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AN INTERVIEW WITH ANNE ROTHOLZ

FOR THE

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Mohammad Athar: This begins an interview with Anne Rotholz on January 7, 2016, in Monroe Township, New Jersey, with Mohammad Athar. Thank you very much for having me today. To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

Anne Rotholz: I was born on April 11, 1932, in County Mayo, Ireland, in a small village called Bonniconlon.

MA: And what were your parents' names?

AR: My father was John and my mother was Catherine.

MA: And do you know anything about their history?

AR: I don't know a lot about their history, because I didn't know my grandmothers. They were dead before I arrived, but they grew up in the same village I grew up in. I do know however that my father's people came from France to Ireland in 1798. They came to help the Irish with The Rising. The Irish people were trying to get their freedom once again. Anyway, it didn't work out and they were defeated, but a few of them, two brothers that they know of, stayed in Mayo and married local women. My former name was Gillard, G-I-L-L-A-R-D, which is a French name.

MA: What was your father's occupation?

AR: My father was a small farmer. So, I grew up in a little farm in Ireland. The ocean was six miles away from us on one side, the mountains four miles away on the other, and the land in between wasn't that good.

MA: And you lived in north western Ireland?

AR: Northwest, that's correct, yes.

MA: What about your mother?

AR: My mother was from the village and she had an Irish name Gilmartin. She was a very interesting woman. I think my father was about ten years older than her, but she was very interested in many things, and she was very good mother. I think quite different from my father though. They were quite different. She was into anything she could get her hands on to read she read, like poetry, literature of any kind. Any magazine that came around the house she had her hands on and she read it. She was also very into history and politics. For a woman in Ireland at that time, that was quite different, but she was. She was also quite psychic we found as children. I don't know if it survived in any of us, but she was, and it was quite genuine. She was just a local woman who got on very well with the others around and everything. It's interesting because when we were kids, I was going to mention that there were about ten families in the village, and in the center of the three or four houses where I grew up, we had a big field, a lovely green field with flowers in the summer and all that. We all played. All the children played together there. There really wasn't a lot of room in houses and we didn't stay in. If it was raining we probably would, but we played there. The thing I was going to say about my mother was

when anybody got a cut or a scrape or anything wrong with them, they went to my mother instead of going to their own mom. Not that it mattered. Their own mothers would have taken care of them, but it was close by, and she was that kind of person. That was her nature, to be caring for others and all that.

MA: Was she involved in any political organizations?

AR: No, no, no. It was just that she knew exactly what was going on in Ireland at the time and there was a lot going on when I was growing up in the late '30s, early '40s. Of course, World War II was going on too and we were affected by that. There was also a lot of political stuff going on in Ireland and she knew all about it. She would read anything she got. I suppose she talked to other people, but more she read about it.

MA: Did your mother tell you any stories of the World War I period?

AR: We knew it. World War I, oh excuse me. I thought you were talking about World War II. No, World War I, I had an uncle who was in World War I. He was in Philadelphia. He died a few years ago. They recently had the 100th anniversary and they had a lot of celebrations, not celebrations, but memorials in Ireland for it, because a lot of Irish people were involved in it. The thing I remembered about him, he must have been in the cavalry, because when he came back he said he felt so bad about leaving his horse. He wasn't thinking about how great it is that I am alive and so many are dead. I'm sure he was thinking that too, but he felt bad he had to leave his horse. So, he was obviously in the cavalry.

MA: He was in the cavalry?

AR: He was, yes.

MA: Did any other relatives serve in World War I?

AR: No.

MA: Before we get into the World War II period, can you talk about the town of Bonniconlon?

AR: Okay. Well, one thing I want to tell you about World War II, was of course we were all affected by the shortages and everything at the end of the war. One distinct memory I have is of sitting by the fire reading. My father would be reading; my mother would be reading, reading by the firelight, because we had no oil. I just remember that distinctly and I remember also at night if we heard an airplane go over, which was very unusual, but if we did, my mother would immediately go and turn all the lights out. They were told not to leave lights on, not to attract them. We had shortages of food of course. We were given coupons to get certain things. If you had a big family you ended up with more coupons and they got more and so on. Of course, growing up in the farm we had the advantage of having food from the farm. It wasn't a big farm and sometimes it was affected by rain or maybe some of the cattle would die or something like that, but we usually had enough to get by on, but things like tea, which the Irish people must have, and other things like that, that was a major problem. Anyway, in some of the larger

families they would kind of trade coupons and that so they could get what they wanted. I never remembered being hungry. We weren't hungry. We assumed that there would always be food there, but we had hard times too. We had times where--I guess the weather or anything else could affect it, but the other thing that I remember about that period was everybody helped everybody else. Like if we had had an excess of milk or something else, butter, whatever, we'd give it to a neighbor who didn't have it, and then, when we didn't have it they would give it to us and so on. It was a very cooperative kind of village. It just worked for everybody.

MA: Was your father's farm asked to give supplies for the war effort such as fresh milk, fresh eggs?

AR: No, no, no. Absolutely not. The only thing my father had to give, this is interesting too. Everybody who had children in the school had to give turf for the fire for the school. Every year you had to give turf. My father would go with his cart of turf and drop it off in the beginning of the year, and then, when the turf supply ran out, we had to take a soa of turf from home and bring it to school. That's different too, isn't it? [laughter] They were good times. They were hard times sometimes, but mostly we were happy. We grew up as a village and we had this major playground, this lovely green field. We gathered there and we'd play all day there. We made up our own games, we solved our own problems. We weren't running home if something happened or this and that, somebody did something else. We solved our own problems there. I think that was a great asset in the sense that it tells you what life is all about. You solve your problems, you find the solutions, and you don't go running looking for help unless you need it. If you really need it it's different.

MA: Just one more question for the World War I period. I read somewhere that the Black and Tans were very involved in the country, that they were actually in your town. I was wondering whether your parents had any stories they told you about that.

AR: Yes. Well, actually they took my father for questioning. The Black and Tans, I don't know if you know the history, that they were prisoners who were in England, and they sent them in Ireland to keep the peace, imagine in quotes, after the uprising in 1916. My mother told me that one day they came to the house. There had been an ambush somewhere locally. They came to the house and they took my father out and they questioned him. He told them that he was cleaning the cow barns and so on. He actually had the traces on his shoes and that's the only reason they let him go. Otherwise, they would have taken him and they had horrific methods of killing people. Believe me, really bad.

MA: This village of Bonniconlon, was it mostly farms?

