

12-1-1984

Interview no. 715

Sister Justa Justyn

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews>



Part of the [Oral History Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Interview with Sister Justa Justyn by Rosemary Stoelzel, 1984, "Interview no. 715," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute of Oral History at ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Combined Interviews by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact lweber@utep.edu.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Sister Justa Justyn
INTERVIEWER: Rosemary Stoelzel
PROJECT: Class project
DATE OF INTERVIEW: December 1, 1984
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: 715
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 715

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Born in 1887 in Old Bohemia, known today as Czechoslovakia. Came to America at age 16 where she became a nun. Spent 29 years in China. Came to El Paso in 1950s after deportation from China by the Communists; Sister at Loretto Academy.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography. Childhood in Old Bohemia; life in America; becoming a nun; teaching; separation from family as a result of communism in Czechoslovakia; life in China and helping Chinese people; war with Japan; changes in El Paso.

Length of interview: 1 hour, 20 minutes Length of transcript: 31 pages

Interview with Sister Justa Justyn

December 1, 1984

Rosemary Stoelzel, Interviewer

Walking down the corridor of Loretto Academy's Nazareth Hall to her room, Sister Justa confided that she is 97 years old. That would place her birth in the year 1887.

S: When and where were you born?

J: I was born in Old Bohemia. That's not on the map any more! I had a beautiful childhood in a family of six children, 3 boys and 3 girls. We had a beautiful home, and were supremely happy. As children, school was just around the corner, you might say. We had only men teachers. The only lady teacher that came in was the one that taught us to sew - to crochet, or knit, or do handiwork of that sort. She did nothing but that, and she went from room to room. Everybody had to try, as that was part of the curriculum.

Most of the people in town went clear through high school. They were not rich people. Remember the "La Bohème"? They are the old type people still. But I don't know now. I have been away a hundred years almost! (laughing) But in my time, they were the old people. They believed in joy, happiness, fun, and hard work.

S: What did your parents do? What occupation?

J: My father had a lumber yard, and my mother lived at home with us children. We had our own home. It was a stone home, built by my father before he married Mother. Of course we all enjoyed it. It was a beautiful little home, not too big but comfortable. And we loved it very much.

S: Did you live in a village?

J: It was almost too big to be a village, yet not big enough to be a town.

S: What was the name of it?

J: Pasaky. Pah=sah=kee. It had 3 syllables to it.

S: Is that town still there?

J: Yes.

S: In Czechoslovakia now?

J: Yes, it's the same place. But I do not hear from home now, of course, because of the conditions there. I do not correspond with anyone. I don't know who or what is in my home now. When I was leaving, it was still the old fashioned Bohemia. Sorrow, no. Always joy and happiness and music and dancing and so on. It was a happy home. But then the Communists came. I had a brother that was in the militaries, a much older brother, and he warned us. He said, "Trouble is coming. Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, be careful. Because something may happen to you some day that you'll be sorry for." So I said, "Well, what can I do?" He said, "Live the way your mother and your father and you always lived - the old way - and that's the proper way."

S: How much older was he?

J: He was 20 years older. He was the oldest child in the family. [He left home to go to America.] He was in imports and exports, living in Duluth, Minnesota. He came home to visit every once in a while. That's all we knew of him, practically. We were the small fry! (laughing)

S: You mentioned music and happiness in your childhood. Is there any particular event that you remember that happened to you when you were a little girl? Anything of special interest?

J: When I was in high school a very interesting event happened to me. My father was one of the men of the place. Some of these men who were interested in families sort of formed a club. My father was one of the

J: men, and at different times they threw up little fiestas and had a good time. They would have music and dancing and supper, and everybody enjoyed everybody. It was really very happy, summer and winter. Summertime it was beautiful. Wintertime we were snowbound - every winter. So, many people got together. They'd say, "Now look. There's gonna be hard times because we are gonna be home." The streets were cleared only enough for you to walk, and in some places it was higher than we were! But seven families joined the club and took turns. On your turn that family prepared the supper for the people, and a little entertainment if they had a way. And these people came. They always prayed first. Then everybody sang a song or two, and the national song was very popular. Everybody sang it. And then they told stories. They were very sociable people.

Before I finished high school two of my uncles left home, because they saw that the place was too small. There was no big future. So many people were leaving, some years before then, and these two brothers did it. They both had families, and they got connected with someone here in the States. These people wrote to my brothers and they met them in America. They got them a home to live in, till they got settled. My brothers felt that unless Communism was over, they would never go back home. They were not prepared to live as Communists. [Bohemians in America] got themselves so organized that they could help one another. And when new immigrants came there were people that would go and visit them and invite them to their home, if they had a place.

Our town was at the foot of the old Bohemian Forest. Our property was right by the ditch that separated the government property from our private property. And the huge trees! Finish my hands! (holding out her arms) Those would be the trunks of the trees! And we always said there

J: were no tops to them, they were so high! They were pine trees. They'd grow one round of branches each year and drop one round of branches each year, and they'd get higher and higher. It was very beautiful. It was government property, of course. They had foresters there to look after it, and that was like a heaven! You could go to the forest and there was moss, and wild flowers of every kind. The forests were ventilated because the trees were so high. The government prepared an empty rise in the distance, where there were no trees, and on the rise the government supplied fruit bushes. There were berries - all kinds of berries - blackberries, raspberries, and strawberries growing wild there in those places. It was a public property, and anyone that lived there was permitted to go and use it - eat or pick. There was one stipulation: Do not demolish anything you find. Take care of it. It's the government's, and that's yours too, as much as mine. So let's take care of the place for our children. We are enjoying it, so let's keep it that way. And it was! no one transgressed there. They could pick the fruit and take it home. Poor people with several children very often picked the berries when they were in season and sold them and made a little income for the family.

