

**Gerard Burke**

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed in person by Jennifer Rudolph

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Brockton, MA

**Rudolph:** This is Jennifer Rudolph, Coordinator of Libraries at Massasoit Community College. Today is Friday March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2014, and I am interviewing for the first time Dr. Gerard Burke, former president of Massasoit Community College. The interview is taking place at Massasoit in the Student Center conference room at One Massasoit Boulevard, Brockton, Massachusetts. This interview is being conducted by the Massasoit Community College Library and is part of the Oral History Project for the fiftieth anniversary of the college. First I want to thank you, Dr. Burke, for coming here and being willing to talk to me about your part in the history of Massasoit.

**Burke:** It's a pleasure and a privilege.

**Rudolph:** Thank you. I'd like you first to tell me a little bit about yourself—where you grew up and went to school?

**Burke:** Well, I was born and raised in Boston. I went to parochial grammar and high school. And, interestingly enough, my father was one of ten and was at Boston English—when Boston English and Boston Latin were the two best high schools in the country. And his father died when he was in his junior year, and he had to leave to support his mother and his nine siblings. And I never heard my father complain; he just rolled up his sleeves. So I grew up in a third floor of a three-decker in Mattapan. There were nine of us in that six rooms, with one bathroom. But my father, who was a custodian, has sent every single one of us to parochial grammar and high school. And you don't realize until later the sacrifices that your parents must have made. And he was very interested in education, and he would be proud that twelve of his children's spouses and grandchildren became teachers so, I think he would probably have liked that. And, you know, I sort of had a typical Irish-American background growing up.

**Rudolph:** That was a very big family, even in those days. I think that those are two large families—your father's family and your family.

**Burke:** Well, my mother and father had five boys and two girls, so it was seven of us plus. And of course we always had an aunt living with us—every family seemed to have an aunt that lived with them. We call them unclaimed treasures, they were, you know, unmarried, so...

**Rudolph:** What about your college background?

**Burke:** Well, I can remember in the eighth grade in Our Lady of Lords School in Jamaica Plain, Sister Maura(??) I remember gave us an assignment to write down what we wanted to do when we grew up, and I wrote I wanted to be a history teacher, and here we are sixty years later, and that's what I am.

**Rudolph:** That's what you are.

**Burke:** A history teacher. So, I had older brothers—one who at the time was going to Teacher's College and became a teacher, became a principal, and so I really didn't think of any other path. I always had that goal, and so I went to Teacher's College and I enjoyed it very much. I was fortunate enough to be elected president of my senior class, and we still have reunions. I didn't know it was a lifetime job because we had our fiftieth several years ago, and so I enjoyed it very much. Then I was fortunate enough to win a scholarship to Georgetown University, where my wife and I had just got married, wife was(??) Mary, and we moved down, and so I went to Georgetown. And it just happened that my uncle was a United States congressman, and so my wife went to work for him. I shouldn't tell a lot of tales, but she had originally been hired as one of Senator Kennedy's clerks, but my uncle's administrative assistant had to leave because of a pregnancy, so my wife went and worked for my uncle, and I went and worked. It seemed that everybody in Capitol Hill was a student either at Georgetown or GW [George Washington] or at American, so it was interesting for students, especially people like myself who had an interest in politics, to actually be working in the Capitol. And we got to go to a lot of places that other people would not have the opportunity to go to. So, all of your graduate schools in Washington are in the evening to accommodate federal workers, so I went evenings for my master's and for my Ph.D. and we had a great time. We also had three of our daughters while we were there, as a student. Every time we had a baby, we had to move to another apartment, and you know—but it was great. We had very little. There was a whole group of people from Boston down in

Georgetown, and we would get together and play sports on Saturday; we'd play touch football or something like that. But it was interesting because that was the years of John F. Kennedy being President and—not that we knew him any better, but we always felt a closer kinship, and I had the good fortune to be at several events that he had. He really did have a presence about him. I remember one happened to be at a Saint Patrick's Day party. And it was a huge crowd—everybody was facing to the stage, and he'd come in the room, and you could actually feel him—everybody sort of turned because he had that sort of magnetic personality. But it was a great and it was an exciting period for—

**Rudolph:** Great time to be there.

[0:06:49]

**Burke:** It was.

**Rudolph:** Now, I was curious to know—you said you received a scholarship to go to Georgetown; I'm assuming you applied to get the scholarship—

**Burke:** Yes, and that's why I—

**Rudolph:** —received the scholarship, but I wondered why. Was it because you were a history major? Was it because of the time? What drew you there in the first place?

**Burke:** I think the fact that I was accepted to Georgetown [*laughs*]. I didn't apply to many graduate schools. Georgetown was the one I wanted to go to, and I was fortunate enough to go and enjoyed it very much. In fact, one of my sons—my son Dan—went to Georgetown Law School. And just a funny incident. We took him down there, and we showed him where we lived—three nine-O-three Davis Place in upper Georgetown. And the apartment we were in happened to be vacant, and we said, Isn't this wonderful? You can have the very same apartment! And he didn't want it. He wanted his own apartment. [*laughs*]

**Rudolph:** He was afraid you were going to redecorate it. How did you come to Massasoit? Tell me a little bit about that. How did that happen?

