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Oral History Number: 407-001

Interviewees: Deidre McNamer, Patricia Grean, Jean-Marie Cook

Interviewer: Donna McCrea

Date of Interview: September 19, 2006

Donna McCrea: This interview is being recorded in the home of Patricia Goedicke Robinson, which is at 310 McLeod in Montana, Missoula.

Deidre McNamer: I'm Deidre McNamer and I go also by Dee McNamer.

Patricia Grean: I'm Patricia Grean and I go with Patsy.

Jean-Marie Cook: I'm Jean-Marie Cook.

DM: So for each of you if you would just tell me how long you knew Patricia and in what capacity.

JMC: Well, I'm her sister so I knew her all my life, although I have lived for a long time in Beirut, Lebanon. We were really quite separate. We saw each other on rare occasions in the last forty-two years.

PG: And I met Patricia in 1958, '57 or '58, when she was married to Mr. Goedicke, who was a professor of mathematics at Ohio University. She came to live in Athens, which is the home of Ohio University and we met. We became friends.

DMC: And I met her around 1980 or '81. She had come as a visiting professor at the university here in the creative writing program and I didn't meet her the first year she was here. Subsequently I met both Patricia and Leonard together, I think at a dinner party around '81 or '82. We lived three blocks apart. The two of them and, later, Patricia, after Leonard died in 1999, were very often a part of our family gatherings here. So they were, in a sense, really surrogate parents, especially before my own parents moved here to Missoula from Helena, where they had been living, and Oregon before that. So my father and Leonard shared a birthday and so we would celebrate that together. So I know her in that capacity as well as a colleague at the university, where we both taught in the same program.

DM: Some of these questions I didn't really give time to think about so I'm throwing them on you now and you may not have what would be the perfect answer, but as you think through this, if something comes to you later you can jump back in and fill it back in. But I'm wondering if you can share your favorite memory, either just of Patricia or Patricia and Leonard or whatever memory comes to you.

PG: Why that's really tough. When you consider that we, for eleven years in Athens, Ohio, were as close as sisters could possibly be. Actually, we rented a house from Patsy and her first

husband, Victor. We lived across the street from one another for three years. We had a signal. Patsy wrote every single morning, she wrote poetry all morning long. She took no phone calls or anything like that. She and I had a code and if I needed to talk to her desperately I would call up, let it ring twice, hang up, and then call again and she knew and would answer.

DM: Do you have any particular memory or just general memories if you have a few things that come to mind.

JMC: Not really.

DMC: I have most of my memories if I thought about them I would be able to sort out very specific moments. Generally, the cast of the memories is of her as one of—Peter Stark said at the memorial—is of someone in motion. And curious and calming and wanting to discuss something quite urgently. But I have a somewhat darker one that just because it's recent and I think I'll never forget it and I don't know what it means quite yet either about her or me or death. But she was in the hospital, it was the morning that she died. It was really the last time I saw her conscious. She turned to me and said, really quite vigorously, "Do you know what death feels like when it's coming?" She was on morphine and a little slurry and I couldn't hear her well enough to be sure of what she was saying and so I said, "Do I know what death feels like?" And she just turned to me and went, "D-E-A-T-H. Death." And I said, "No, I do not and I'm sorry." But what I'm trying to get at is some combination of being in your utmost frailty and also really needing to try to be as sure as she could be about some kind of information that might be out there and I was a total washout with that particular question. But I think I'll remember it as an aspect of her that wasn't really predominant but it was there.

DM: Can you tell me a little bit about what childhood was like for you, maybe something about your parents or growing up?

JMC: [inaudible]

DMC: I'm curious about your mother, if she was deaf all the time you were growing up or mostly deaf or what that was like.

JMC: Well, she was deaf but it wasn't really evident because she wore a hearing aide all the time. It was very interesting; she started out wearing a pretty big battery like this strapped to her leg and then she finished up, of course, with one of these tiny cordless things. So it was a big difference. I remember she used to say that it was very convenient because as kids if we got too raucous she would just turn the thing off.

PG: And then she was pretty much stone deaf with it off.

JMC: She also used to have great fun with children. She had some kind of speaker strapped to her bra, in addition to this great battery strapped to her leg. Kids used to love to speak into it

and they used to love to have the ear piece [?] with her ears. They had a great time with that. But certainly this was not always in one's face that she couldn't here. Not at all.

PG: She played the piano, too, did she not? She was a fine, fine pianist.

JMC: Yes. Dee, one of the things I thought of before when you asked what it was like growing up: both of my parents played the piano. It was interesting the Chopin that the man selected at the service the other day was one that my father used to play. We used to, typically, when we'd go upstairs and go to bed the piano would be playing down below. He and my mother used to play four-handed piano. One of their great party things was they'd put a scarf over the keys [?]. I remember also that Patricia and mother used to spend every Saturday afternoon together listening to the Metropolitan Opera.

DM: And you lived in New Hampshire, is that correct?