Those pine trees had beautiful pine cones dropping. In his lumberyard my father had a space for our cones. We children went up there and prepared our cones. We always picked up the big ones! He had made us a little bar of iron, or brass or something, with a handle so we could hold on well. He let us put the stick into those cones and stay near the stove to light it. And the fragrance of the pine trees! The whole house was fragrant all winter at night. My father always said, "Nobody's gonna light any of this unless your mother or I are here!" It would be terribly dangerous, with the fire loose on it.

J: We always thought we could see fairies, because we read the story of fairies. And we said, "We don't see them now, but it's just because the fairies must be some place else!" (laughing) We believed in the fairies. As we grew up we realized that was like Santa Claus. But those were our fairies - those little pine cones on the bars. We'd burn them and they lit like a candle, and the fragrance was beautiful. People had never seen anything like that and would think there was some kind of a fairyland!

It was a common, social life for all the people. No one was really very rich, and there were NO beggars! If anybody'd come in that was hard up, the townspeople at once collected something to get him settled, get him a job if possible, and get the family arranged so that they could live properly. It was Bohemia, that's what it was! "La Boheme!" That's joy and fun, and I'm the witness of it! I'm the product!

S: You finished high school there, then?

J: I finished high school. There was no college there - just a grade school and high school. But most of the people in town were the graduates of that high school, because they were people who didn't go out far. They had steady jobs and they had common good living. So the old people stayed there, lived there, and died there. The youth was born there, educated there, and lived there, but there was no prospect of any kind of a big industry or anything. It was too far off - too close to that forest. They couldn't progress out that way, so the town was sort of isolated.

Before we finished high school one of those uncles that had come to America years before came home - returned. They had no children in their family, and his wife died. He had a beautiful home [in America] all right,

J: but there was nobody in it. So he arranged to sell the home and came back to Bohemia. Of course we children were wild to hear the stories of America, and he told them. We had cousins living in the United States that were just about my age. They had two girls in that family - one a little older than I, and one younger. My uncle wrote them back in the States, and he said, "Invite this bad girl!" That was me! "To come and live there for a year or two and get acquainted with the world!" And so they did. They wrote to my father and my mother. They had never seen me and I had never known them. But they said, "They tell us you have a girl that would fit in with our girls very well, and it would be a wonderful experience for them to have somebody connected with the Old World come - somebody that grew up there," or something like that. So they invited me, a stranger, to come and live in their family as one of them.

But my mother said NO! I was just a 16-year old girl. [Sister Justa laughed.] Was I ever 16?

S: Of course you were!

J: I wanted to go very badly. What young child wouldn't take a trip to Europe for joy, having fun, someone to receive you and keep you? It was out of this world! My father was all right. He was willing to do it. He was trusting, but Mother wasn't. She was really worried. Actually, I saw her cry over it, and it hurt me so that I didn't know whether I could do it or not. But at the end she relented. She said, "You'll be responsible for anything that happens to you. You gonna be alone. There are only your relatives after all. They are cousins, but only your relatives. If anything happens to you, Father and I cannot be responsible for you if you are over there." So I said, "I accept it," and I promised them almost on a Bible. I said, "Get a Bible!" That's what the common people did -

J: put their hand on the Bible and say, "I promise." It was like an oath. I promised that I'll be good if they let me go. I wasn't old enough to get a passport, get a visa, or nothing. But my father took it over. He was well known because he had lived there and all. He got my passport, my visa, he got all of it arranged. I used to go with him so that they would have the witness of who I really was, that I was his daughter, and that he was responsible for me - all that. They had the old time rules and regulations of how to get a child through by herself. It was not common. People were like my mother. My father had a spirit of going on, but Mother

S: Would hold back?

J: But she relented. So when things were ready I got ready to go. My mother said she wouldn't go to the train - she couldn't see me go on the train. She said, No, no. She'd be at home and she'd be praying while I was going that I would change my mind and come home! And I nearly did! (laughing)

Now the train was coming. We heard it. I was shaking, not knowing whether I should go or whether I shouldn't go - or whether I was gonna be able to go! I had things in my hands - the passport and the tickets and all. I said, "Father, should I give this back to you and go home?" And he said, "I'm not telling you to come home or to go home or to do or to go. You are old enough, and this was not my idea of you going. It was your own. Now if you are brave enough, trust God enough, you'll be OK. I give you permission to go." Father and Mother gave the permission. But I said, "But the train is whistling," and I hugged my father, and I cried, "Can I do it?" He said, "It's up to you." And behold, the people there were all watching me. They didn't know what I was doing, that I was leaving like that. But when the train came some kind of a peace came over me.

J: After I said goodbye to him I said, "OK. I'm gonna adjust to this.

I've only to do it, and this is a preparation for the future." Father said those were my words to him, before he left me. It really was the preparation for my future, without my knowing it. It must have been God's will, that they permitted me to go. That they had the means to do it for me, and let me go. And I got on the train and I cried all the way to some train stop somewhere! I did. I wanted to tell them to stop and let me out! Then courage came to me.

