison by the Germans. And you begin to wonder, you know, what's this all about? Why do civilizations like this, and people like this, do this? So I think that experience always stays with you. It never leaves you, and you always ask the same questions. And you come up with the same answers.

MG: What kind of Philosophy? What kind of English were you studying?

JJ: At Columbia, you had to—if you were an English major, you had to take a survey course, which lasted three years. Not a one year, but a three year survey course. And then you took specialized courses as well. And at the same time, I was taking philosophy courses. I was a philosophy—I didn't know whether I'd go to philosophy or literature. And so I took a lot of the famous people there, like Randall and Irwin Edmund, people of this kind were famous philosophers at the time. There was—they had two great departments. English and Philosophy, they were great.

MG: And you stayed on to do a Master's degree?

JJ: Yes. I stayed on to do a Master's degree.

MG: Why?

JJ: I felt comfortable at Columbia, and there were professors there that I hadn't had yet. And I looked over the list and said, *I might as well stay here than not*. And then for doctorate work, I went away to Minnesota. Switched to American Studies. Then personal things happened, and I had to retreat to the University of Pennsylvania, where then I had the decision to write a novel or the Ph.D. dissertation. And I wrote the novel instead, and that was the end of it.

MG: Why?

JJ: Because I always wanted to write. And I said, *I'll take my chance with the novel. I think if I write a dissertation, it's going to destroy my ability to write fiction to some extent, just the way newspaper work did it*. I worked for two years on a newspaper and I was advancing fairly rapidly. The only trouble was I couldn't—I couldn't write fiction. As

soon as I began writing fiction it sounded like a news story. And fiction is a lot different from a news story. So the same thing was happening with scholarly writing. It took away from the fiction, and I was always protecting my fiction activity in some way.

MG: Why an interest to write fiction? I mean you started off you know, working towards a Ph.D., and then came off to do fiction.

JJ: Because I was always interested in making up stories, a fantasy world in a sense. And also because I thought literature mattered. It would impact—it would be a way—in fact that probably determined my decision more or less to become an English professor rather than Philosophy because I felt—Philosophy doesn't have that kind of an impact, it's not that widespread. But a novel is widespread. It has an impact. And I was interested because I thought literature made things happen. Well, I still do.

MG: Tell me about the novel.

JJ: The novel got nowhere. It was called *The Heretic*. And it had, the last one-third takes place in an insane asylum in which all kinds of strange things happen. Later, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* came out. I was going to revise mine, I said, *no, no it's too late for that; they'll say it came from that*. So I still have it. Then I went on to write a few more failures. Meanwhile I was publishing short stories. And I published quite a number of short stories.

MG: Were there particular themes or issues that bring the short stories together as a group?

JJ: Sometimes some of them. Stylistically, they break up. One is a kind of magical realism area. And the other is a comic area. I like satire and comedy. And they're totally different. Entirely—you wouldn't think it was the same writer. So they split evenly. In fact right now, I'm just about finished with a political novel that is satirical in a manner of Voltaire, let's say, *Candide*. And I think it's a very funny work. On the other hand I'm also working on another novel which is simply called—tentatively called—*The War*. But you never know which war it is. It's just war.

And then I entertain other works that I would like to write—one on the Renaissance, in the time of Lorenzo de Medici, with the dark forces there of Savonarola and so on. They're always present in society. And that will take some research as well. But all along I've been researching anyway. So I'll—I'm really more busy now than I've ever been in terms of writing. Sure.

MG: Where were you in 1962 or 1963 that brought you to USF? How did you hear about the university? What were you doing at the time? How were you contacted?

JJ: I was teaching at Colby College in Maine, in the middle of Maine. And Colby College was a wonderful institution, I had good friends. I just didn't like the area, and I could not stand the winters. I could not imagine myself there, the rest of my life in this kind of—

what I considered a winter hell. Most people like it. They go skiing and so forth! I don't like it. And I happened to visit Miami, on free tickets from my in-laws. And I found that—I said, *this is a wonderful place! It's warm in the winter!* And the university was building up, [and] I took a trip here. I would have been here in '61, but I was on sabbatical, and the terms of the sabbatical included one term that I had to go back for a year. And I did that. And then came back here in '63.