JMC: Yes. We grew up in Hanover, which is Dartmouth College town. It was an idyllic place to grow up, as I tried to mention the other day. We could do anything. There were no locks and we did have the advantage of the university's cultural programs and concerts and things of that kind. I always used to say, "How could one ever live anywhere but Hanover, New Hampshire." And when I grew up and got to be a big girl and went away, I used to say, "How could you ever live in Hanover, New Hampshire?"

DMC: How did your parents meet?

JMC: That's a bit of a question. When my mother lived at home in Mattapan, Massachusetts, there was a group of people that were all Roman Catholics and worked in different places and as I understand it, someone who worked with my father was a friend of the family and brought him home one time. But I always understood that there was a kind of pact between them. He was crippled with multiple sclerosis, which he got when he was only twenty-one years old in medical school and he had a limp all his life. There she was, crippled by her deafness, and so they thought they would come together and make a go of things together.

DM: So was he a physician?

JMC: Yes he was a psychiatrist and neurologist. He was the first psychiatrist that Dartmouth College ever had. I think he started out as a part-timer and when he left, I forget now, but there were twenty-five on the staff or something like that, twenty-five psychiatrists and psychologists. I met a journalist I think in Beirut. He had gone through Dartmouth College and he was there early when my father was there just as a part-timer. Unfortunately, his office was in a hall which was called McNut. This guy told me that students used to make great jokes at McKenna or McNut, the psychiatrist.

DM: Were there only the two children, you and Patricia?

JMC: Yes. And despite the fact that my father was crippled, he liked to teach us things. I remember particularly his standing in this place in the pond where everybody in Hanover went swimming and teaching us how to dive, something he had never done himself, of course. He would show us the three steps to the end of the diving board and then jump. Patricia was really good. She could dive very well and do an incredible jack-knife and slip into the water clean, she was very good. I think my mother was a very strong swimmer and we used to love to swim with her because my father didn't swim at all. When we moved we were living on the grounds of McLean Hospital, which is a well-known psychiatric hospital in Waltham, Massachusetts. It's just outside of Boston. We had some kind of a house on the grounds and my poor father went up to the top of the hill and had his day there in the hospital or whatever and he'd come home and he had this fenced out area and I remember we had rabbits and we'd say, "Daddy, the rabbits got out again!" And he would have to come home and chase around and get the rabbits. I remember very clearly one day he told us—we were, gosh, four and five, five and six, something like that—he asked us how we would feel about moving to a cold climate. We would be able to ski and skate and play in the snow. So we did. We moved there and the whole family learned how to ski. Since my father was crippled, he could turn in only one direction, but nevertheless, he did it and he was always telling us how to ski.

PG: You were very close in age, too, weren't you?

JMC: Yeah, fifteen months. We always used to say that between June and September, she would be two years older than I, but when September came around I would catch up.

DM: And who taught you to ski? Was it something that you learned in school or just from your father? Or just because you were there?

JMC: I think we just all went out and learned. I suppose we had lessons at one time or another. I don't remember at the very beginning, but it was something that everybody did. The area did have a reputation for teaching skiing. And in fact, when she was quite a bit older, when she was in her sixties, my mother participated in a program to teach all the kids in the school how to ski; I think on her lunch hour she went out. In high school we had a ski team and lots of competitions among high school students of different schools in the area.

DM: Did your mother work out of the home?

JMC: No, she didn't. I remember during the Second World War, she became a nurse's aide and trained at the hospital and did that. But she basically didn't work. She used to volunteer for different things, but no, she was very definitely an at-home mother. She was always testing herself. I remember coming home from school and she would be ironing, but she would have Shakespeare open beside her and she would be memorizing to keep her brain going.

DM: Tell me about where the decision to go to college and where—Patricia went to Middlebury, is that correct?—and why, do you remember why she chose Middlebury or what her goals were at that time.

JMC: I don't really remember, except I do remember that my mother used to say, "When you kids were growing up, the wolf was always at the door, and when you went away to college the wolf was at the door, and now you're both finished college and the wolf is still at the door." One of the problems was that my father, because of his multiple sclerosis, could not get any life insurance and he was very much afraid that with multiple sclerosis, you know, it can come and go, and he had awakened in medical school completely paralyzed down one side of his body, and he was paralyzed for a year. He was always afraid that without this life insurance he was going to wake up some morning or he was going to wake up some morning in a dreadful condition. And money, you know we were comfortably off, but money was a big consideration and it was a consideration when we were going to college. I don't know about Patricia and how she found or zeroed on in Middlebury, but I do remember that I think I applied to Mount Holyoke and I also applied to Bates College in Maine because they offered full scholarships. They wrote back to me and told me, "Your father makes too much money. You cannot be a candidate for this full scholarship." And then, for some reason, I went to Middlebury too. Probably a bad choice because it was very much like Dartmouth. The sort of community, or at least that was my feeling: a small town college. But it's a great school. As far as I can tell it's gotten better and better all the time.