AR: It was all farms. It was very tiny, but it was a good place to grow up. There were so many advantages. We all played together, we solved our problems and so on. We learned together. We learned to be very observant. We learned what was going on around us. We knew all the flowers, all the birds. We knew when the cuckoo and the corn crake would be expected to come back, like in the spring. We just were in tune with that. We knew where the birds made their nest on the side of the fences. The boys would always have a competition to see who found the most of them in spring. We just knew. We knew the sky, we knew the stars, we knew the Milky

Way. Ireland is far north so we saw the Aurora Borealis all the time as well. All these things fascinated us. We were encouraged to be interested in stuff like that and to be curious about life and everything else. While we didn't often know what was going on, for example, I remember one night one of my older brothers came home and he was white as a ghost. We said, "What happened?" He said, "Every star in the sky is falling." We were familiar with shooting stars, we saw them, and sometimes we would see several in the night, but that must have been a brilliant showing of one of the meteor showers, but we didn't know that, but we did know the sky. The other thing, my father would teach us how to forecast the weather. We knew what the weather would be like and it was interesting. He would look at the mountains and depending on whether the fog was coming in, going out, and so on, he would tell us what the weather was going to be like. The other thing he'd teach us was to listen to the stream. There was a lovely stream that would run by our place. In the summer we would go barefoot and we'd go into there and play in it. Anyway, we would listen to the stream and if we could hear a gurgling way out by the mountains then we were going to have fine weather. It always worked out. [laughter] And Ireland is a very difficult place for weather forecasters, believe me, but the local farmers knew. They knew what to listen for and what to look at and then, they made their forecast based on that.

MA: Did you have any family living in the village also? Any aunts or uncles?

AR: No. I had two that were about three miles away, two aunts, but no other family.

MA: Would the family get together?

AR: Rarely, but they would, because like one of them was five miles away, and that was a distance in those days. It isn't now of course, but in those days it's strange, but if you went out to the mountains, the mountains were about four miles away. The people on the other side of the mountain, we never saw them, but once or twice I went there when I was young. I noticed that they talked totally different from the way we talked in the village, but you learn all those things. It's just an interesting place, but the other thing I want to say about my father when I was growing up, he and my mother both probably went to what would be the equivalent of sixth grade, but my father read like crazy. He was reading all the time, but he was like a genius in mathematics. He was just so good in math. I remember way back he would come home at night and he'd be tired and everything. He had all these puzzles for us. We'd have to sit down and figure them out. That's where I got my love for math and that's why later on I became a math teacher. He could do anything in math and he had very little formal education. They were interested and they wanted us to be curious about stuff, and find out about the world, and to know what was going on. Even though it was a little village, we knew that there was a big world out there. We didn't know a lot of what was going on. We knew about the war and things like that, but a lot of curiosity about what was close to us as well. Of course, living on a farm you are subjected to the cycle of life and so on. That was a whole other thing for us.

MA: Do you know how your parents met?

AR: It was a match I believe. There were matchmakers in Ireland in those days. I don't know the details of it, but I know it was a match. They were well suited. Except my mother was much

more, what should I say. I don't want to say refined, that's not quite what I mean, but she was more into culture and stuff like that. My father was a real farmer, but he was also into the math stuff and that. So, they were a good balance for each other. He was ten years older than she was. I may have said that before.

MA: Did you have any siblings?

AR: I had seven brothers and three sisters. Two of them died. They were all older. The three girls came at the end of the family. My mother had a girl before. I think her third child was a girl, but she died from diphtheria I think, and then, the little boy died from the flu in the flu epidemic. The girls were at the end of the family. We benefitted by that too, because my brothers were gone off making money and all that, and they'd send it back. That's how we got to school and did things like that. We got to the secondary school where we had to pay for the schooling.

MA: Talk about the school and your experience.

AR: Okay, well, first of all the school I went to was a mile away. This was the elementary school. That is so important, because it gave me the foundation for the rest of my life. Anyway, we walked there, a mile there every day and the thing that I thought was interesting was that as you went to school the older people in the village would refer to us as the scholars. That was such a nice way of putting it. They didn't have the chance to go to school and they were delighted that we did, and then, all of the sudden we got this lovely title of being the scholars. We didn't pay much attention to it then, but looking back now I think that was just a very nice gesture of them. Not that we were all the scholars that they thought we were. We worked in school. I went to school and in school we had a very fine grounding in math and languages. We had to learn Gaelic. We had to speak Gaelic in school. Writing and reading of course. We were reading before we went to school, so it didn't matter. We got a very, very good foundation. We didn't have things like science. If we did my brother would have known what was going on with the meteor shower. We didn't have science, but we knew a lot about life just from living on the farm, observing the mountains. All that stuff, we knew a lot. We knew how to read going to school, but we learned--mathematics was like drummed into us. Of course, that wasn't a problem for us either, because we had that at home. Writing was emphasized too, good construction, good composition. Every day we had to write a composition about something or other. That's so valuable. Today people can't do that, can't put two sentences together, some of the kids. We had a very good foundation. Then, we learned other things. We learned how to knit socks and to knit sweaters, because that was important to us. We didn't have a lot of those. We only had what we needed to survive in terms of clothing and stuff like that. Then, there were hand me downs of course and in summer we didn't wear our shoes, because we were keeping them for the next winter. They didn't realize how big our feet could get in the meantime. Anyway, the thing about that was once the first day of May came everybody got rid of their shoes. We loved it. We loved going around barefoot. We did learn how to make socks, we learned how to make sweaters, and we learned how to make scarves and hats and stuff like that. It was a plus for us. The interesting thing was, people might laugh at it, but we might be sitting there doing history. We had history and geography big time as well. There would be a history

or geography lesson, the teacher would be at the board, and we had to be knitting at the same time at our desk. [laughter] Interesting way to learn, but it was, and it worked for us.

MA: Now was this a school house or a bigger building?

AR: It was a school house. There were just kids. There were maybe thirty girls in like a parish. There would be maybe six villages in the parish. So, there would be about thirty girls and maybe the same number of boys, and their school was attached. There was a big wall. We called it the great wall in between the two. [laughter] Everything worked fine until they were playing football or something, and the ball came over into the girl's yard, and they wouldn't give it back to them. We had all kinds of fights over those things, but they weren't major either. It was attached. We had two women teachers, and then, for the boys, they had a man and a woman. There was no such thing as you had to have a lady teacher. You didn't. Whoever you got you took and you hoped they were good. The ones I had were really good. They were strict. We got an odd swipe of the cane as they called it. Not much, but enough to know that it was there. I suppose it didn't hurt us. Today you can't do that.

MA: And the classes were also separated by boys and girls.

AR: The schools were separate for girls and boys. The classes were separated like what they called infants, which would be the equivalent of kindergarten here. Kindergarten to third grade, and then, fourth to eighth. We were going to eighth by the time I got to school.

MA: Was that the only contact with people you had outside of your village, or had you gone to other parts of Ireland at any time?

AR: I didn't go to other parts of Ireland until I was about maybe seven or eight or ten years old maybe. We went not that far though for a good while. Then, eventually we went to Dublin and places like that. In those days there were no cars. If we heard a car coming it was most unusual. We could usually tell whose it was it because of the sound of it. We had the same thing in the village. You knew every dogs bark. You knew the donkey's bray. We were taught to be so observant of things. We just learned it from each other. I don't know. It was a whole different world.

MA: Were there established roads between the villages or were they just simple roads?