I was alone. We got to the ocean, got on the boat. I had the boat tickets in my hands. Then on the ship many people got sick. Nobody had prepared me for that, that they would get seasick. I wasn't seasick myself, but I saw so many seasick and I didn't know what was happening. Why were they seasick? I was never taught about it anywhere in school or at home, either. But anyway, it was finished.

We got to New York, and then they were pointing out the Statue of Liberty. We had read about it in school, and we knew about that. So I said this was like I was meeting somebody that I knew when I was young!

S: Like an old friend? (laughing)

J: I was only 16! The Statue of Liberty was up there, and I said, "I think she's waving!" The people all smiled at me. I knew nobody on the ship. But it was a pleasant trip. I wasn't sick and I got to New York. I had all the preparation, what to give the man at the customs, and I had directions in my hand, to direct me where to go.

S: Did you go through Ellis Island?

J: They told us we would have to go to Ellis Island, but when we got there we didn't, because they said they were changing it. I was sort of disappointed because they told me all about it. I thought that would be

J: wonderful and I was preparing to see it. But we didn't. They put me right on the train, and then I got to Nebraska. That's where my uncle lived. He wrote to these people ahead of time and asked them to watch for me, since I was alone. And so two of my cousins were waiting at the train, waving.

S: In Nebraska?

J: In Nebraska, in a town called David City. It's in between Lincoln and Omaha, and they lived there on a farm. They told me they were cousins, but I never had seen them or anything. And they took me home, and I thought it was wonderful. My aunt was like a mother right then. She said, "This is your home, and this is your uncle. You can call him anything you want, but he's your uncle." Of course he was my mother's brother, so I had known him when he was younger.

They made me perfectly at home. But I was listening. You see, I knew only Bohemian language. I had studied French in school, but these kids weren't going to talk in French. They were talking Bohemian and English. And when they got into English, I was silent because I didn't know what they were doing. I knew this was gonna happen, that they were gonna talk different. They said my uncle had had a meeting with the family and told them that they would have to make me as their little sister, because I wouldn't even know how to talk English. It didn't dawn on them that I was coming without knowing English!

S: I'll bet it didn't take you long to learn English, did it?

J: I went to school but it wasn't a success. The teacher was a lady, and she knew who I was, but she didn't know Bohemian language. She always was speaking English, and when I did anything, it wasn't successful. But that uncle had a little boy, little Charlie, who was six years old. It

J: was his first year in school. You know the first grade books?

S: Yes,

J: With the pictures in colors - pictures of animals, and trees, and people ..

S: and the alphabet.

J: He was doing that book. The alphabet was there, of course. It is the same as our own. And I was through high school, so I had sort of an idea what I'd think it should be, and it usually turned out all right. I didn't want to go to school, but I went anyway to please them, because they were happy to see me go. But who taught me English was Charlie - little Charlie! (laughing) With his school book! He was a bilingual. That whole family was bilingual. All the people that settled there came from some place in Europe. Some of them were Germans, some of them were Alsatians, there were French and English and German. I felt just like I was in the center of the world, and I was!

S: So how long did you stay in Nebraska?

J: My cousins met me at the train, and when I got acquainted I asked what was next. We left the city and went to their home, which was some miles in the country - I don't know how far they were. They showed me where I would be having a room with one of my cousins. This was where I was gonna sleep, and this was the dining room ... They had a big place - a beautiful farm. They had animals and grains that were growing, like all farmers do. That part of Nebraska, they say, is feeding the world! Nebraska fields are so rich in wheat, and that's where I was - in those rich fields up there. I was watching and of course I didn't know how to do any of that work. But they taught me.

The first thing one of my cousins said, "First thing you have to learn to do is to ride a horse!" I said, "My joy is beginning! My joys are

J: beginning!" (laughing) So he said, "We have a horse that's very tame, and he won't throw you. You mustn't be afraid." So he [brought the horse] and he said, "Kiss his face!" He smiled, and I tried to kiss it, but I couldn't!

S: Kiss a horse!?

J: I was so afraid of it, too! My first acquaintance was a horse! He helped me to get on, bareback. Didn't have a saddle on him at all. My cousin said, "Just sit down on him. Put one leg on one side and one on the other and sit down." And they put a bridle on the horse's mouth, and strings or cords or something to my hands. That was my introduction to America! (laughing) That horse never threw me.

At that time I had no trouble at all. I could ride. I could keep level because I had been riding a bicycle at home. That helped me keep my equilibrium going straight. And I used to use roller skates. That was all a help to the horse riding. I enjoyed it so much.

I was getting fast, and one day this cousin said, "I'm gonna teach you to ride fast. The way you are just going now is ordinary fast, but there may be an occasion when you have to go very fast," so he showed me what to do and what not to do, and started me. "OK. Don't come with me," I said. I was brave and I was foolish! "Just let me go!" But as I went so far, something happened, frightened that horse, and he threw me over a fence! My arm is still scarred. I was alone in the country. I didn't see a soul. The horse was gone, I was alone, and my arm was bleeding!

S: Was it one of those barbed wire fences?

J: It was a barbed wire - it had spaces like that. They were not deep, but there were many. I worried that they could not ever find me! I didn't know where I was, for I had never been to places. After some little while

J: that same cousin who put me on that horse came riding another horse, and he saw me down below. He said his father nearly killed him! My uncle told him, "You know that she didn't know how to ride a horse fast, and you let her go alone! Where is she?" They looked for me everywhere, till they saw me. My first joy was a horseback ride, and this was my first sorrow - also on a horse! And the only one! I was never thrown again.