MG: Now I mean I notice you were at Dickinson, you were at Vassar...

JJ: Yes.

MG: ...before Colby.

JJ: Yes.

MG: What were you teaching at those schools? Were they different types of assignments that you had?

JJ: Yes. Well, similar. At Dickinson it was my first teaching job. I was filling in for a professor who was on sabbatical. When he came back, I was out. Although two years later I was offered a permanent job there and I turned it down. I don't know—I think I had made a mistake there.

At Vassar, I was a Ford Intern. The Ford people were paying me. They chose a number of young teachers and put them at places like Vassar. And I worked really closely with the department Chairman. It was a marvelous place. And again, I might have gone back there but I didn't want to.

MG: Was, now—at this point, when you're at Dickinson, Vassar and Colby, have you made the decision to pursue creative writing as opposed to the dissertation?

JJ: Oh yes. I think that decision was made before I even entered college. I had written stories while in the army. And, and so I was always interested in fiction.

MG: When was your first trip to the USF campus? Did you come here in '61?

JJ: In '61 I visited. And all you had was the administration building and a couple of other buildings. And there was an air about it. I said, *it's something new, it's interesting, it's small...* At least for a while it would be small. And I liked it. I liked it immediately. I said, *this is a new campus. The architecture is new, I like the...* what they had showing here. And I didn't meet anybody. But my first impression was that it was a good one. Unfortunately my impression of Tampa was not as good. I said, *it's a small, sleepy town.* The skyline was totally different from what it is now of course. The only thing you had was the Florida Hotel [laughs] and nothing else. And I couldn't find a motel! I went up and down these roads, and I was exasperated. And I said, *where do they have motels here?* And I'm going down Nebraska and I'm going everywhere—I said, *where's the*

center of this place? It was to me, amorphous, and I had my doubts about coming here because I said, *Tampa doesn't seem to be a very good town*. Of course I hadn't hit the center of it, you know. And the corporate center—I hadn't hit that at all. Maybe I would have been more depressed, I don't know [laughs].

MG: Who hired you? How did your actual contract....?

JJ: Jim Parrish was the Chairman of the department. He had the most responsibility in hiring me. And I might say without—excluding me—he made many of the appointments to the English Department that were first rate. They had a—he compiled, he put together a fantastic department. One or two mistakes, but a fantastic department at the beginning. Youngish, eager, potentially explosive in publication and so forth—it was a very good department.

MG: What did he hire you to teach?

JJ: He hired me for a split assignment. And they used to have the basic college at the time. And basic college—and in the Liberal Arts. I would teach English and I would teach Humanities because I expressed an interest in Humanities. So I've taught in both areas. And in fact I ended up my career with the BIS Program—the Bachelor of Independent Studies where I taught Humanities, essentially.

MG: Both English—English and Humanities are very broad. What....?

JJ: Specifically, Contemporary Literature. Modern and Contemporary, British and American Fiction. That was my area. Then—but at this place, even though they hired you as a specialist in some field, you were expected to teach everything. At one time, we were asked to make a list of the courses that we taught at this university and I came up to fifty-two different courses. Which meant that your summers were taken up preparing courses that—for example, the first black course, I'm sure I gave it. Because Jim came to me and said, *how are you on black literature?* I said, *not very strong*. I said, *I know James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison*. He said, *that's enough*. He says, *you're going to teach our first Black Literature course*. I said, *oh my gosh*. You know, *that's too much*. I had to spend the entire summer reading. One anthology was out, it wasn't even out yet—I had to wait for it before I made up a syllabus. So it was—you're expected to teach many, many things here.

MG: Was there much of a focus on research? Did you have a chance to pursue your own interests?

JJ: Oh yes. There was always an emphasis on research. But the early emphasis was on teaching. They really counted good teaching. I suspect that there's much more of an emphasis on research now and publication. But when we first started, the accent was on learning, as they would say. And this is what made it so exciting—you had some first rate minds on this campus who had published of course. You know, publishing and good

teaching go together very often! But the emphasis was on doing a job in the classroom. And it showed.