AR: There was one road. There was one main road, but then, there were what they call the side roads. For us, we had to cross the stream. It wasn't a huge one, but when it flooded it was pretty bad. So, they built like a wooden bridge over it just to walk across.

MA: Are there any memories from your time in school that stick out to you?

AR: I have loads of memories from school. I don't know. The thing was I was never uncomfortable in school. I liked it. Maybe I enjoyed learning, but I wasn't crazy about it. They didn't give us major homework, because we didn't have most of the time, in the early years anyway, we didn't have oil for the lamps. We were working by firelight. I remember everybody

was kind of pleasant and we helped each other. A little bit like we did in the village. I just enjoyed learning and I enjoyed learning the Irish language, because I didn't have it before that. Now my grandparents would have spoken Gaelic, but my father and mother, no. They were brought up with the English language. I enjoyed that and I enjoyed the arithmetic. We also had singing as well. I liked that. We didn't know any other kind of music, but we just had fun. School was never a chore for me anyway.

MA: Was religion very important to your family?

AR: Yes, it was. It was important to everybody in Ireland at that time. Everybody went to church and listened to whatever we were supposed to hear and so on. I didn't always agree then, but you didn't say it in those days. Yes, it was. Also, of course the church ran the school. The local pastor was the principal of the school, still is, which is interesting, but they're working on changing that now. Religion was important and at night we'd pray together and that kind of thing. My mother was a religious person.

MA: You said the church was a mile away from your home?

AR: Yes, by the school.

MA: Did you get to the church often besides school?

AR: Only once a week. Maybe if there was something special going on, but we just went to mass on Sunday. We were all Catholics in the area.

MA: Around this time we have the Depression and I was wondering how that affected your family as farmers, if it did.

AR: Yes, well, I was born right after the Depression. It didn't really, because you have to understand the Depression was mostly here in the U.S. I know that some of it was worldwide. We were isolated in Ireland at that time. We had our farm and as long as we had the farm we could get the basic food that we needed. We didn't have money. Nobody had money. That wasn't the thing. It didn't really affect us, no. I do remember my aunts. I had two aunts that came to this country and they'd send us packages at Christmas, warm sweaters. We loved those, but other than that we didn't get any help really.

MA: What year did you enter high school or the equivalent of high school?

AR: Good question. Let's see. Probably around '37, '38. Oh, elementary school or high school?

MA: High school.

AR: Oh, high school. No, no, no. Let's see. … It would be maybe '38. No, it couldn't have been. My mathematics isn't working today. I would say maybe about '47.

MA: So, you entered high school after the war.

AR: Oh, yes.

MA: Talk about the war, when it broke out. For Britain and Ireland it was probably around '39 when it started.

AR: Well, Ireland was never really involved in the war. They were supposed to have been. There are all these stories that are still going around, I've even heard them here, that Ireland supplied ships, the German ships. They gave them fuel and all that, they came into port. Those stories are not true at all. They're not. Ireland remained neutral. That was the big thing. They were neutral and they were constantly trying to drag them into the war. England was constantly putting pressure on them. For other reasons too there was pressure. They never did. The war was--the north of Ireland was still under English rule, and they were involved in it. They were getting bombed and everything. Toward the end of the war Dublin was bombed about three times and it was supposed to have been a mistake and they were apologizing and everything. They thought it was like pressure for Ireland to get involved in it, but they never got involved. They stayed neutral. Ireland was affected in the sense that my brothers joined security forces for Ireland. They were like voluntary things. They weren't soldiers or anything. They were supposed to take care of the villages if anything happened and so on, but we never got to that point. Just Dublin, Dublin did get bombed.

MA: You were young for the time, but do you remember any feelings in your village or your area where people wanted to join the war, or they wanted Ireland to join the war?

AR: No, it really wasn't an issue for us there. It wasn't. It was kind of removed from us and we kept up with news on it. We weren't in on all of the details of it. It just never became an issue, at least where I was in rural Ireland. It wasn't. We knew what was going and we knew terrible things were happening, but I suppose we were young. We were interested in what was going on around us more than anything else.

MA: You mentioned before that you had food shortages. Was that a result of the war?

AR: That would be right at the end of the war, the years following, yes, but it was like the food that came to us, like tea, for example. Sugar too. They had beet factories in Ireland and they did have sugar most of the time. Flour, I remember. The flour was very dark. They didn't take the whatever out of it, the good stuff out if it, the bran and so on. So, it was very dark at the time. I remember the women would get these things and get all these sieves, and they'd put it through and make it white again. [laughter] They had their ways of taking care of problems like that. Of course, the men were going crazy, because there were no cigarettes or tobacco. I remember my father, he smoked a pipe so he was in a bad mood when he didn't have it, but then they found a plant that grew locally. They called it Ainne. I don't know what the right term is for it. They used that. They dried that and they began using that as tobacco, but it was a poor substitute, I can tell you. [laughter]

MA: In this period, let's say '42 to '45, were you mostly just helping on the farm or did you have any other odd jobs?

AR: Well, I went to high school. I did tend the farm. I never worked except on the farm. I never took a job in Ireland. I hope I have my dates right, give me one minute.

MA: No problem.

AR: … And I was young then too. I would be too young to do anything. Nobody worked. The only thing I remember was my brothers coming home in uniform one evening. They had joined the Civil Defense Forces. They were working on the farm and a couple of them were in England at that time too. So, they had a more firsthand experience of how a country suffers when they are at war. Really in Ireland, again, maybe because of my age, I was unaware of a lot of the things that were going on, but we knew what was going on.

MA: Were your brothers forced into the military?

AR: No, no, no. This was like a civil defense thing they began in Ireland in case they had to go to war. It was to defend the local areas and so on. They were in uniform and they loved them. They thought it was great. It's a different thing in regular wars. Nothing ever happened really that caused them to have to do anything. I remember they were big on theatrics, even in rural Ireland. They would have plays every year and all that. Local companies would come in and they would put on plays and all. I remember one night, whatever play they had on, they had fired shots during the play. Everybody got so uptight, because they thought the war had come to us. [laughter] That was the closest we ever got to anything like that.

MA: That reminds me of a question I wanted to ask earlier. In your village, I was reading up that there is an annual festival in the village every year.

AR: There is now.

MA: There is now. It was not there back then?

AR: No, not then. It was beginning. They were talking about it when I left Ireland, but now there is. Actually, they have an agricultural show that's one of the biggest in Ireland. It's really good. They have all the produce and homemade things, all the cattle, the dogs, the horses. They have horse jumping. It's a big event. As a matter a fact, I had helped start that when I was there.

MA: Oh, wow.

AR: My brothers and I were involved in the very first one they had and it was small then. We had fun, but now it's grown into a really big one.

MA: Talk about going into high school. You went to St. Mary's in Ballina?