When we went to the town there was a school, a Catholic school, and there were sisters there, who taught the school. There were grade school and high school divisions, and all the sisters taught in the school. Some ladies taught there too. I fell in love with the sisters right away. There was one that could speak Bohemian. The others were only speaking English. I said, "How did you happen to learn?" She said, "My mother didn't know anything else but Bohemian, and I had to talk to her, so I learned." So I got acquainted with the sisters. I was hearing from home, and I was living at my uncle's, and I visited the sisters several times. Then I was thinking, I wonder if I could be one of those sisters? I wonder what qualifications you have to have? I was through high school, and that's it.

But the high schools [in Bohemia] were different than what's here. The science room was prepared to generate electricity there. The students had to grind those discs to get the electricity. Look what a beginning it was. There are grown-ups that don't know that. We had to do it. Every child had to learn where he got the electricity. You just didn't punch a button. And of course, over here it means nothing now. We all punch a button and take it for granted! (laughing) They go into the foundation of everything. They are very thorough. I was through high school, and I knew what I had gotten in Bohemia. I saw what these were getting

J: here. I had much higher education in Bohemia. There, we had a little garden by the school. There were little trees there. Every student got a tree, a little one, with his name fastened on, and we had to plant it ourselves. The teacher showed you how, and showed you what you do, and you had to look after it. It was gonna be your tree. We had to learn from the beginning how to feed, whatever you had to do. It was perfection, to be where there were trees and gardens and things. They taught us from the very beginning.

I'm gonna skip a whole lot. When I was in the states about 3 years, my father sent me a little box of apples that grew on my tree! He said that was something that he knew I would love. It was the tree that I planted in school. When you leave the school they tell you the day to come and take the tree. They give you the tree to take to your home and plant it for the family or for you. When it was time, they gave me my tree, and my father planted it sort of off by itself, because he said, "This is going to be a special tree for us!" (laughing) And when the apples grew there - little red apples, they were - I got apples from my tree. And I cried over the apples! (laughing)

The children that were here in America, they didn't know anything that we had done. They did none of that. They did books and arithmetic, and there was "reading and writing and 'rith-metic. Taught by the rule of the hickory stick!" That's it! That was the school here. And we didn't have this kind of school. There, everything you began, you began at the beginning. When I was in school every girl had to learn to knit, and when we had the closing, every girl had to have her school uniform, and had to wear the stockings she made! They were lace stockings. Each had to learn how to do it.

(Sister Clementia entered the room and was introduced.)

J: This is my other half. We have lived together for 53 years now!

C: And we're the better for it!

S: I'm sure you are! (laughing) So, then, how did you become a nun?

J: So, when I saw those sisters, I began to think. I never thought of it before because we had no sisters in the town where I lived, and I never saw them - only if I went into a big town, or something. They talked to me, and they didn't say anything at first. But then I asked the one that could talk Bohemian, "Well, how do you become a sister?" And she said, "Well, you have to ask if they will take you. You have to be admitted, and it's not easy. They see who you are, what you know, what you have been, what you're going to be - all that. And if they admit you, then you make vows that you're going to be permanently in the place. You're not there to "try out." First you get your try-out, and when the day comes, then you make your vows - like oaths - that you belong. And they take care of you all the time. But you have to obey the rules. You have to be obedient, and you have to go where you are sent." She didn't make a rose garden about it. She told you what you had to do if you are a sister. That wouldn't be too hard, I thought. They were the Loretto sisters.

S: In Nebraska?

J: That's where I knew them. She wrote and asked for qualifications. They prepared it, and I passed it. I could go right on, they said. So then I went to Kentucky.

S: How old were you then?

J: I was about 20. I was 16 [when I came to America,] but I didn't go right away into it. My mind was working. I didn't know whether I would

J: or whether I wouldn't. I was still hoping that I would get a chance to go back home. I had never really said goodbye to my parents. The visa was only for one year, and I had it in my possession. But what good was it? But I thought if I ever got a chance to go home, I would. But then, if I were a sister, maybe I couldn't. I was very worried. But after time went on, Bohemia had been taken over by Communists. They were already complaining. They couldn't write, because everything was censored. If a letter was against [the Communists] it was burnt or you were called to order. So I didn't write. I was not knowing which way I would go. But finally I decided I would become a nun. And it wasn't difficult then, because I knew that I would go to school. I had only a high school education, and I knew that if I was to teach I would have to have more education. Whatever they could give me to do, I could do. I said I could work in the garden, because at home we learned how to plant trees and all. This was how I was preparing for the future! I'm going to plant the garden in Kentucky! (laughing) But I didn't. Instead, we finished the training. The solid training lasts 2 years, or a little more maybe. After that the decision is made for your future. I was sent to the normal school. Do they still call them normal schools?

S: Not any more, but I know my grandmother went to a normal school.

J: Everybody had to go to a normal school. Then we were given a job teaching, assigned by the Mother Superiors. They decide where you are gonna teach, what you are gonna teach, and so on. I enjoyed the primary grades. They sent me to St. Louis first, and I enjoyed that school so much. The first year I had nothing but the little ones. By that time I had enough English that they didn't realize I was just learning English! I had gotten it at my uncles, because I spent every minute of my day and night learning it.