MG: Tell me about the students.

JJ: The students at that time....

MG: In the '60s.

JJ: Yes. They were, for the most part, good students. Of course you always have a curve. Those who don't know what they're doing here, and at the very top those who are very, very good. We went, we went to the Brain Bowl, you know, at one time. We could have taken it nationally! That's how good our people were. It was—the contagious enthusiasm went over to the students. For example, some of the professors would give a jazz poetry gig. We had three hundred students show up! And I remember when they tried to give this about twenty years later, no one showed up. Students didn't seem to be interested.

In film for example, we would have films, at that time, foreign films were very big and provocative films of all kinds. We had full houses all the time. We had discussions of films and so forth. Later, it didn't happen. The films that were being given by the organization that took over were run of the mill! Something you can see on TV! They were not as provocative. There was an air of excitement on this campus that time. And the students, for the most part, were very good. A lot of them, remember, came from Tampa, had no opportunity to go to college. No members of their family were in college. They had some—a drive. They had to prove something. This was, this was big. And if a sociological study were made, it'd be interesting to know what happened to the students then. Vis-à-vis the students today, you know?

MG: The 1960s are tumultuous times in American society.

JJ: Yes, yes.

MG: Were they tumultuous times on this campus?

JJ: Not as much as the national. We were more followers. Certainly not the situation at Columbia where everything was taken over. When I first came here, I remember in '63, there was a group demonstrating in front of the administration building. They were women. They were carrying placards. And they were demonstrating because they wanted to wear Bermuda shorts on campus. Because they had to dress up. And well, that was in '63. Bigger things were happening on other campuses. And at the peak, in '68 we did have demonstrations here, anti-war demonstrations. There was a—an attempt to take down the flag at one time, and the Sherriff and all his cohorts were waiting for any move to be made by the students. And I was there, looking on to see what would happen. I was, as a witness—and nothing really happened of great consequence here.

There was, perhaps as a correlative of this, the Johns Committee—the investigation, which was probably one of the worst things that happened here. [It] violated the whole idea of what a university should be, you know? I don't think these men knew what a university [was]. If they saw one, if they passed through it, they wouldn't know what a university was. And [they were] highly prejudicial I think, even religiously prejudiced. If you read the transcripts of what occurred in the interrogation of [Sheldon] Grebstein and Sy Kahn for example, I think they wanted the two to say that they believed in God in their terms, you know, and so on. This was absolutely a ridiculous phase in our history. And I fault the university for not taking a stronger stand against it.

MG: Why was the Johns Committee here? What were they looking for? Were they looking at you?

JJ: They weren't looking at me. It seems that there was a protest from somebody. But Grebstein was teaching a course in Literature in which he quoted *The Bohemians* by Jack Kerouac. Actually, he was quoting it in a negative way! But the fact that he used it was enough to stir the attention that there were radicals on this campus, and communists and so forth and so on. And there probably was a great deal more.

When you have a legislature and universities, the political and the educational, throughout history, you've had trouble. Because their purposes are entirely different. The purpose of a university is creative—new knowledge! Which endangers—has to be, by definition—and to preserve the tradition at the same time. When you eliminate one or the other, it's not much a university.

Now this threatens the legislative people who tend to go into those areas, tend to forget the creative. And they say, *preserve the tradition*. And even there, they're wrong because they want to preserve a particular tradition. So the history of universities, from Salerno to Bologna to Oxford, has always been this kind of struggle between the political and the educational.

They think that our purpose at the university is to train people to enter the tribal organization. Well, it's more than that, you see. They would turn—these kind of people would turn the university into training schools. But an education is far more than training members of the tribe.

MG: John Allen is the President at this time.

JJ: Yes.

MG: What could or should he have done in your opinion, during this period in which the Johns Committee is investigating the university.

JJ: I know he was caught here. You know? The university as a state university depends on funds and financing from the very people that you may attack. I think on the whole he steered the university in the right way. [He] might have been stronger politically.