PG: Didn't it have even in those days a kind of creative writing program that might have interested Patsy?

JMC: I don't remember any creative writing program, but of course Frost was very much [?] and I think I saw somewhere a wonderful photograph of Patricia with Robert Frost on the steps of some building up there. Some young high school seniors were at my place a couple of months ago and they were walking by this picture and I said, "There's my sister with Robert Frost," and they said, "Who's Robert Frost?" What is the world coming to?

DMC: Did your father discuss psychiatry a lot and I was wondering, Pat, too, when you first met Patricia it was sort of the big Freudian days and psychiatry was on everybody's topic list at least it seemed in the fifties. Did she talk about it with...Did you talk about it at home with your father and did she talk about it later on?

JMC: I don't remember ever talking with my father. It was not a thing that was done. However, we used to say, and Patricia used to say it particularly, is that he always seemed to be analyzing our motives. You could hardly ever say anything...I remember things like, let's say mother would be late coming home or something like that and we would say, or I would say, for example, "Oh, dear, I'm worried about mother." And my father would say, "What do you have against mother? What do you wish to happen to her?" This sort of thing would be going on all the time. But, no, we never discussed it much and I remember occasionally he used to talk

about his work. He was a neurologist as well as a psychiatrist and he said he frequently had to tell people that they had multiple sclerosis and this would be very difficult for them and he'd let it sink in and say, "I have multiple sclerosis," and this would be heartening for them because they realized that someone could still function and carry on. You probably all know there was this book that somebody put together once of children of psychiatrists and interviewed a number of people and they interviewed Patricia for this book. I think I have a copy of it that she sent to me but I wouldn't be surprised if there was a copy of it around here somewhere. Did you see it?

PG: I know it exists and I remember her talking about it and I don't think I have a copy but I'm sure there is a copy around here. That's a good idea.

DMC: Did she talk about psychiatry with you?

PG: Well, as you said, it was something that was in the air around that time. I don't remember her ever discussing growing up with a psychiatrist father, for instance. I knew, of course, that this was the case, but we would talk about psychology. She was interested in it, I think, and a little disturbed by some of the things, I think. I'm not altogether sure the relationship was happy constantly between Patricia and her father.

JMC: The understatement of the afternoon.

PG: [?] right to do any more than introduce the topic.

JMC: A couple who lived not too far away and were very good friends with my parents were both psychiatrists. The husband and wife were psychiatrists and they had some kind of relationship which went way back. Maybe they had been in school together, I don't remember. I also remember when, after my mother had died and my father became more and more difficult, and I remember the female doctor, Ann Thomason, said, "He must not be allowed to get away with that sort of thing. He cannot do that." And Patricia told me about that. She had been there a lot, dealing with him.

PG: It was tough, I think, very difficult for Patsy. And her first husband, Victor, was eighteen years older than she and I often thought that that was not coincidental. I think that she needed a kind of father relationship.

JMC: My husband was eighteen years older than I was.

PG: That's interesting, isn't it? Both girls married people eighteen years older.

DMC: Leonard was twenty years older and had a significant relationship with psychiatry.

JMC: Yes, he was a kind of lay...

PG: He was a lay-analyst.

JMC: Another interesting thing, which was probably partly dictated by the age difference...The two sisters married much older men and pretty much decided not to have children.

DM: Was that a conscious decision on her part?

JMC: I think so.

PG: I think so. By the time it maybe would have been considered, Patsy was absolutely committed to poetry...

JMC: I told you she was committed from age six!

PG: Yeah, I know, but it was the most important thing in her life and she knew that she was not going to be a parent [inaudible]

DMC: When was this?

PG: Well, I knew that when she had been married [inaudible] there were no children...

JMC: I said, maybe you were out of the room, that it was significant that we both married older men but that we both seemingly decided not to have children.

DMC: And then she became really quite ill right not long after she had met Leonard.

JMC: That's right.

DMC: So when she got pretty serious cancer, she was still of child-bearing age. But she got very, very ill. She told me recently that she thinks that she just repressed a lot of what people told her at the time about how much danger she was in.

PG: She certainly did. I can tell you that when...Patsy had a lump-ectomy in '72 or '73 at the Cleveland Clinic, and it was one of the very early lump-ectomies. At that time, they pretty much took the breast and they took all the muscles, and she did not want that. So she just had the cancer removed.

JMC: When they weren't doing that much.

PG: Practically no place. The Cleveland Clinic was the only place they were doing it at that time. Within a year, when she and Leonard were living in Mexico, the cancer had metathesized into the lymph nodes in her neck. Patsy was, what, thirty at that time?

JMC: Thirty one. This was '72 but she was born in '31.

PG: So it had not only metathesized into the lymph nodes of the neck, which they then removed, so Patsy had a considerable scar, but she had a hysterectomy so there would have been no children after that. When she was recovering, we were walking on a beach in Mexico and she told me at that time that the doctors had told her that she had a twenty-five percent chance [inaudible]. She forgot that completely until a couple of years ago when I talked to her about it.