J: All of them agreed that they would never talk Bohemian in my presence. It would be only English, and that was perfect. There were the little children, the grown-ups, my uncle and aunt - and in their own way each one helped me. It didn't take me too long. So I already knew English when I went to Kentucky to be a sister. I didn't need translations or anything. You know, their high school training in Europe is very severe. You have to know writers, and be at home with your grammar. Although it was Bohemian, grammar is grammar. Doesn't matter what language, it's all the same. And so it wasn't too hard for me to pick up.

In any case, I went to the Novitiate, and then I went and taught these little ones who were only ready to read and write the alphabet - you know, first grade. From then on I kept teaching. I left the little ones and I started bigger children, and so on. Until a letter came to the Mother House asking for volunteers to go to China.

S: To China?

J: At first I said, "China - I wonder? What would be China? Would it be like going to America?" And my uncle said, "No! No!" (laughing) I had a chance to meet one of the priests who had been on the missions in China and was back. I said, "I am thinking of asking to go to China." They were asking for volunteers. Only volunteers could go. So, I became a volunteer then. I wanted to go. I never had a hard life, and I thought this is the beginning of a hard life, I guess!

S: Did this priest help you to make up your mind?

J: Yes. He said, "You have no dependents. You cannot go back to Bohemia unless you want to become a Communist. So you have separated from your family already. It's difficult for them to visit you, and for you to visit them. Only visit, and then you'll be in the presence of the Communists

J: listening to what you people are doing and talking about. It would be a different life [from what you knew.] You couldn't do it." And then he said, "You must be agreeable to all the rules, and you have to observe them. If you don't want to observe them, don't go. If you want to be bossy and boss yourself, and don't let anybody tell you what, then don't go. That wouldn't be for you."

S: Don't be too independent?

J: "Don't attempt it," he said. "That would be too big a bite you are taking." Anyway, six of us volunteered. Everything was prepared, and we got transportation, and we went. But it was a rough journey. But we got there, and from then on it was China!

S: What year was that?

J: 1923. We had a little hut where we lived, and we were supposed to learn the language first. Oh! If you ever met anything that's next to impossible, that's it! (laughing) No alphabet! No grammar! Nothing to guide you. They have a lot of heiroglyphics, that you don't know what they are for. But we were fortunate. We got a man that spoke some French, and I could talk, get on with him. Only his French was so strange! I don't know who he was or how he knew French. But he ended all the English words with the French accent and the French endings. When he wrote it, I'd say, "How do you read it? You wrote it like the French again!"

(Side one of the tape ran out. Tape was turned over.)

As soon as we could we began to talk to the people. We were supposed to Christianize people. Knowledge we couldn't teach them, because we didn't know enough Chinese to impart it. We could hear it and understand it, but we couldn't say it yet. It was difficult. God had blessed me with ability to learn languages, and I was always grateful for that ability. I didn't

J: have too much trouble learning it at all. I couldn't read it at first, but later on I could read Chinese characters.

S: Could you write them?

J: I couldn't write them. But if I saw it I could recognize it. That was enough. Well, I was there twenty-nine years!

S: Oh, my, Sister! That's a long time. 29 years?

J: I learned to love the Chinese people. They were responsive. Bishop Galvin had a very large territory given to him. He said he had a belief that if you don't have a mother then you don't have a home. Or if there isn't a good mother, then you don't have a good home. How are you gonna make a good mother out of a girl? That was his question. Those girls in China in these villages, how did they grow up? Some of them were Christians, some of them were pagans, some of them were Protestants, some of them belonged to - whoever taught them. And Bishop Galvin said, "These people want to know God." They knew that there was a fou?

S: Fou?

J: That's a general term for God. They knew an awful lot about God, without knowing that it was God. And, if you'd say, "Who made you?" "Mommy and Daddy!" (laughing) I said, "Yes, but Somebody else helped them. Who was governing all that?" They didn't know it was God, that you all came from God's beginning. That was new to them.

We taught them slowly. We learned to say it first ourselves. We had two Chinese priests living there, and they knew English and Latin and Chinese. They were their teachers, really. Then we started really teaching and doing it. The first Chinese Christians were in China long ago. There was a Jesuit priest, an old one - a scholar and scientist. He wrote a little book. If the Christians knew and observed what was in that little

- J: book, it was enough for them to go to heaven. God would accept them, because they would be good people - and God would not reject good people who did what they could. But, that little book was written in Mandarin, the highest dialect. It was like picking up Shakespeare and trying to interpret!
- S: Where were you in China? What part of China?
- J: We were in the center, on the Yangtze River, about 600 miles away from Shanghai.
- S: And what's the dialect there?
- J: Mandarin, but it's simplified. The spoken language is simplified Mandarin, so we were right in style! It was really not difficult. But the other sisters - they were in other provinces. They had difficulty. The books were written in Mandarin, and they were reading them in some dialect. Each province had its own dialect. We always thanked God that they sent us to Hupeh. The province was Hupeh, on the Yangtze River. That's where we were, and that's where we stayed.
- S: I wonder if you ever experienced a flood on the Yangtze.
- J: Two! Two wars and two floods. The first time I heard flood noise I was so frightened. I didn't know what could happen. Everybody was frightened. The noise was not like something earthly. That water was rushing! It was so powerful, because the Yangtze at times - you don't see the other side of the river [because it is so big and wide.] It is navigable all the way, very far up. But navigable as it is. It's very deep in places and not so in others. So it had to be very carefully navigated.

The Bishop was trying to Christianize the villages and towns, and all the farmer people. He wanted them to become Christians, because they [the farmers] were the majority. What would you do with a few?