AR: Yes, St. Mary's. It wasn't a shocker. It was different from the rural school I was in, but I really liked it. My parents always told me it was an opportunity to get an education and so on. I appreciated it as that. I think I mentioned before that we had to pay for high school, because it

wasn't in the town, the local town. It was a Catholic high school run by nuns, but they had other teachers there, but my brothers paid for me. That's the reason I was able to go. My mother and my father, both of them were insistent that we go to school, get as much schooling as we could, the girls at the end. So, we were fortunate that we were at the end of the family, not at the beginning. Anyway, when I went there it was different from the elementary school I was in, but it was just as strict about learning. They had a lot of new things, like we did languages. I don't know if I mentioned this. They didn't do science in the elementary school and they didn't have science in the high school, the secondary school at that time either, but we had, again, mathematics. It was the equivalent of college mathematics here, what we had there. There were fantastic women teachers and they were just wonderful. Of course, I like math so that helped that. We also studied literature. We studied Shakespeare. One of the things we had to do, it would blow anybody's mind today I suppose. We had to memorize a Shakespearian play.

MA: Wow.

AR: I memorized *The Merchant of Venice*. Today some of the passages will come back to me. I was thinking why do we have to do that? It was good discipline. I think that was the reason they did it. It's amazing, but everybody did it. You had no choice if you wanted to pass. The languages too. I took Latin and I also took French, and then, Gaelic, of course, I pursued. I really got very good at the Irish language. I used to write very well in it too. My teachers always told me I wrote well in Irish. The emphasis again was on mathematics, writing and reading, and literature and so on, but a very solid education. There was no fooling around there. We had our good times when the teacher was turned to the board and that kind of thing, but there was no fooling around. You got your homework and you did it and you didn't question it and so on. Now I had to go six miles away to school, which meant I went on a bicycle every day. All my friends did too. If the winter was really harsh my parents would somehow scrape enough money together to let me board in town some place, just the heart of winter maybe, one or two months, but other than that it was a six-mile trek in the morning and six miles in the afternoon. So, anything I got in the high school I really appreciated. It was good.

MA: What town was the high school located in?

AR: It was in Ballina which is six miles away from where I lived.

MA: So, you would have to get up pretty early in the morning?

AR: You bet. [laughter] It was fine when there was plenty of light. Of course, in Ireland there is light most of the year, because they are so far north, but in the middle of winter its dark until about eight o'clock in the morning. We were up and we'd have to be on the road by eight. We were young. We didn't mind that stuff then and it made us hardy and everything else for later on in life.

MA: This high school, was it run by nuns also?

AR: It was run by nuns, but most of the teachers were not nuns, they were lay teachers. They were excellent teachers. They were just good. Most of them were women. They had a couple of

men. The girls and boys were separated. The boys were in what they called the college there. They had the men teachers and some priests. They were all girls where I went to school. We never paid any attention to that. We made our own fun and we had our own troubles and so on, but it was never like a boring thing or anything. It was just a chance to learn. That's what I was taught home in Bonniconlon. You learn. My parents taught us to be curious, taught us to learn about life, to be involved in life, to get out there and see what it's all about and so on, but I was going to say before, I didn't mention it when we were talking about growing up in the field and the playing games and so on. I was going to say I never heard the expression it takes a village to raise a child, but we certainly lived it. [laughter]

MA: One question to follow up on that. Besides your brothers and sisters, were there other kids for you to play with?

AR: Oh, my god, of course. There were nine on one side of us. There were four in the house on the other side. There were six on the other.

MA: Wow.

AR: The place was full of kids. It was. That's why it was like happy and pleasant. Really, I don't remember anybody being sick or anything like that. I mean the old people, yes, they got sick and they died. We were exposed to that. We saw people in their infancy and we saw people get old and die. The same thing on the farm. We learned loads of lessons there that kids wouldn't learn today, but there were loads of kids around and we were the village. Yes. Now, they are different. Some of the parents were more strict, but they weren't really as long as the kids were somewhere around. There was always somebody looking out for us. There were other kids. If something happened and we weren't there they'd miss us. My mother was always concerned we would find our way to the stream, to the river, and then, we'd drown. I don't think anybody could ever drown in that steam. [laughter] In a flood they might, but that was always a concern. Don't go near the river. [laughter]

MA: In high school were you involved in any activities outside of school?

AR: Well, we didn't have a lot going on. The only thing they had, they had basketball. I couldn't do that, because I couldn't be there in the evening and so on. They didn't have clubs and such like they have today, but everything was focused on learning. That's what we were there to do, to learn all the different things.

MA: You said you graduated high school in '52. After you graduated, what did you see yourself doing?

AR: I stayed at home for a while, because they needed me around the house and the farm and so on. I stayed around for a few years, and then, I thought about what I was going to do with my life. So, I decided to join a religious order.

MA: Okay.

AR: So, guess where I ended up? Princeton, New Jersey. I went to the convent there. I suppose because I had nuns in high school too, I was influenced by them, but I put my sights on other countries and so on. That's was I did. I was nineteen years in the convent.

MA: What made you decide to go to a convent in the U.S. as opposed to Ireland?

AR: Well, for one thing--there were two things. Number one would be that in Ireland, and this is true when I hear all the things about scandals and all the rest with priests and all that. In Ireland you couldn't go to like a convent in Ireland or be a priest in Ireland unless you had money. It was kind of reserved for people of money and so on. They got the first shot at it anyway. Let's put it that way. That would be one reason. We didn't have money. Like I said today when I hear about all the carry on with the problems with priests and all that. I said people have to remember that it was all upper class people and that makes a difference. It wasn't like the small farmers' children. They were in Africa. They were at the Philippines. They were in South America. They were the missionary priests. They went and they gave their lives. They got educated in Ireland. Then, they went off to missions. The ones who remained in Ireland had to be able to pay for the schooling in other words. Farmers didn't have that kind of money. I wouldn't have it. So, that was one influence and also the idea that broader horizons. We were taught to be curious about life. So, I was curious.

MA: What motivated you to join this order, this convent?

AR: Oh, right. Well, because there was a lady in my village and I think her sister was in the convent. She would come home and visit and I'd talk to her. It sounded like a good opportunity.

MA: How did you get involved with them?

AR: Well, it was through her that I got to know them.

MA: Okay.

AR: One of my brothers, my second oldest brother, his name was Patrick, who incidentally was in India for about twenty years. He went there with Blackwell Hodge. I don't remember, but, anyway, he worked in heavy equipment. When I was growing up he had two huge books. He taught himself all these things. He set us up with a windmill. Nobody in the world had a windmill at that time in the early '40s. In India he worked on race cars. In his spare time, he would read about engines for racing cars. He was like a genius and he never went past the school in Bonniconlon, but he paid my way to the states. So, I came here with nothing. [laughter]

MA: What did your family think of you going off to the United States?

AR: Well, they weren't upset. They were sad, but not upset about it. At that time, eventually most people in Ireland had to find work elsewhere. They went to England, a few to Australia, mostly the U.S. Some to Canada maybe. It was kind of given a lot of the population is going to leave Ireland.