I remember at Vassar, Sarah Blanding was the President. And when Joe McCarthy decided that he might look into Vassar, she said, *I'm going to Europe*, and she says, *and to Joe McCarthy I'd like to say, drop dead*. And that was it. They would have none of it! But of course Vassar had a reputation, private funds, [and] it didn't depend on the state. So you have a different situation. Sometimes one can posture, when you have nothing to lose. And when one has a great deal to use one is a little more careful. And I don't know all the ins and outs and of the situation at that particular time.

MG: Were you close with Grebstein?

JJ: No.

MG: Did you have the kind of relationship where you....

JJ: No. He left as I came in really. I got to know Sy Kahn, who was very good. A good poet and a good person. I got to know him. But Grebstein, I never really got to know.

MG: Did the Johns Committee leave a lasting impact on this university? Especially in the immediate aftermath? Or even more long term?

JJ: Perhaps not. Because there were people like me—almost everybody was like me—defiant of it. I said, *I'm not going to put up if—with any kind of restriction*. If I say, *this is what British Literature is, then they have to trust me or get rid of me*. They hired me because this is my area. Or American Literature in the Twentieth Century. And if they say, *oh you can't teach Dos Passos, he's a wild guy...* Or, *you can't teach Kerouac, or you can't teach...* well, I'm—no one has ever come to me—and I... This is a sensitive area. Contemporary literature is a sensitive area. So I'm teaching *The Ginger Man* and all kinds of stuff. No one even hinted that I should not do a certain work. No one.

MG: So in your opinion then, there were never issues of academic freedom for professors and their ability to...

JJ: No.

MG: ...teach as they wished?

JJ: No. There was one issue with a professed communist who went around with a beret, I didn't know too much about it. But still he was kept on. In fact, we're harder on the recent activities than we were then. The '60s after-all, loosened up an awful lot of things. It created fears, but it also created parameters, new parameters of behavior, of dress, of thinking, of attitudes. So it accomplished a great deal.

MG: Did you incorporate issues of student unrest? Student demands? Anti-war protests? Free speech?

JJ: Yes.

MG: Into the way you taught or into the way you thought?

JJ: Oh yes, yes. In freshman English we did that. We would take controversial works so that we could discuss them. Oh yes we did, we did quite a bit of that, up and down the line in every course.

MG: Were you involved in any of the significant political issues here on campus?

JJ: Not really. The development of the constitution, I was in the senate at the time. But I didn't really participate heavily in it. There were others [who were] more politically knowledgeable and adept at this kind of material. They did a beautiful job in working up a constitution for the university. It was a long, drawn out process. That was the major political event that took place. So others did the work. I didn't do very much. What other... I don't know what other issues came up here that....

MG: Well growth becomes—the growth of the university becomes more and more of an issue. I mean, as we get into the '70s, and especially in the '80s, the university is significantly changing.

JJ: Oh yes.

MG: The accent on learning changes with Cecil Mackey's arrival.

JJ: Yes.

MG: With the end of the basic college—basic studies college—what was your thinking as some of John Allen's vision for the university was transformed under Cecil Mackey? Did you approve of those? Not approve of them? Did you have some things you would have liked to have seen done differently?

JJ: No I didn't—I personally did not approve of it. Because I liked the concept. There was something new. The trouble is that structurally, it led to conflicts. It was like two houses meeting and suddenly you had a split level house. And some things didn't quite work structurally. So it worked because you had good people who agreed with one another. But as soon as you had someone come in let's say, who disagreed, then there was turf battle. *This belongs to us, you can't teach film. You can't teach that. It's our province to teach that...* Now you have structural conflicts.

MG: And you mean as the result of the end of the basic college...

JJ: Yes.

MG: ...these conflicts came.

JJ: That's right. And so they decided, not because of that reason, but many other reasons, to do away with it and go the way of most other universities. But we went the way of most other universities. Rather than experiment and play around a bit more, we immediately caved in and went the way of the other universities which makes this like all the other universities, including now, with football and so forth. And then you become, well, your Southern Illinois or East Carolina or South Florida or—hundreds of them. You're no different. And it—at the time I thought you should be known for something. Be known as the place down there that has a so-so... a unique approach, with an accent on learning. And this I think is the way we should have gone rather than capitulate it completely to conformity so that we become like everybody else. There's no difference really between us and any other university as far as I can see.