JMC: On a couple of occasions she told me, I think, that she herself had not realized in what danger she was at the time of this metastasis. I think she was being treated at Mass General in Boston.

DMC: When she had her second breast cancer, whenever it was, then she went in here and had to give these medical histories and they went, "You had what?" A couple of people here said that she was a five percent survivor of that kind of cancer, of any kind of breast cancer that had metastasized above the clavicle, was the phrase. So she knew in recent years and either knew and had repressed it or something that she really got about forty more years than she might easily have had, which I think kind of fueled her...Especially after Leonard died, she just really worked in these last years and I think that she felt that she had come to some appreciation of the fact that she had really lasted longer than any of the odds, but also that time was running out.

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

DMC: Was it '72? I thought it was more like '68.

PG: No it wasn't '68 because she left Athens in '68.

DMC: Oh, OK, so she was about forty, I guess.

JMC: The more you [inaudible] early thirties. I always thought it was early.

PG: Anyway, it was a very, very, very serious cancer, extremely serious. I did not expect her to live.

DMC: So she and Leonard lived with that, those brushes of really serious health problems. He was told he should get, I believe, a triple or so bypass. His son said that DeBaKey himself, the famous surgeon, said, "You have this or you're going to be gone pretty fast." That was before you treated some of that with medicine and some of that with surgery. He said no, and that was around the same time. So when they arrived in Missoula, they both had had intensive medical experiences and I think that was a bond between them and also contributed to this live-for-the-day *joie de vivre* that they both exhibited quite a lot, especially when they first got here. They had come through a lot by then that we didn't know about for some time.

JMC: You asked me about a particular memory. Something has been inspired here. When she finished with the first surgery at the Cleveland Clinic, they wanted her to stay—she was living in Mexico at the time—for a month and have things checked out. She didn't have any place to stay, really, so they decided to come and stay with me and my husband at our place in Virginia, a very old house that we were working on fixing up. She and Leonard arrived and we had the most wonderful kind of house party. I don't know how long it went on, but we would get up and have incredible breakfasts. My husband was in literature as well. We would sit and talk and talk and talk endlessly, but we somehow managed then to stop and people would go to their various writing tasks. Patricia went to the old barn and went up in the hay loft and worked on her poetry. Leonard had a card table set up in their bedroom, and he worked away on a manuscript that he maybe was working on [inaudible] Then my husband would go to his desk, and I think that was the year he was working on a new translation of *Beowulf*, and I was [inaudible] I did have some of my own work to do too, but we just had a wonderful time. Rick came at that time and visited, Leonard's son. It was a very idyllic time. Everybody got along really well and it was nice.

DM: Tell me about her writing habits, or what you know of them. You mentioned a routine. What do you remember about that or what do you know about how she wrote and when she wrote.

PG: She wrote every morning during the eleven years that I knew her. She wrote every single solitary morning. As I said, the phone was never answered or anything else. She [inaudible]

DMC: That was her basic pattern right through this last illness. She was, as far as I know, most mornings she was writing. Visits to the doctor and her general diminishing energy took up more of the day. My mother stopped by to see her one morning, just on the spur of the moment, and this was I think in the last two years. She was in the middle of the...and not receiving, you know. So it was pretty inviolate.

JMC: Very disciplined.

DMC: Very.

PG: She would get up. She would have a cup of coffee—these were in the Athens years, the years I knew her—and she would go up and sit in a big chair like this in her study and write and smoke cigarettes.

JMC: Did she always write long-hand?

PG: Yes.

JMC: I remember her sort of curled up with her knees tucked under her and a kind of notebook that she would be writing in long hand.

PG: I think she did that all through. I don't think she ever worked on a computer. I think she wrote poetry [inaudible].

DMC: She would write it and then type it into a computer, but she had a clipboard and she always had a comfortable chair or two. She had one little puffy chair and then one in her office. I don't think she would even get dressed. She would be in her robe and just start in, partly because she said a lot of things came to her at night when she couldn't sleep and she would jot them down blindly in the dark and then throw the piece of paper out on the floor and so I had this image of whenever she woke up she would be wading through all these crumpled balls of paper, little shards of paper, and assemble them. I think she liked to come off of that state and go directly into work. But she did start using the computer. She was really disciplined and rigorous and there's a whole record of her work which is now in the archives. It would be typed then into the computer and it would be draft of this page, draft of this page, draft of this page...Sometimes just a few words changed. But she started using it that way. She was keeping journals and poetry starts and I think drafts, long-hand.

JMC: Another thing she was very careful about early on—and I think this is a vague memory of when we were practically still living at home—she wanted, of course, to be published and she sent her poetry out to a variety of poetry magazines and she kept such careful records, you

know, "Sent such-and-such a poem on such-and-such a day. Received returned rejection." A complete record of all of this.