MA: So, it was an accepted thing?

AR: Yes. My father wasn't too happy. He thought I was doing something crazy. My mother was more religious. She didn't protest it at all.

MA: Did the convent take care of all of your immigration papers and all that?

AR: Oh, no. I took care of it on my own. Yes, absolutely. I went to Dublin and got everything. Did everything, they didn't take care of anything. Like I said, my trip was paid for and everything, and then, there were no fees involved in the convent, because once you go there--it's not easy. I always say I worked three jobs while I was there. I went to school and worked two jobs. [laughter] People sometimes say, "Oh, well you got an education." I really didn't. I got my education in Ireland. I did. I went on. I got a bachelor's and master's here, but I worked on them. At that same time I was actually doing two jobs in the convent.

MA: Can you talk about the trip over?

AR: Oh, the trip over was a disaster. Oh, yes. I came on the *Maasdam*, which was a Dutch ship. I was sick from the minute I left home until I saw the Statue of Liberty. [laughter] That was a disaster. That was my only trip on the ship. I took the plane after that. It was pretty bad. I really didn't leave the room at all hardly. So, I couldn't tell you anything. I just remember seeing the Statue of Liberty. Nowadays there are all kinds of things to give one to not have that experience. I'm not a good sailor anyway. I don't like cruises and stuff like. I think that's why.

MA: How long was the trip?

AR: It was six whole days.

MA: Where did you land?

AR: Hoboken, New Jersey. Isn't that interesting? Everything was different. That's where the Dutch ships came in, Hoboken. As soon as I got off the ship I had to go in the tunnel. Can you imagine the experience of getting into the tunnel to get into New York? That was different. There are tunnels in Ireland now, but in my day there were no tunnels there.

MA: What other things really kind of shocked you when you first came to the U.S. if there were any?

AR: There weren't a lot really. I suppose because I had such a good experience and I wasn't sheltered growing up. I had a good experience growing up and I was mature enough. I got what I was expecting I suppose. Then, of course, how can I put it? The discipline is different. You had to observe times of quiet and times silence. It was rigid for me compared to my life in Ireland. It was very rigid. You go to bed at such a time. You get up at such a time, but I accepted it. I got used to it for the time being anyway. It was different.

MA: After you got here you immediately went to the convent?

AR: No, I went to my relatives in Philadelphia for a month.

MA: Okay.

AR: I had aunts and uncles and brothers. At that time, I had two brothers in Philadelphia.

MA: When did this family come to the U.S.?

AR: You mean my aunts? They would have come in; I suppose maybe in 1918, 1920.

MA: So, they were already established?

AR: Oh, yes, they were. One of my aunts, actually she's my godmother. She was home the year I was born. She came home for the Eucharistic Congress and she stayed and left when I was born. They were all in Philadelphia.

MA: After that you went to the convent?

AR: I went to the convent then, yes. I spent two-and-a-half years in Princeton, and then, I went out to teach. Not too well prepared I have to say. Well, I was prepared because my life prepared me for it. It was an experience, but it was fun. I went up to a boarding school in Tarrytown, New York, and that was my first experience teaching. They were nice. They were little kids, maybe second or third graders. It was nice.

MA: Were there any memorable experiences you had there?

AR: Plenty. [laughter] One thing I remember, only because it was Christmas. I was saying to somebody recently, the first Christmas we were there. Christmas Eve I have this sixteen-year-old from across the mountain with me who was there with maybe five or six other Irish kids I called them because they were. On Christmas Eve they tried to make it nice for us and they had a little feast and all that. They played "Christmas in Killarney." Can you imagine what that did for a bunch of kids just over from Ireland? We were all weeping and wailing and everything else. [laughter] I don't know. I found it difficult like this. It was a bit rigid, but I knew that it wasn't going to last. So, I put up with it. Let's put it that way. It was a good experience. I think again my life had taught me that there were certain things you have to do and so on, and I did it.

MA: What was a typical day like at this convent in Princeton?

AR: Oh, my god. You don't want to know. [laughter] We got up at five am. That was different, and then, we would go to pray and mediate at about 5:30, and we'd be there, have mass at about seven o'clock. Then, we had breakfast, and then, we had chores to do, cleaning. I can imagine it now. I think it's funny. We were always cleaning things that were clean already. [laughter] People look at my house and I say, look, I spent enough years cleaning things that were clean. That's what it was. You had to do it because you were supposed to do it. We did. The other

thing I remember distinctly about it was everybody had to kind of be the same. You had to eat what they gave you to eat and so on. I gained like twenty pounds in the first year I was there. [laughter] That's a slight exaggeration, but not much. We had good times. We made our own good times. We'd go for walks in the woods behind Princeton. It's a beautiful place. We'd find all these different places to go and all that. Of course, we were always supervised. We didn't go on our own. That was the mentality in those days. I remember at night we slept in the dormitory. It was a new place, a new building. Actually, it sold recently for a load of money. I remember next to me was a sixteen-year-old from Ireland and she cried all night. [laughter] But after two and half years I got out of there.

MA: Was it mostly Irish immigrants who were at this convent?

AR: No, this was a French group, mind you.

MA: Oh, okay.

AR: Oh, yes. They thought the Irish were very impertinent or something. It was absurd the things we were supposed to do. We liked fun. They were very, how can I put this, somber maybe, that's the only word. They meant well and all that. I don't think they were too highly educated even, most of them. I did things like the laundry, the cooking and that.

MA: And you said you worked in your convent years? Did you work in any other jobs while you were at Princeton?

AR: Well, I did later on. They had a junior college there. I taught there. I was in charge of the new entrants, the new people who came. I remember that was a bit of a challenge. It was fun. It was hard, because I wasn't into all this control and all that. I remember one of the things that I really took a stand on. We got mail from Ireland. They always opened the mail and I said I'm never opening anybody else's mail. I didn't. I never did. I said they can take the job away if they want and I never did. I suppose that came from Ireland and all that.

MA: Were you able to keep in touch with your family in Ireland?

AR: We were allowed two letters a month. Of course, then it was all letters. You wouldn't put in a phone call. Forget it at that point. I remember once they said, "Oh, you're writing far too many letters." Right after they admonished me for that, I got a letter from my mother saying we haven't heard from you in ages. Then, they said, "Write home. Write home." [laughter] It is funny when you look back, it really is.

MA: After the convent in Princeton you said you went to work in Tarrytown?

AR: It was a boarding school in Tarrytown. The French Benevolent Society ran it. I don't think it exists anymore. Right by the Tappan Zee Bridge. Matter a fact I saw the Tappan Zee, the building part of that. Actually, I saw all the Verrazano being built, because I was in Staten Island at that point and I went over to Fordham every Saturday. Every Saturday there was a bit more of the Verrazano, but Tarrytown was nice. It was a boarding school and the kids were all

from New York. For one reason or other they couldn't be home. They were nice kids. It was a nice experience. It was a beautiful place. They had a big building and they had like a veranda on it. They could go out and watch the traffic going over the bridge. It was all covered with wisteria, that purple plant. I always think about that. It was a nice place.