MG: With the end of the basic college, was there an issue of where your home would be departmentally? You had English and Philosophy as backgrounds.

JJ: Yes, that's right...

MG: Were there discussions about where you would sit?

JJ: Yes, that's right. Because with a split appointment, they'll say, *well, what happens when that goes out?* So I didn't teach Humanities anymore. I would teach in Liberal Arts and that was it—which was OK. I always longed to teach the Humanities. And as I said, I got to teach them with the BIS program. But yes, they were—there were adjustments to be made as you accepted a more traditional approach. But it would have been interesting to carry it out even more. You know, these students came here from Tampa. And here they were given the Humanities, and I mean this was no compromise. This was tough stuff that they gave. And they had a course in freshman English when I came here—the students had to read ten novels! I said, *wow, this is tougher than what we give at Colby College!* Ever since though, it came down to seven novels, to five novels, to two novels. And then reading magazines, reading.... You know, it got deteriorated fast. But the students were kept at a high level. And after the transition, I don't think the level was as high. Or it wasn't as demanding anymore. But you can—students can always get a good education, just about anywhere. With the diffusion of works, you can get books anywhere. And professors are diffused pretty much. You had first rate professors here.

The only thing—I think the variant in all this is the student population. There are students, you know, when I went to Columbia, the students were so contentious—a kind of permanent contentiousness. You had to rise. You were reading works that you would never have read to counter them! It wasn't the professors who were so stimulating as the student atmosphere! But if the students here are more interested in fraternities and football and so forth, there's not that challenge. So the person who's intellectually—who wants to achieve intellectually—is more or less on his own, even though he has the same books and the same courses and so on.

MG: Did that change while you were here? Were the students more engaging with each other in the early days?

JJ: I think they were because it was smaller. When I came here we had four or five thousand students. And the place looked like buildings rising out of North Africa. In fact every time I walked towards a science building after it was constructed, I thought it was a fortress. And I was in *Beau Geste*¹ all of a sudden. And there was sand all over the place and so on. But the students, the theatre, poetry readings—yes, they were [a] much more coalescing group at that time. Then you reach a critical mass I think. I don't know where that is, where there's 7,000, 10,000, 15,000.... At that point, you lose—you lose that. You gain something else, perhaps. But you lose that close feeling that you had at the very beginning.

MG: In your opinion, what did we gain with our growth?

JJ: Perhaps variety, greater offerings, more schools. But I think you lose something very essential—personalism. It becomes more impersonal. You used to know many of the students. You couldn't walk from here to Administration without saying hello to students, at least ten [or] fifteen times! I can walk across this campus and not say hello once to anyone. It's an impersonalization that takes place once you reach a critical mass. You can still get an education. Perhaps even a better one if you're really self-motivated. Because you have a greater variety, more choices.

MG: In addition to your work on the faculty senate, were there other committees or groups, clubs that you were involved with?

JJ: Yes. At the beginning there were too many. At one point I was on nine committees. And it was eating up all my time. And I wasn't doing a good job on any of them.

MG: What kind of committees were they?

JJ: Oh, the honors committee—I've forgotten now so many of them. [The] teaching committee where we had to go to St. Petersburg and discuss with other colleges whether the aims of teaching, and so on.... Then the committees within the department itself. But at one time I counted nine of them. I said, *there's too many I have to withdraw from some of these*.

Later I just belonged to one or two committees. The STP committee, that is Salary and Tenure Committee which I was on for quite a number of years off and on. Yes, when the wrong people got raises, I was off. When the right people got raises, I was on. [Laughs]

MG: Any campus organizations that involved students? Were you mentoring or serving as a faculty advisor?

JJ: No. I can't remember. I'm sure there must have been. But I can't think right now. No I

¹*Beau Geste* is an adventure novel that was written by Percival Christopher Wren. It was published in 1925. Several movies have also been made.

can't think right now of any. But I'm sure there were some. Because I know I had interactions with students quite a bit.

MG: In 1991 you retired.

JJ: Yes, I retired.

MG: You had been twenty-eight years.