DMC: There's a green box in there. There's a system. If the card is tipped on its end it means that the poem is out and it has, you know, where it had gone, and she was maintaining this system and it was a pretty comprehensive and thorough one, right up until she died.

JMC: Pat, about this program for writing in the morning as you said she had in Athens. I remember at one time when she was married to Victor and was out there, I think she was telling my mother about this, that it was difficult to write in the morning because she had so many things to do to take care of the house and take care of Victor and so forth. And I think she [inaudible] that she was going to start getting up in the morning before Victor or anyone else in the household was up and she would get up at six and write from six to eight before she had to do anything. Do you remember anything like that?

PG: Well, I remember, but in the years [inaudible] she would pretty much go until noon and then whatever had to be done she would do subsequently. She was certainly disciplined. She was enormously disciplined, incredibly so.

DMC: And there were...When you just start going through the draft pile, she kept everything. So you can go through a poem would have many, many incarnations and I just came away from even starting to go through some of her work, which you did earlier, but with the sheer work that went into it it was just over and over and over...

PG: I never could believe...And I'm reading some of the journals now and they are unbelievable. She would have one line and one word that she would change and change and change and change. [inaudible] So that's how she worked, always.

JMC: I used to use her as an example when I was teaching. I had my stints of teaching creative writing courses. Students would say, now, the poem should be spontaneous and so I would give them an example of my sister. Careful drafting and re-drafting and word changing.

PG: One of the things that always impressed me about Patsy was how enormously important music was to her, you know. This was really, if she could sing somewhere she wanted to do that, otherwise, when she was composing she'd play music.

DMC: While she worked?

PG: Yes.

DMC: I didn't know if she did or not.

JMC: And she would frequently play the piano and she would just sit down for our own enjoyment and we used to play duets and my mother and Patricia and I used to play three-handed things on the piano.

DMC: Did you really?

PG: I remember when she got that piano and how thrilled she was to have it because I don't think they had a piano in Mexico.

DM: What do you think was her motivation for writing? Did she write for anyone or did she write only for herself?

PG: Well I mean I don't quite know what you mean by that. She always wanted to be published, so she was writing because this was a part of her and she had to do it, but she wanted other people to read and understand her work. It wasn't a private, I don't think, do you?

DMC: Well, no, but I think, you know, she probably, like a lot of writers, she went back and forth...There's some evidence that she went back and forth between knowing what she should consider most important at the moment and I think most of the time she just thought she should do it for the work, to get it as good as it could get. But then she would find herself going, "Oh, I should have sent the manuscript here, or I should have done it there," and becoming, as she did, really consumed with whatever was foremost in her mind. It would be really there for a while and then she would write a note to herself saying, "Oh but I need to stop thinking about that. The important thing is to go back and make the poem better." So I think that's a kind of...One didn't exclude the other, but she could get, as Pat said, she wanted it out there and she was always trying to think about whether she was doing enough to make sure that a poem found a good home and so on. She wanted to be published. It's hard in poetry. You don't have an agent, you know, she was older than a lot of the people she was seeing in the big hot venues now. She told me...I was complaining about having a hard winter trying to sell a novel and it had gone to all these places and I had all these rejections and I was mad at my agents at one point and then I just had to shut up because I realized (a) I had an agent (b) my many places were five places. She told me—and she didn't want it out really broadly—that this latest manuscript had gone in one form or another to far more than that. And yet, really good poets were saying this was her best work yet.

So she was in this combination of markets and where she was in her career and just that biz she would refer to, the "po-biz," the poetry biz, and how she always thought she should be more savvy about what that was. So it was hard and I realize that she just had no intention of just falling back and saying, "Well, it's all over. I'm not going to get this manuscript out," or "The twelfth one was my last one instead of this one." She would do everything she could to get this good work out there and it's wonderful work.

JMC: I had the feeling, long-distance, that she was really quite distressed about not being able to get that manuscript published.

PG: I did too. She would keep trying to do it and it wouldn't work.

DMC: Well, she was also, I think, not unaware that she didn't have very much left. She didn't know how much time. She knew something was going on that wasn't right, I think, even before she got this cancer diagnosis. And she was frailer than she had been five years before. So you never know, but I think that that made this project really doubly fraught. She felt [inaudible].

DM: And which manuscript was that?

DMC: This last one that she completed in June. It's on her computer there. She's got a manuscript. She's got two really fine former students who are going...We're all going to try and get it out there and I think it will be published. I'm just sorry it wasn't before she could know that it was going to be.

DM: Does it have a working title?

DMC: It's called *The Baseball Field at Night* and it has that poem in it that someone read at the memorial with that wonderful first line, "Death be my home light [?]." It's really her, you know, they're serene and beautiful poems. So I think it will find a home and she got it done. I mean it said June on there and she was sick in June.

DM: Talk about her students a little bit, what you know about her relationship with her students or her thoughts about teaching or mentoring.