MA: How did you get this job in Tarrytown?

AR: I was told to go there. That's what they do in the convent.

MA: Oh, so you were assigned.

AR: You do this. You're assigned that. You don't say I wouldn't like to do that. [laughter] You just go.

MA: Did you live in Tarrytown?

AR: Yes. I lived in Tarrytown. I did. I lived right in the school. They had an adjoining building for everybody.

MA: What was teaching in that school like?

AR: Well, it was different. I loved the kids, that was no problem or anything, but it was new for me too. It was a different culture to begin with, but it was fine. It worked out fine. I remember one of my friends, she was sent somewhere in Old Bridge or something to another school to teach. I remember her saying, "I didn't know the money and I had to collect lunch money." She said, "I was smart. I got one of the kids to collect it for me." I said good for her. There were a lot of new things, but they weren't new to me. I was used to adapting. That's another thing they taught us in Ireland. Wherever you are, you have to make the best of it and adapt.

MA: So, for you it was not too difficult.

AR: It wasn't really. It wasn't.

MA: How long were you at this Tarrytown school?

AR: You're asking me questions. I think a year-and-a-half to two years I would say.

MA: Where did you go after?

AR: I went to Staten Island of all places. [laughter] There's a big building if you go over the Outer Bridge. There's a huge building there. It's a Jewish something now, rabbinical school now. They had this big building or something, St. Louis Academy, and that's where I was then.

MA: You were also assigned there by the convent?

AR: Also assigned there, yes. I taught in the elementary school, maybe fourth, fifth grade for maybe one or two years. Then, I went into the math department and just taught math from there on.

MA: Were you always being shifted from school to school or was that a program they had at the convent?

AR: Well, it was at the whim of whoever was in charge. Princeton, the Powers that Be we called them. I won't tell you what we called them. [laughter] But it was fine. We knew that was what we had to do and we did it. We laughed about it sometimes. Other times we cried about it, but we did it anyway.

MA: You said you were going to Fordham. Was this when you were in Staten Island that you would take classes?

AR: Yes, right. I went every week, went part-time, got my bachelor's part-time. Really it was no challenge to me, most of what I had in Fordham, except the education courses. I had that in my head already. I had a load of that stuff in Ireland, but I did, I got my bachelor's there.

MA: Was this mostly night classes or were you going on your time off?

AR: Saturdays and summers. Don't ask me how many years it took me, but it took a few years.

MA: How was going to Fordham like for you?

AR: It was fine. Of course, a lot of the people going would be in the same position I was in, because they would only be going on Saturdays, maybe summers, but there were other people there too. I found like nothing terribly challenging. Nothing I couldn't do, let's put it that way. I did enjoy. We had other things to do. I was teaching at the same time and it was a bit of a chore in that sense. It would have been easier if I had been doing it full-time. I think. Maybe it wouldn't. I'd have been more bored. [laughter]

MA: How did you pay for your tuition?

AR: That was paid by the convent.

MA: That was paid by the convent, okay.

AR: But, people will tell me today, "Oh, you got an education in the convent." I say I paid for everything I got in the convent. I worked two jobs the whole time I was there. I was working and I was teaching, and we had other household chores we had to do, and that was the equivalent of another job. I say well, look, I didn't get anything for free. I worked for everything I got and I appreciate it, but I worked at it.

MA: So, at the convent you had to pay your way while you were there?

AR: Well, you had to work. I was teaching the whole time and I was doing other household assignments that we got.

MA: You mentioned these other two jobs you were doing.

AR: They were both in the convent.

MA: Okay.

AR: They were teaching and household chores. The household chores weren't a job; it was the equivalent. Maybe that's stretching the point, but it was.

MA: After you finished your undergraduate years, did you go straight to graduate school at Fordham?

AR: No, I didn't. Well, maybe the next year, but, then, I got sent back to Princeton from Staten Island, because I was put in charge of the younger nuns, the young nuns who were still being, as the old term was, formed there. I was in charge of them for a couple of years. That's when I would go to Princeton, go on the bus, go up to Fordham, the campus in the Bronx. Then, there was a convent in Tarrytown where I would stay the night there, come back to Fordham the next day, and then, back to Princeton. It was all right. It was another adventure.

MA: So, you are going to Fordham and you are doing this work at the convent. Was it mostly going to a bunch of schools, doing that kind of work until you left the convent?

AR: Well, I was in Princeton. I've lost track of it.

MA: That is fine.

AR: It was a while ago. For about three years I think. Then, I was up in Holmdel. Actually, it was Hazlet. I was school principal there for maybe four or five years. By this time, I was getting a bit antsy and things were changing. In the seventies a lot of things changed and a lot of people who went in the convent left around that time and I began to think about it and I did. Eventually I left. I was nineteen years in there though.

MA: In your early life in the convent, did you have contact with other Irish people? Did you have a community of Irish with you?

AR: We did. It wasn't encouraged, but we had our own contacts. There were a lot of the ones I was there with from Ireland. Quite a few from Belfast, which was interesting. It was a whole other different culture from Mayo. It might be a different country, which it was really at the time. There were many nuns from other places in Ireland too. We were not encouraged to be cliquey or clannish or anything like that. We were anyway. That was the problem. [laughter] I should remember that this is all being taped.

MA: We can always go back and take things out.

AR: No, it's all right.

MA: While you were in the U.S., were you following any news of what was going on in Ireland?

AR: Not a lot. We didn't even follow what was going on here. We got evening news maybe. We were allowed to look at Laurence Welk once a week. Of course, when I was in Staten Island we would see more news and more TV and that kind of thing. Not a lot, yes. The news you got from Ireland I would get from my brothers in Philadelphia or from letters from Ireland. Like in those days you couldn't even make a phone call to Ireland. Even five years later, if I wanted to call Ireland, I had to go to the post office, book a call, come back when they told me I could make the call. Then, call Ireland. Be sure that my sister and brother-in-law were waiting on the other end. Then, of course, Ireland being what it is, the postmaster would be listening in. [laughter] We used to kid about that. Now, I have Vonage. I can call Ireland twenty times a day. I do call and talk to my sister about half an hour every day. Those times were different.

MA: When did you meet your husband?

AR: Let's see. What year? I was nineteen years in the convent so that means I left in '73. Is that math right?

MA: I think so.

AR: So, I think I met him around '78.

MA: How did you meet him?

AR: I went with friends to an event in Princeton and I met him there, very informal. [laughter] It just happened.

MA: He was in the military?

AR: He was in the Navy, yes, very interesting. He was in World War II. He had to fly over, I don't know, the two bombs they dropped. I think Nagasaki. He had to fly over that the day after the bomb was dropped to determine what the damage was and so on. He would never talk about it. He wouldn't, no. The most he would ever say was, I don't want to think about it, which made me realize how horrible it was too.

MA: How was your wedding? Did you have family there? Was it small?