J: He wanted the majority. He had this little Mandarin book and got a Chinese scholar to sit down with him, and he said, "Now put that Mandarin into Mandarin our people in Hupeh will understand." And sentence by sentence he got it done. We could hear it, and shortly after we could begin to understand. The people understood it right away. And they could be Christianized, all because of that little book!

S: Tell me about the flood.

J: The flood came, and it was so terrific. It was at night. We heard the noise. I'd never heard noise like that, and I didn't know what it was. But the bank of the Yangtze gave out, gave away, and all the Yangtze wall of water was coming! The wall of water was coming on the town! As it came it took anything that could be movable. Small houses all went right with it, and the people who were in them went too. The destruction was unbelievable. It happened that the town where we were, the flood came just to our gate - believe it or not! Water was in the streets, and there was a stone step and then our gate. The water came to that stone, but we never had it in our place.

S: I'll bet you had a lot of refugees, then?

J: We had no room for everybody. We opened the gates and saved the lives and fed them. We never could imagine what was happening. Everybody was in misery. And people from other places had come, too. When this happened they thought it was the end of the world! They didn't know if they could get out alive. Nobody knew what was happening. But gradually the water began to leave, and when it was calm enough to get into a boat, then we went out to see. You see, we had the privilege of baptizing those that were not baptized. So we would go to places - accessible places. Some were inaccessible, and we couldn't get to them. But where

J: we could go, we baptized and instructed. We knew enough Chinese at this time to talk. For they didn't know English. Nobody speaks English there. So we instructed those people and baptized many.

Our place was a campus, and all the houses were in there, surrounded by walls. But the people were all inside, because they couldn't get outside in the water. We tried to feed them. We tried to do what we could. We were not prepared to meet this, of course. And during the flood, just across the street from us, people had put up boards from something to something. They lived on those boards because the water was everywhere. And the people that were inside - if there was an empty spot for them to sit down or lie down they said, "This is enough for me. Just let me stay out of the water!" We had planted all kinds of little plants, lillies and things, and they had dug those up and ate them because they were so hungry.

We had already taken some girls in to teach. See, what the Bishop did - both before and after the flood - was to pick up intelligent looking girls. You couldn't do it any other way, except by looks! They were Christians, and they knew God. He would send them to us. We were living in Hwaiyan (the town). He said, "Don't teach them English. That's out of the way." We had these big books, and they learned as much as they could. He said, "Let them stay with you two years, maybe, until they know Christianity well. Then let them go back to the village, and they can teach the village." Being natives, they would be accepted immediately. And that happened. That's the way he Christianized the countryside, with these girls. They learned to pray, they learned to talk right, they learned what was proper and what was not proper. They had to give up some of the old customs, superstitions. That was a terrific drawback, because the superstitions were very difficult to give up for those people. But, one by

J: one, if they saw the reason and got the whole instructions with that little book, they were not afraid to give up the pagan practices. And that's the way it was propagated, with the Christians believing in God - one God, and no more.

Some of the old ones were afraid. We had a temple in Hwaiyan of 300 gods, and the statues were all there. St. Thomas Aquinas, a Catholic church big saint, they had him as a pusa. They called them pusa.

S: As one of the 300?

J: He was in there with them! I said, "How did he get in?" They said they examined everybody that was put in that temple when those statues were made. Why would they put him there? St. Thomas Aquinas had so much charity that God would want him as a god. They called them gods! Then they came to me. My Chinese was really getting good, and I had talked to them so much, and I was always out with some of them. They said, "Now look, we want to get your statue made up and put it in the temple!" I said, "No! It cannot be there!" "Why not?" I said, "I belong to an institution that would forbid it." And that saved me right away! It would be forbidden by some power that they didn't know. So they didn't make my statue to be in the temple with the gods!

S: You would have been number 301! (laughter)

J: But we got to be very good friends with the monks. They were marvelous men. Some of them were highly educated men, that gave their life to that Buddhist religion. They were really very good people. When they met us they said they already knew [Catholicism.] They had studied the Catholics and they said they didn't approve of all of it, so they didn't accept it.

That monastery was like a garden. They had many strange teachings. They believed if anybody, if any thing is sick, you have to help it. Any

J: thing, not only people but things, too. Their monastery had a place for all the crippled animals that they found. They brought them in and fed them so they wouldn't die of hunger, and looked after them. You couldn't kill them, for that was forbidden. But they fed them so that they could die a natural death. That was sort of a charity that I'm sure God accepted. They had geese, and they had chickens. All cripples went around the monastery. Outside was a big turtle pond. The turtles were this big, some of them (holding out arms). They said they had been there for centuries - they didn't know how long - and they had multiplied. The monks were supposed to feed them because, since they were in the monastery, they were gods. We couldn't do it because we wouldn't feed Buddha or a Chinese pagan god, so we couldn't feed them. We'd say, "You're very kind, but that's something our institution doesn't permit us to do." And if you talked rules, and if you observed them, they paid their respect to you.

S: Your institution's rules saved you several times, then?

J: Always. We had two floods - this one, and another one not quite so severe. And we had two wars with Japan - one with the south and one with the north. And that was terrible. But we didn't leave. We stayed there. The tiles on our roof were broken, and window panes were broken because of the bombing and the schrapnel. But we stayed. It was a very difficult life, but it was a strength for the people, for us to stay.

S: You set an example?

J: They said, "If they stay, we can do it too. If they can do it, why not we?" And they didn't rush out. They tried to save their own places.

S: Tell me about the war.