PG: She really loved it. She really loved teaching and as far as I know she was a really great teacher.

DMC: She was one of the most invested teachers that I've ever met. She would write...She just gave a lot to the students in terms of attention and time. I was talking to somebody about how glad you are when it gets to the end of the semester and they've handed in all their things and you can get to that last hour and then it's over for you. And for most people, that's within a couple of days of finals week probably or maybe the next week. She would keep portfolios and work on them all over a break. She would turn in a grade but she would keep their work so she could annotate it and add things and give them back this hugely critiqued body of stuff and she would do that at the undergraduate level and the graduate level. So they would never get their things back from her until maybe the beginning of the next semester, often. I thought a number of times, "How could you do that?" You just want to be done in some ways. She really, really brought a lot of energy to teaching and thought it worth it, I think. She got a lot out of it.

PG: I think she got a lot out of it. And she developed very close relationships with some of the students.

JMC: I was aware, just corresponding with her by email, of all the different students and what role they played in her life. When some of them came up to me at the reception and said they wanted to speak to me. When they told me who they were, I knew, because she had told me about them and how much she had helped them and they would say, "She was my teacher but she was my friend."

DM: Of what do you think she would have been or was most proud?

DMC: I think her work was undoubtedly...But you might know...Somebody was looking at photos of her and there were a lot of incarnations of her. I suspect that she might have been proud that she was able to change and grow and try new things in her life and keep trying to do that. Just joining the choir even this last spring. I think she had decided that it was important to stretch yourself and I hope she looked back on her life and went, "I did that in the ways that I could at the given time." Does that sound accurate to you?

PG: Yes, it does. Because I think poetry was the central thing in Patsy's life, absolutely the core of everything that she was, did, thought about, and all the rest, that I think everything was measured by that and how things were going. She was upset about the last book, at least we talked every week so that's what I'm remembering. She thought it was [inaudible] and she could not understand why it was [inaudible]. And I would say, "Well, one of the reasons it's not being accepted is that poetry generally isn't being accepted these days. Publishing is not in a great state. It's very difficult to get something like poetry published."

DMC: I think she worried a little bit, in terms of getting your work out there in this country, that she might have, in retrospect, done some damage to her career by being in Mexico for as long as they were. She made that comment to me a couple of times that if you weren't there, if you weren't visible, if you weren't teaching part-time someplace where you would have readings and be running into people at various conventions and so on...What they did was just decamp to Mexico to be writers and only medical and family and there was a visiting relationship but they really didn't inhabit this country for ten years and it was at her...well, the years when a lot of her contemporaries were far more visible in terms of the circuits. I think she felt that in retrospect that might have made some difference. Obviously she didn't at the time or she wouldn't [inaudible].

JMC: I remember—I think it was when they first came back from Mexico or it might have been earlier—she got some fliers out about herself and sent them out to different universities saying she was available to give poetry readings. Maybe that was part of it. And I think she did. She started doing a lot of readings in different places.

DM: One of the things that she would talk to me about when I came to look at her collection of papers was her husband's work. She was always very interested in telling me about Leonard's work and where that was. It's interesting now to hear you talk about her work, when all I ever heard her talk about was Leonard's work. Obviously she talked about her work as well but it was very important to her that I know where those pieces were and how they fit. Can you tell me anything about their writing relationship or how his work may have influenced her, how their partnership may have worked in terms of writing?

DMC: I don't know a lot except that I think that a big strength of their relationship was that they both thought writing was highly important to do and to try to keep doing. When Leonard began to fail in terms of being able to write longer things or even to read in a sustained kind of way, he kept going. He had this little office over at the library for a while that somebody let him use and he would go work. They believed in that together. I think that she felt that their relationship was really bound up in this kind of dual effort. And then of course their age difference and the trajectories of their careers was somewhat different. I know what you're talking about. Especially in these last couple of years it seemed to bother her a lot that Leonard was somehow not getting his due or wasn't being recognized in the way that she thought he should be or that his talents warranted. I don't really know what that was all about. I can't go very much further than that except that I know that he admired her work and told me so, and she his, and felt sorry, I think, that his fiction hadn't gone further in terms of creating a reputation.

[inaudible]

PG: I know something about that. I know, because we lived in the same town and we were so constantly in each other's presence I know more about the first marriage. A thing that always amused me about the first marriage, really, was Victor was a mathematician and a scientist of sorts too, interested in astronomy. But Patsy insists that he was really an artist and she was constantly pressing him to do little sculptures or something of that sort. So even in those years, art was what was really significant and a whole lot more important than mathematics or something of that sort, you know. She wanted him known also.

JMC: He did wood sculptures and clay.

PG: He did. But I don't think he did a thing after they, you know, so I think it was Patty's real insistence.

DMC: But now on the other hand, a fair amount of her work had a lot of physics and math references in it and I always got the sense that she wanted to be at least knowledgeable. She was interested in that realm and wanted to say important things through it. I always liked her work best when it stayed more away from science, but that's just aesthetics and individual taste, I think. But she read a lot about physics and the workings of the mind and astronomy.