AR: Oh, no. He was a widower and he had two kids. They were the nicest kids. I was just with one of them, well, both of them really in California for Christmas. Anyway, we were married in a little church. I think the church isn't there anymore. It's about six or seven miles from here. Little church in the side of the hill, but they've replaced it now with a new one. We had a reception here in Rossmoor in the clubhouse. We had family from Philadelphia. Nobody came

from Ireland for it, and then, other friends I met along the way. It was nice. It was fun. Then, we went to Ireland for our honeymoon. So, he got an introduction to Ireland. He was back there about ten times later. I go every year for about month.

MA: Was he still in the military when you married?

AR: He was retired.

MA: When did you get your citizenship for the U.S.?

AR: Oh, I couldn't tell you the exact year in that. It would have been maybe in the '60s sometime anyway. I distinctly remember the day. I had to go to Brooklyn to get it. I don't know why. I got there and we were late and they had just finished. The nun who took me was very persuasive and she persuaded the judge to do me by myself. [laughter] I always have stories about everything, but it was interesting, but it was in Brooklyn. I don't know why we went there.

MA: Do you remember what the process was to get citizenship?

AR: I don't exactly--do you mean on that day?

MA: Yes.

AR: We were late so I had my own private ceremony. All I had to do was raise my hand. I missed the rest of it because it was over, but it was very nice of them to do it for me really.

MA: After you leave the convent, did you go to Spotswood High? Was that your first job after?

AR: No, I actually worked for the Diocese of Trenton in their adult education for a while, and then, I started a senior citizen place in Trenton for them as well. They were starting a thing for the seniors, the Diocese again. I was in that for a while as well, and then, I went to Spotswood.

MA: What was it like teaching there in Spotswood?

AR: It was fun. It was a challenge. I actually went there, because I had two friends who were there. One of them was the principal. I said, "Do you have any jobs available?" She said they had a math teacher who was going to be out long term. So, they gave me the job for the rest of the year. At the end of the year I got the job. I loved it. I really did. At the end of my teaching there everything was changing. I found the kids; I still really liked the kids. They were good, but things are different in all schools now. It was getting so that the teachers weren't supported the way they should be. You know how things change. The parents, yes, anything the parents said. My experience at the end was if you gave the child an A you were the best teacher in the world. If you taught them something and they didn't get the A that was a different story. Like everything else you accept that. You know where it's coming from, but I always felt bad. I always wanted to give them so much and they were good. The kids were really good. I remember one of the things. They would come across a word in class, any word. I would say, what does that word mean? Nobody knew and I didn't know. Then, I would say to one of the

kids, off to the library and find out what it is. Anyway, the kid would go off and come back half an hour later and tell us what they word meant. It happened a few times, and then, I realized that if twenty hands went up in the class to find the meaning of the word. Then, ah, you want to get out of class. That's what it is. It was fun, stuff like that. They were nice. They were good kids. Some of them were from Helmetta, which is the old tobacco. They are making apartments there now. Their fathers all worked there. They had kind of a different mentality. They were very nice kids. They all had a home by the shore, which was interesting. Then, there was another group from Milltown which is another district and they were a bit more affluent. That town was built by the tire company, Michelin. My step-daughter worked for them. I should know. Anyway, they were unlike the others. Then, the Spotswood kids were different again. So, you were dealing with three different sets of kids. They were nice. I had a good experience teaching and I got along. I learned to get along with them. You have to. I had fun a lot of the time. The last year with what was happening was different, I don't know what it's like now. You weren't getting the support. Something happened and you went to the guidance counselors and it was always the teacher's fault. I didn't do something right or I was going too fast for this one. I remember once them saying you're going too fast. I said if I was going any slower I'd be going backwards. That kind of thing, because it was at the point the kids were just not into studying the way we studied anyway, and doing the work and so on. I'm sure they all did fine. It was do the least possible. I used to think, I'd say to them sometimes, "Don't you remember what we did a week ago, two weeks ago? What we are doing today is building on that." They would reply, "How do you expect me to remember what I did two weeks ago?" And I thought they should have had to memorize a Shakespearean play at one time.

MA: Is that how you would say the school system kind of changed? You were there for twenty-five years.

AR: It changed. I'm not critical, because it happened all over. It was like that everywhere. Everything's changing and that was just a reflection of what was going on. There wasn't the support that a teacher needs. Like there were times when you do need support simply to teach. You can't say you don't have to do this or have to do that. It's okay … You get an A if you didn't do this. You can't do that. I don't think you can do that and have a good education. It's not my experience. Maybe it happens, I don't know.

MA: Where were you living when you were teaching at Spotswood?

AR: I was living here in Rossmoor. It was only twenty-minute ride. It was a comfortable ride except in the snow and ice.

MA: Before you become the principal at St. Benedicts, Hazlet, were you involved with any civic groups or charitable organizations?

AR: No. When I was there it would only be the teachers. We never did anything there. Since I'm here, I'm involved in lots of things. We didn't really have the time for stuff like that. It was a long day teaching. When I was principal I was a teaching principal too.

MA: How was your experience as a principal in Hazlet?

AR: I liked it. I don't know. I just liked the people there. I loved the kids. The funny things that happen from time to time. One day a teacher brought me a kid and he had his fist closed tight. "Show the principal what you have in your hand." The poor little kid, he was only this high. He opened it up and there was a centerfold from Playboy. [laughter] I just laughed. We were both laughing. He knew he shouldn't have it. The look on his face, he knew he shouldn't have it. Things happened. There were nice things and there were sad things too. Like a mother one day hitting her child in front of me. At that time, you didn't report them. Now I would. I let her know what I thought.

MA: How many years were you at Hazlet?

AR: I should have made a map of my life before you came. [laughter] I would say about three or four would be the general thing, and then, you'd be moved around.

MA: You said you also taught while you were also a principal.

AR: I did part of the time.

MA: Part of the time.

AR: I didn't do it the whole three years because the school was too big.

MA: Are there any other experiences you had as principal that you want to share?

AR: Do I remember that long ago now? I just liked it. I liked the kids and the teachers were a good bunch. We had fun. There were no major incidents. They had a nice parents group. They were very supportive and all that. Just a nice experience from what I remember. Maybe I'm having selective memory. [laughter]

MA: Did you ever visit Ireland in this time, let's say from 1960?

AR: I did. I went when my father died. I don't remember the year now. I went then. After I left the convent, I have gone every year since. I go for about a month. Maybe the month of September. Go back to my roots.

MA: Do you go back to the same village?

AR: I do. My sister's married. She's a teacher also. She got her master's in Ireland. She was teaching. She's an excellent teacher, better than I was. I always admired her, because everything from the world outside was in her classroom. She had birds' nests and the kids were looking for them. She just taught them so much.

MA: How has the village changed since you used to be there?

AR: Sad. There are only like five families left in it now. It's sad. The house where I grew up is empty. It's up for sale now.

MA: But it is still there?