JJ: Yes.

MG: What brought about your retirement?

JJ: I would say.... I had never intended to retire. But I was teaching a course at Fort Myers. And my friend, Les Tuttle, was sitting with me, going there, and he says, *John*, he says, *phase retirement has come in*. I said, *well I'm not thinking of retirement at all*. I said, *I enjoy what I'm doing* and so on.

So he said, *you want to write don't you?* I said, *yes*. He says, *you on sabbatical?* I says, *oh, great...* He says, *think of it as a five year sabbatical*. He got me thinking. I says, *my gosh! He changes semantics here!* I says, *yeah, I'm off a half a year, teach a half a year, I make up my pay this way...* It's a sabbatical every year for five years. The only stipulation is that at the end, you're out. And that's a low for the university that they didn't put a struggle to keep me here, but anyway, never the less [laughs]—I didn't mean that but... [laughs]. But I was intrigued by it. And I said, *I'll take it*. And I went on phase retirement.

MG: What were your goals? What did you want to do during the phased retirement and then when you were fully retired?

JJ: Well, about the same. Simply divert most of my energies into the writing. I wanted to do that. And I says, *this is it*. Because when you're teaching—I remember Mark Van Doren once, I had him as an instructor at Columbia—he said, *if you're going to write, don't go into teaching*. He said, *they tap the same source*. And I didn't think much at the time. But I know what he meant. And he was right. Because once you get before a class, and you give a performance, to some extent, and whatever insights you might have, you spill in the class, you have no need to go home and write about them. You've had your audience, you see? And you're exhausted. If you're careful about teaching, and you meet with students, and you do what you have to do, you really don't have much time to write. You're exhausted. So you depend on summers—and then you work, because they get additional funds. So going into phase retirement gives you a half a year free, and you're still teaching. You see? You're satisfying both in a way. So that was good. I could have continued that for a few more years. But retirement is good. I can still read. And I write. And that's marvelous.

MG: Are you still engaged with the university? Do you come onto campus?

JJ: I don't come on the campus, but I would engage with the bachelor of independent study. I still have one more student who's writing a dissertation or her thesis, not dissertation. But she's writing her thesis, and when she finishes, I'm through because the program is through. And it's too bad, it was one of the great programs that helped more people than I can think of. Mostly women—women, about 80% of them were women. And women who could not go to college. They're mid-life and they could do this, and get a degree. And I know a lot of people who have been absolutely turned around. It just wasn't productive. It didn't have the FTE's. But it wasn't that big of an expense. And I think the credit that came to the university for having it far outweighed the few thousand dollars that it would cost. But I thought that was a great program. It was carefully monitored, the people were mentored, you had deep immersion experiences, and two-week seminars, eight hours a day! And it was an excellent program. But it's dead. And so when it dies, I'm through. I have one last student.

MG: If you could look in your crystal ball the next five years out—what is Dr. Iorio going to be doing?

JJ: [Laughs]. I'll be here, being interviewed for the 55th anniversary of the university! [Laughs]. That's what I'll be doing!

I've never been much of a prophet. I once predicted that they would have submarines and some of my schoolmates said, *they already have them*. I says, *oh, OK*. [Laughs]. I also invented the mime, the blow-up ships, but they already had those too. So I'm not a very good person to ask what will happen five years from now. I suspect the cars would be newer. The university will be a little larger. They'll have a few professors here with famous names.

MG: What will you be doing?

JJ: What will I be doing? I'll be writing. Part of that is wishful, you know, that I'm still around five years from now of course. But if I'm still around and I feel great, I'll continue to write.

MG: What will Pam be doing?

JJ: [Laughs] I don't know! She'll probably still be mayor [laughs].

MG: Maybe Governor?

JJ: Oh I don't know, that's her decision. I've never—oh I've made suggestions that, *maybe you should look into this or that*. But I've always left it to her because I don't want to put her in an awkward position. A person does what he feels comfortable with, no matter what another person will say. You know, *John, you should be a General*. Well, I don't feel comfortable being a General, you know. And so I don't want to influence her unduly

in that area. I'll help her out whenever I can, but that's her choice to make if it ever comes about. First she has to do a good job—excellent job as mayor. Then from there, who knows what she might want to be.