JMC: She was really interested in astrophysics.

PG: I know. I always thought that was interesting. I think that it grew more significantly in her life as she moved away from religion. The more she moved away from her Roman Catholicism and away from religion, science became a more significant thing.

DMC: Yeah, well, and she wrote something recently, her statement on spirituality and it's interesting where she arrived, this sort of [inaudible] more of the science realm but it blended a lot.

JMC: You were saying that as she moved away from religious orientation she was out in Ohio? She was still religiously oriented?

PG: No, no. But we talked a great deal about it. And she was more—I don't even know how to put this—she was more willing to participate in religious thought than she was subsequently. We would talk about various kinds of things and she, I think, was more willing to consider that it was a possibility.

DM: Were your parents practicing Catholics?

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

[Tape 2, Side A]

DMC: We were just talking about religion and what role it played in her life and I just asked Jean-Marie whether the McKennas were practicing Catholics when they were growing up.

JMC: Ostensibly. That is I probably think my mother was. My father went with us every Sunday to church but I was aware fairly soon, I think as a young child, that he did not partake of his Easter duty and take Communion. He just attended. He was there and that was it. Whereas mother [inaudible] confession and did Sunday school after and so forth. It didn't play a very big role except that we all did go off to church every Sunday. [inaudible] But he did say at one time, I think when he was growing up he went to so many [inaudible] but he never spoke about it but I get the feeling that he went through that stage and then pretty much gone. Later on, when...I don't know exactly what happened for Patricia, but when she said that she was no longer a practicing Roman Catholic and when I became no longer a practicing Roman Catholic, my mother said, "You girls have shown me the light," and she gave it up. When she was dying, they tried to bring a priest in to give her the last rights and she said, "[inaudible] at all." I suppose she was maybe a little bit under the influence of drugs towards the end but they did bring a priest in and after he had gone she said that his rosary beads reminded her of the toilet pull in the old-fashioned toilet at her house in [inaudible]. Good heavens. Dear me, dear me.

DM: Do you know what caused Patricia to move away from Roman Catholicism or was there some precipitous event or was it a gradual...

JMC: I don't really know. As I say, I can't really remember what happened. I just wasn't aware...We didn't talk about such things.

PG: Her first husband was very anti-religious and that may have had something to do with it. [inaudible] She read a lot in philosophy and she read a lot of things of that sort and so I think that it was a gradual moving away from [inaudible] she felt was no longer very significant in her life. I always, at that time, I was not a Roman Catholic but I did go to church regularly and my husband taught philosophy of religion. Patsy was always sympathetic and certainly always willing to talk about it all and we would talk a great deal about that.

DMC: Then Leonard, in later life, re-embraced the Catholic church. That was something I never knew how that all shook down with them except that he—what year was that when they renewed their vows in the church over here at Christ the King?—and Leonard, I know it was far more important to him to have this Catholic infusion again than obviously it was to her. But she didn't fight it and she didn't ever say anything denigrating about his wish to do so but it didn't seem to mean the same thing to her.

JMC: I always wondered a little bit about that. I found it surprising and I didn't know whether it was Leonard who was sort of...

DMC: It was Leonard, yeah...

PG: I was surprised too. Of course we weren't living closely together. But it really surprised me that they [inaudible]

DM: What year was that, do you remember?

DMC: It was in the mid-eighties, I think. It was maybe about '86, maybe '85 or '86. And she said something once about, oh, you know, that was the equivalent of a Hail Mary for Leonard. He grew closer toward the end and I had conversations with him about religion because I'm interested in religion and was once a practicing Catholic. He liked to talk about it. He didn't have any particular direction in which he was urging me or anything, but it seemed to be him and it was important to him as he got older. I think he actually went to mass.

PG: I think he did too because she talked to me about that and clearly she went with Leonard. It would not have been her choice to go. One of the things she objected to strenuously was the music in the church. She couldn't stand it.

DMC: Hootenany masses.

PG: She really couldn't stand it. She did an awful lot, I think, for him.

DM: I know the choir of course was at the service. So in recent years, just very recently, she joined that choir. There were other things that she was doing, other community things that she was involved in.

PG: She also sang [inaudible] in the symphony chorale.

JMC: She was in two things this spring.

PG: That's right. Joined the Episcopal choir and then she did this. I was just reading those journals. She was very, very, very proud that she could sing and that was because she was not well at all and, by god, [inaudible]

JMC: During that period in the spring was when I was recuperating from this operation and we used to talk every day or every other day on the telephone and she was always telling me about her involvement in the choir and how she had to go out to choir practice and she was obviously enjoying it very much.

PG: I think it reflects the poetry, it reflects the sound of the poems, which was always of prime importance, how the poems sounded, how it moved.