J: The Japanese were not bad. We used to wear a rosary on the girdle. Any place we went, if we'd meet a soldier he'd begin in Japanese, and we didn't

J: know Japanese. Then he'd look at the crucifix and say, "Oh, jo, jo, jo! You may go!" They didn't bother us. They were very respectvul. They and the monks visited our chapel often. I said, "Why do you want to come in here?" because I knew they didn't know what it was for. They said, "There is a peace in here and we want to sit. We want to experience your peace." And they sat in the church, experiencing peace with God. They said God was close in the chapel, and God was here.

S: Did I understand you right when you said you were in a concentration camp?

J: I wasn't, she was (pointing to Sister Clementia). That sister was.

S: Oh. You were together in China?

J: Yes, until she had to go to the concentration. I wasn't an American citizen yet. That's why I didn't go. With Japan, they put all the rest of them in. But I was Bohemian. They said, "You are one of us," because they had already taken our town. You see, they had already taken Europe, and had taken Bohemia, and taken Pasaky. And I'm sure they were living in our house! But they said, "You are one of us. Don't oppose the people, let them go."

S: While you were in China, did you ever go back to America on missionary work?

J: I never did. Some of the sisters did. They came to tell the [American] people of the poverty, of the diseases, and things like that. So the [American] people were really helping us. They got school children to help, sending out money so we could get things a little better organized.

I never left China. I was quite sick one time, and they said I should be sent home. But I said, "Doctor, send me home and I go for a coffin right away! Because I never can live anywhere without my China!"
(laughing)

S: How did you come to live in El Paso?

J: We were deported from China by the Communists. The two of us were together then. Our papers were written all in Chinese, and it said, "Under the power of .." It was very flowery language. They talk high language and nobody knows what it means! Everybody uses it, but you cannot understand it!

S: The official language - right?

J: When they deported us we came home. We had difficulty coming home and we were stopped for a bit in Hong Kong. They came with us as far as Hong Kong. And once we crossed that creek, across that little bridge, we were with the British. It was heaven! The English have always been known to observe all the regulations of Communism! Observe all the rules of immigrants! You meet all kinds of people, so be careful of them! That was the English. But over there in Hong Kong, that was done away with. If you were a human being and if you were over there, you were coming and you were welcome - whoever you were.

They had hospitals prepared there. They had ambulances, they had buggies, they had wheel chairs. They had their Chinese ways of pulling people around. Take them to [hospitals] right away. Give them something to drink, take them to the doctor and see what they can do. Coming across that bridge, we were just two, of course, but there were others. Some of them came across crying. Some of them came across yelling! Some of them came swearing! And some of them were almost demented. Because that was freedom. Across on the other side of that little creek was freedom. And here they had been in captivity, like we were.

We stayed there until our turn came. We had to follow the next one in front of you, and they examined you - examined everything - you and

J: everything you had! See what you were like, how you were made up! Some places we were examined to see if we were women or men! (laughing) Those English! But we stayed a little while because we couldn't get transportation to America. The whole world that was in China was coming home. They had to. They were all deported, and we were too.

We had deportation papers, but when could we be deported? We had to get a way home, a way out. But how are you going to get it? Every company you would go to said, "We are booked for two, three years." We didn't know how to get out. But again, God was with us every step. We got to Hong Kong, and we were lined up there. And almost like a miracle the man at the hotel office said, "If I ever get a chance to get you in front of somebody, you will be the first ones that I'll put the priority on. And I'll let you ahead." So one day he phoned and he said, "Two people cancelled their trip to America, and you have it!"

S: How long did you have to wait for that, in Hong Kong?

J: Just about two days. We had been there I don't know how long. It was like a miracle. He said, "Don't try to carry anything. Just come yourselves if possible. We don't care about things. We only want people!"

And we got home. When we got to Los Angeles they notified everyone on the ship, "Don't try to leave until the signal is given." They said there was a hotel, and they gave the name and the address. That hotel was prepared to take everybody off the ship and make them comfortable until they got organized. The people that wanted to meet the ship were told not to come out, but to wait at that hotel. When the ship got in, they put us in buses and took us to that hotel. Very organized. Leave it to the British! They are like the Americans. They believe in being organized! But as soon as we got in, one sister was waiting for us in

J: Los Angeles. (to Sister Clementia) What time of year was it when we landed in Los Angeles?

C: I think it was summer or fall. It wasn't winter, I know that.

J: I don't know. We were like [immigrant] women. We hardly knew anybody. I had been in China 29 years. I didn't know any of the sisters. It was like a different world. And they were very kind, but they didn't know how to be the Chinese-way kind! They were kind the American way!

S: And you weren't used to that?

J: And we weren't used to it. We wanted the Chinese way. And it wasn't there. But anyway, we stayed. While we were staying at the Mother House each of us got our assignment, where we were to go, and we two were appointed for El Paso. I went down to the Sacred Heart, and she went down to the Guardian Angel - two schools here in the city. We lived here - not this house, but the other house over there. We were living here at Loretto and taught school there. I was there for a while. Then they needed somebody in another school, but always here in the city.

Then I was released. They said to resign. I said, "I don't. You send me where you think I belong and I'll like it." But she (Sister Clementia) got released and I got a release, and we've been here ever since.

S: So that was in the 1950's when you came?

J: 1952. And since '52 we've been living here. And dreaming!

S: Dreaming of what?