MG: Now I know you're her father, but how's she doing?

JJ: She's doing very, very well, I think.

MG: Do you have an opportunity to interact with her and advise or discuss affairs of state with her? Does she come to you?

JJ: I don't see her as much as I used to now that she's mayor because she's so busy! I mean from morning to night, and I have to, sometimes rush meals over there so they don't starve! But I think she's doing very well. Today in fact she opened up benefits to gay couples, people [who] have commitments and so on. That was a campaign promise she had made. She believes in it. You know, what's the alternative? To do away with civil rights suddenly for a group of people? So she did that today. And she's proud of that. I saw her early this morning and she dropped off her son [who] I then take to school. And didn't say much—she said, *I promised that, and I feel it's right*. That's it. I said, *good*. So she's, she's very interested, more than one might think, of the welfare of the people in Tampa. And particularly the poorest of them, the homeless and so on.

MG: Who does she get that from?

JJ: I don't know, probably from family, you know, where we would talk about these matters in the '60s and '70s. She was with the boys in the house and always wanted to be president and all kinds of things, arguing about the war. And she was you know, very young, seven years old and so forth. And I always had a sense of passionate justice, you know? Even in The Bible, Isaiah, I think it is says something about an aroused conscience. And I've always felt that. It should not be, in this great country, you should not have people standing on roads. A woman I saw yesterday, asking—begging for food. And people barely able to make it. Now I begin to sound like a democratic platform if... [laughs].

I think a lot of that idealism was imparted through the family one way or another. But the individual has his own take on things. But it isn't strange that the three of them have pretty much the same ideas, you know, in a way. And I've always told them to think for themselves! Think! I did the same thing with students! I'd say, *how many are going to vote this way?* They'd put up their hands. *How many parents are going to vote this way?* Same hands. I says, *don't you think for yourselves?* You know? *Not that I want you to change, but, you arrive at those conclusions yourself*. Now I did the same thing with my kid.

I don't know, they enjoyed the university, I enjoyed the university, I think this was a great place. Some great things that they did was to send me on the Florida program to Italy and to the University of Paris. They were real pluses for me personally, and for other

members of the faculty who got to go there. If I had to fault it in anyway, it's part of the bigness. Well, there are other matters that would take too long to elaborate upon, to really get into. And parking [laughs]! It's a mess! I remember when I first came here, it was easy! You just parked—and no charge! And now they charge us, very strict. I'm confused about where—I can't park here, can't park there. And now they're even charging. The only thing we got as a perk for retirement was free parking. And now I understand they're going to charge the retirees for it. It's not—you know, not when other places... I'm used to New England places, I've known a lot of them, and the way they've treated retired faculty, with office space, with all kinds of [things]. At least to say, *we acknowledge you, we acknowledge your service* and so forth. And I don't get the sense of it here. The decal is a small thing. And then to put a price on it is, a slur. I would say.

MG: Would you send your grandkids here?

Jl: I wouldn't send my grandkids anywhere. They're—I know my grandkids are getting ready for college, and they belong to the Florida savings account, so they could very well end up here. But I would say, as I am saying already to the young—my grandchild. I'm saying *you have to prepare for college now. The college you choose, you have to choose very carefully because they all offer slightly different things. And a big college may not be for you. Maybe you want a small one. Maybe you want this, maybe you want that.* And I tell them about my experiences of what I like and didn't like. Then it's up to them. They'll pick colleges that you never heard of, because their friends are going there, or because they can get in easily or because... who knows. But I'm never—I never say, *you must go to USF*. I say, *if you go to USF, you will get as good an education as you can get anywhere in the country. If you went to Yale, or Columbia or Harvard, Cornell, it doesn't really matter. You have the same books. They read the same books, and the lectures are about the same. In fact here you might get even better lectures by full professors who really studied it and so on.* So it doesn't really matter. If you want education, you can get it here.

MG: Dr. Iorio, I appreciate you coming in today.

Jl: Thank you. I'm running out of things to say! [Laughs]

[End of Interview]