JMC: I think that she was always very much concerned with world events and distressed about what was happening. I remember for the first time the summer when Bobby Kennedy was shot. Something else had happened at that time. Maybe it was when she met Victor. But everything seemed to be coming down from the outside world. Recently she expressed very much distress. Someone brought up at the memorial service how she demonstrated against the first Iraq war. I remember she told me, she said, "You know we'd be out there standing and we'd look and down the street there would be a big van and they'd get cameras out and it was the feds checking up on us [inaudible]"

PG: She went to one of the first marches in Washington.

JMC: Oh yes, I remember that. She went to the "I Have A Dream" speech. Traveled by train all the way to Washington.

PG: She was very socially conscious [inaudible] very important.

JMC: I was telling somebody the other day, when I visited them in Mexico, Victor, when she was there with Victor, we drove back together and we drove all the way to Athens, Ohio.

PG: Did you really? [inaudible] and Patsy?

JMC: Yeah. And we would stop and stay in motels and it was at the time when there was still a good deal of discrimination. It had to be...It was a celebration for my having passed my generals for my Ph.D. so that had to be around '62, I think. We would stop at these motels and there would be a sign that said, "We reserve the right to refuse certain clientele." Patricia immediately knew what that was and she would absolutely refuse to stay in such a place and she would give them a big lecture.

DMC: She has, just living here in the house, which my husband and I have been doing since she died for a couple of reasons that aren't interesting, but we see the mail coming in and she was giving some amount of money to so many different organizations and clearly it was people that weren't hitting her up for the first time. There were probably thirty or forty different groups that she believed in that she was on their mailing list anyway.

JMC: Did you hear about the one where she was solicited for some help by a student, I think an activist student, and she sent her a check for twenty-five dollars. When the check went to the bank, it had been changed into \$2,500. Somehow she straightened it out. You could see changing the figures but how would you change the words?

PG: How would you do that?

JMC: Exactly. Anyway, [inaudible]

DM: What else should we know and record for future generations. Think of people ten, twenty, thirty years from now. Is there anything that you think should be said that might not be found in other venues, in her papers or in other conversations or in her readings, that you would want the future to know about her?

PG: I have early letters from her. It would be right after she left Victor. I haven't yet decided what I'm going to do with those. I'm going to read them over but this brings up the privacy issues again. I'm not altogether sure I want to share that. But I'll read them again and see.

DMC: I keep, in my own classes with my own students, I have a—perhaps this is too dark a feeling—but it's as if books and writing and reading as an organic part of life is becoming less and less that. Even for students who like to read, you know, there are just so many competing media. Their parents didn't perhaps in many cases read very much. So the life, what I would like somebody to go to the archives and find out is that there was a certain kind of way of giving yourself to the written word in the idea that it would carry on. And the idea of a marriage built on that, I think, with Leonard—that that was just central to this marriage—even now strikes me as becoming rarified or quaint or on the verge of extinction. That kind of a life. It took a lot longer after Virginia Woolf and Leonard Woolf for anybody to start saying, you know, there goes that kind of life, but I think that within her lifetime so much has changed around the whole idea of reading and books and writing as central to any life that in her life it happened in the matter of a couple decades, really. I hope I'm not being too...You know, it's obviously key to my life and my work and so on, and I'm hoping that these young people go forth and get joy and satisfaction and amplification out of literature. As it is, of course, Jean-Marie and Pat have been hugely involved in books all their lives. But I just think that her records and Leonard's are going to seem kind of wonderful and strange.

PG: I think that's one of the reasons...You were saying before that when you interviewed her she was constantly talking about Leonard's work and what he did and I think it was precisely that [inaudible] to make absolutely sure that this was a partnership of people who were both literary artists. That it wasn't her [inaudible] alone, it was Leonard who was [inaudible]

DMC: And the life. [inaudible]

JMC: Like my high school seniors who didn't know who Robert Frost was. If it's any consolation to anyone, I'm always amazed when I make these long travels by air. I walk up and down the aisle and I see so many people reading. Another thing that struck me is that someone will have bought a big, hard-bound book. One of my many regrets of the things that one loses as one gets older: I used to walk up and down and I could look and see what they're reading now I have to get down.

DMC: Well I don't mean to sound dire or doomy or that it's all over or anything. I mean, look at her memorial service. These young, vibrant people going forth and it's going to be a big part of

their lives, obviously. But I just think that it will be a record that will seem a little other-worldly, the two of them. Do you think that?

PG: I think that's true all the time. I talk to the children's librarian in Athens, for instance. She tells me that up until age eight or nine, kids are taking thousands of books out every single solitary week and from ten on she barely sees them. They just...They're doing video games, they're involved in television, but they're not reading. I don't know, you know far better than I about things like that, but that's what she said.

DM: Well thank you all very much for doing this interview.

JMC: Well I think we should thank you for doing it too.

DM: Absolutely my pleasure. I feel incredibly privileged to have had just a little bit of time to spend with Patricia and this has been a very special time for me as well, so thank you.

[End of Interview]