J: China. They became very dear to us. We loved them very much. We had been with them in their sorrow, and with their joys, and they appreciated feelings. Because many of them have very little of it [feelings.] They stiffen, and their hearts are not moving with it. Some of them are very bitter of conditions and things. But if you can soften them a little -

J: that's where their love comes in. And these girls that came to us. We had many at a time because each priest sent two, and the next two, and the next two. We had 80 there at one time.

S: Well, you've been in El Paso now for over 30 years. Have you noticed any changes in relations here between Anglos and Hispanics over those 30 years?

J: The Spanish is new to me. I had lived in St. Louis before I went to China. And St. Louis is St. Louis! That's all. And then when we were sent here, when we faced this - it's like two nations are living here in one, and Mexicans predominate. And you have to adjust. It was difficult to adjust over there, but in a different way. There is a prejudice here. And there was no prejudice over there.

S: Did you learn Spanish?

J: No. I tried three times. Unfortunately, when I came here they made me a principal of the school. And with my other duties, I three times started to learn Spanish, and each time almost with tears in my eyes I had to give it up. I couldn't do it. I couldn't force myself to sit down and study a book.

(Sister Justa begins talking about China again.) The people began to lean on us and trust us. They said, "Please come and see my mother." We became like friends. They didn't treat us as foreigners. They were really very wonderful. We had to adapt to them, and the food was strange. We got a man cook, and he taught the Chinese cooking. Then one of the sisters that was with us taught him how to make some things. She taught him how to make bread - the kind of bread we would make. And she taught him how to make pies - the kind of pies we knew. And then she cooked meat and told him how to do it. We were living on the main street of that town. Our

J: gate was right on the main street. And the main street was in places only as wide as this room. But that's the main street over there. The market was right on that street. The doors are not permanent - they have temporary doors. They can take them off and the whole shop is open, and put them on and the whole thing is closed. The whole street is closed. That's the way they live, but we got used to it and we learned to love it.

And then I came here. They said a lot of Chinese people live here. I said I'd be very happy to meet them, and I did. As soon as I saw one I knew. I started to talk to him and he stopped and looked back. In Chinese he said, "You speak Mandarin." I said, "Yes." "I, no Mandarin! No Mandarin!" They were Chinese, but none of them were of that part where we were.

S: Have you met anyone since you've been back that spoke Mandarin?

J: The officers in the Army used to come here to visit us and talk. And they talked Mandarin. So we could talk with those. They were learning English. And a few people here, but there are not many.

S: Looking back over your life, what would you consider to be your most shining achievement - the thing that you are the most proud of?

J: My training of the Chinese ladies, women.

S: The girls?

J: Yes. Because that was preparing them to teach others to know God. They had no way before, because God was far away, and unknown. You can't teach them the unknown. So make God at home for them. Let them know that he lives here, and He's here. They didn't believe that at first. We taught to them that God was present to you wherever you are. And He knows you, He hears you, He sees you, He loves you. That was sort of like a

J: mystery to them. But when they began to learn it they became very good Christians. And even some that were already baptized, they'd say, "We never heard these things before." Because priests have so many people, and we were free for anybody that wanted to talk to us. It was really wonderful.

And then the soldiers. During the wars we always were swamped with soldiers. And the officers and the school teachers and the policemen - all these men that had jobs came to learn English. We had to sit down and teach them English! (laughing) We had one sister, she's dead now. She was very witty - a Kentuckian. They say her father was a lawyer, and I said, "I think she's a lawyer, too!" If she wasn't, she should have been! She was very funny. She was teaching these school teachers. The young school teachers all were wild to learn English. And she was good. She was a school teacher herself. So she said, "What do you want to learn?" And one of the boys said, "I want a song!" And she said OK. And he said, "You teach song?" "Yes," she said, "Yes." So he said, "Sing for me." She started (Sister Justa begins singing), "Rose Marie, I love you..." Remember the old song, or was it in your lifetime?

S: (laughing) yes,

J: She was sitting on the bench and had a boy here, a boy there. There was a group of boys. She had no book, but she knew it by heart of course. She said, "You boys watch my mouth. When I open, you open, and when I shut, you shut!" That was her!

S: Did they learn to sing it?

J: Beautifully! Beautifully! And they were the envy of the rest of the teachers because they came back and they said, "We can sing English song!" "You cannot!" "Yes we can!" They got together, the public school boys,

- J: and they sang it for them. Everybody was delighted with them. Doctors came, officers came, and they all wanted English. They had strange things that they had heard, or saw, or that they wanted to have interpreted. Was that because we were white and they were not? Or was it because we were educated and they were not? What caused all these differences that they had? They all wanted to have things figured out. Some way or another they had the idea that big is always big, and if you are small, if you are born nobody, you'll always be nobody. If you were born poor, you're gonna be poor the rest of the life. It was like a luck you had, and there was no more. We tried to get [that idea] away from them. So that they would give it up and believe. They said, "We live differently now. We know different now. Why didn't you come before?" Why?
- S: Well, I've certainly enjoyed talking with you. Is there anything else that you can think of? Something you may have passed over?
- J: One thing. Thank God - a big, big, thank you, God - that you are not a Chinese! Because look what you would have to go through. The mind is different, and it's not easy to correct. I don't say there are no saints there, no holy people. Yes. But it's very difficult for them to change all these things - especially the older people. And the freedom we have! Nobody knows freedom over there. It's a different people. First, when you get there, you begin to sympathize. You say, "What a shame, what a shame." And then that goes away. Sympathy goes, and love for them takes its place. Then you are able to work. For 29 years, without regret!