AR: It's still there. I heard somebody bought it. I hope it's true. It'd be nice if people lived in it. My sister has a nice house about a mile away on the main road. It's nice and the little stream is still there and the bog is still there. That's another thing when we were growing up. I didn't mention this. We had our chores to do as well. We helped on the farm. We helped plant the potatoes in springtime and we picked them in October, and the weather would be so cold. It would be freezing. We worked on the bog. We had to get the turf for the winter. We'd help bend the turf and dry it and all that. We had our chores like that, but they weren't full-time. It was only in season. The rest of the time we played.

MA: So, it has not changed much since you were there?

AR: Oh, yes, it has.

MA: Oh, it has.

AR: Now I was just saying this to somebody the other day. The biggest change was about twenty years ago I was there. I went to visit the bog. My brother-in-law had turf there. He's here like this. You know how they had the turf banks and they cut the turf out. The turf bank next to him, there is a man there and he has his cellphone to his ear. I said, "Oh, my god. See how the world has changed." This is before cell phones were that popular even here. There he was with his cell phone in the bog. I said oh my god. Talk about how the world has changed.

MA: So, when did you come to the community here in Rossmoor?

AR: '79.

MA: '79. You have been here for a while.

AR: A long time. I'm one of the longest residing members here at the moment.

MA: How have you seen this community change?

AR: Oh, this changed a lot, a lot. When I came here it was a very exclusive community. It was built that way. People were always very nice. They were always good neighbors and nice. You know you have your twenty-five-mile speed limit sign and everybody does twenty-five miles. They had all these nice parties at Christmas and all that. It was kind of exclusive, but now some houses are empty there and a lot of rental places here. Like next door is a rental place. Things are not--its fine for me. I am happy. I keep my place nicely and I have nice friends here.

MA: Were you living here your whole time here?

AR: Yes, except when I go back to Ireland for a month. With friends we have done very nice things over the years too. We have Irish celebrations. We also do good things. We did Habitat. We ran an event for them after the flood in New Orleans. We did like a brunch. I thought it was interesting, because we didn't charge anybody to come in. We said just leave a donation and we made close to two thousand dollars on it. We have done a lot of fundraisers for the Smile Train as well. People are very generous and very cooperative. They do help and they give and all that, but it's nice. A few friends and I, we all work on it and it's nice because someone has to get it going. I think again that goes back to Ireland. You have to do things and be interested in life.

MA: Are there other things you are involved in here in Rossmoor?

AR: Big time in walking, hiking. Hiking is lovely here. I suppose I lead that, but I got another co-leader because I'm getting old at this point. We have done a lot like over the years really. Not so much now. People are a bit older and people don't drive. Like before we'd drive up to the Poconos and places like that. I climbed Mount Tammany. Oh, that was fantastic, stuff like that, but now we go up to the Manasquan Reservoir and to the Princeton Preserve and the canals. We do all local stuff and by the shore. We go down there to Spring Lake and walk the boardwalk. It's nice, because it gives people a chance to get out and to walk. We were having a meeting about two years ago and there was a gentleman here who began the hiking club. I don't know how many years ago now, but it was a while. I figured out all the miles we walked over the years. Just an average. It was thousands. Everyone said we couldn't have walked that much, but we did. It's fantastic that people are about and walking and exercising and I fortunately have had the health to do it too. I still walk three miles every day with two friends. We did it this morning as well. We keep going.

MA: That was the end of my questions, but if you have anything you want to say, something we missed.

AR: Let me see if there's anything here. I just wrote a few things here. The one thing I was telling you about my mother and the poetry. In Ireland we learned history of course, history of Ireland and world history then, but in Ireland they had what they called ballad history. They taught history through poetry.

MA: Wow.

AR: That was not only interesting, but as I found out later on, it really impresses you. It's not like reading something in a book. You get the poetry and your kind of living the battle and so on. I said it's good and it's bad. It's good because you get it at the time, but it's bad because sometimes it leaves you with impressions that are not quite correct to say the least. We were curious and we were all that. We had our chores. I don't know. It was a different place to grow up, but it was a good place. I suppose that's true of any place. It's what you make of it and what people there make of the place. I mean I could have grown up in another part of Ireland probably and people wouldn't have been like that. There may have been fewer families and bigger farms and stuff like that. I'd have had a different experience. It's just the way we were. We were forced to solve our own problems and we were forced to survive, to do things and to have fun and everything because of the nature of the place. That's about it.

MA: Just to end with this. Maybe we can talk about your family life. You said to me before you were visiting family in California.

AR: Oh, I was in California. I almost froze to death. My step-daughter and I have a really good relationship. I have my two step-kids. Anyway, they invited me to California and they've been inviting me for, I don't know, three of four years. They got a new house this year. They said you have come and see the house. Last year I was supposed to come and see their new dogs, but anyway. I said if I'm ever going to go I'll go this time. So, I went. I went a week before Christmas, but it was desperately cold there. It never went above, maybe fifty was the highest. They are near Palm Springs so it's colder in that area anyway, but I had a lovely, lovely Christmas with them. Then, I went to another friend in San Diego. She was in a convent, but not with me. We became friends in the early days after we both exited the convent. I went to her and her husband in San Diego for the last three days. It was warm. I had a lovely experience. Christmas was wonderful. They have nice friends. It was just nice. They're just very warm people. Her husband is Mexican and she is a warm person. I left them and my friends from San Diego came to pick me up. They took me out to Palm Springs and down through the desert. Oh, my god. What an experience. It was wonderful. I mean I couldn't believe the vastness of the desert and everything, and I couldn't believe how white the sand was, parts of it. It was really, really nice and we stopped a couple of times and ate and all that. We saw, it was some park there. I don't remember the name now, but it's very important. We went in to Palm Springs and had made arrangements to go down into the canyons. Oh, it's fantastic. It was such an experience, but then the last hour-and-a-half before we got to San Diego, it started to snow. We were still up in, they weren't mountains, but it was desert still. He's very good. He's a good driver and very calm and everything, but I had a really nice time. I said to my friends well, I'm not too old to travel. I went to Newark and took off and came back, and had a good time. Just keep going and that is what I learned in Ireland growing up. [laughter]

MA: Just one more question. When did you decide to leave the convent?

AR: I left, I told you the year I left, what was it again? '73. Everything was changing. My friends were leaving, but they were leaving for the same reason I left. It didn't have the meaning it had before. If we were going to do what we wanted to do in life, we couldn't do it there. So, we took off. We did our own thing in a good way. All my friends almost all left at the same time. They all went on and some of them were nurses and they continued their work. Teaching they still did. Another one, she got sick. She couldn't do nursing. She became a psychotherapist. She's doing fantastic work in Ireland. Everybody, they were all leaving at the same time. It just lost the meaning it had before. The world changed so we had to change with it. That's what it was. It was an interesting life.

MA: If there is nothing else, with that I will conclude the interview.

AR: I think so. I probably said too much already. [laughter]

MA: No, that's fine. I will turn this off.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

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