**Burke:** Well, I was at Boston State teaching, and a vacancy occurred here, and I applied for the presidency. This was four years before I came here. And I was the number one choice of the committee, but when I went into Boston, it went to somebody else. I'm sure they had good reasons. So I continued teaching at Boston State, and in 1982 occurred the merger

between Boston State and UMass Boston, and I always sort of referred to it as the union of a shark and its prey. We had eleven thousand students at Boston State when it closed its doors(??) and so I could have gone over to UMass as a professor, but I got a call from the individual at the [Massachusetts] Board of Higher Education who was doing the placements, and he said that he had a call from Dr. Ayers, who was the current president, and he wanted to talk to me. So I came down, and I had already gotten a job at UMass, and he said that because I was so faculty-oriented, he wanted me to come down here as his vice president. And, you know, I hesitated because I had sixteen-something years in the system, and I was giving up my seniority, if you will, and told him that I didn't want to come down here and think I was lusting after his job, which I wasn't. But he asked me to come and deal with the faculty. So the position was the dean of the college. I supervised all of the other deans.

And so that was my entrée in here, and he gave me certain assignments. First of all, they hadn't had a new program in forty years, and so I began immediately to work on that and to bring down faculty from Boston State. He had made an agreement with Chancellor [John B.] Duff at the time that community colleges would take the faculty from Boston State. The state colleges didn't want to do that because the Boston State faculty were senior to them in rank, and so it created immediate problems with the union. And so what happened is, the community college president said, "Okay, we'll do it." So he gave me the assignment of picking the people who came down, and we took down eighteen Boston State people. Eleven of them were Ph.Ds. The others were all specialists in their field. But it was remedial English, remedial math, and I tried to pick the best people that I could. And they came down, and it did create some friction with the people down here because, again, the Boston State faculty were senior to them—they came down here with higher salaries. So it was sort of a balancing act to calm the concerns of the people here that we would be enhancing what we could offer students, but it was an interesting year. And we were able to get a huge grant for an all-college conference, and we put together a new curriculum and so forth and so on. I thought it was useful—brought in some new programs as well, and so I think it worked out well.

**Rudolph:** How did this kind of melding of two different colleges—I suppose you could call it—how did Boston State prepare you for what was going to happen at Massasoit with this

melding of the Boston State faculty and staff? You said there was a little bit of adjustment for you.

**Burke:** Well, you know, I always considered myself a people person, and I was sure that when the faculty here—and staff too—I brought down several staff, including Joanne Jones. And I knew that once they met them, any concerns they had would disappear. They were experienced staff and administrators, and I think a lot of the junior faculty appreciated the fact that they had sort of mentors now, and so they melded very well, so it worked out. I'm not saying there weren't individual concerns sometimes, but those were addressed on an individual basis. So I think overall I think the merger was very, very productive for Massasoit.

**Rudolph:** How long was it after that you before you became president of the college?

[0:14:17.7]

**Burke:** Well, I came here in January 1982, and I became president in August of 1983, a year and a half later. Dr. Ayers left, they did a search committee again, and I was fortunate enough to be chosen as president. And you know, I think by that time I had gotten a very good read on the college and what its needs were and so forth and so on. Of course, coming right straight from the faculty after sixteen or seventeen years, I think I understood the needs of the faculty very well. I don't know how the faculty felt about it, but I knew most of them by then and what their strengths were and so forth and so on. I think I had a good idea of what direction we wanted to take the college and so forth. So my first two years were very busy years, and I tried to take the community college in Massasoit and make it much more family-oriented. So for example, I think when they had faculty events, I thought it was nice to invite staff people as well and even clerical people and so forth and so on. So we had a lot of things. We started a volleyball league and a softball league. I told the various heads of offices that if we consider a (??) program in aerobics, and I said that they shouldn't harass staff if they were ten minutes late, that we had a significant number of people taking sick leave, and I think after two years, we cut the sick leave in half by the various programs we had.

**Rudolph:** Bringing the faculty and the staff together.

**Burke:** Yeah and working out and doing aerobics. We had all sorts of things that worked. So that was one of my goals, so I think it worked out fairly well.

**Rudolph:** One of the things I remember when I first came here was at the end of the summer, before the faculty came back, so it wasn't for faculty, there was always a cookout.

**Burke:** Yes.

**Rudolph:** And, all of the staff would get together, and we would have a cookout before school started. It was a very nice way for—

**Burke:** Yeah, it was. And we had all sorts of activities at the cookout as well. When we first began the softball league, the administrators had their team, the faculty had their team, and the staff and custodians had their team, and *[laughs]* it became extremely competitive. And so we decided after a while that we were going to meld the teams together, so you know, everybody of course wanted people from the athletic department. It was it was a lot of fun—it really was. Enjoyed it.

**Rudolph:** Well, it was kind of team-building, so to say.

**Burke:** Yeah, it was.

**Rudolph:** How many years were you here altogether before you retired?

**Burke:** Fourteen years.

**Rudolph:** Fourteen years.

**Burke:** Yeah.

**Rudolph:** And you were dean of the college and then president of the college.

**Burke:** Mm-hm.

**Rudolph:** While you were at Boston State, you were a professor. I was just wondering if you taught any courses while you were here as an administrator and taught courses. Did you do that?

**Burke:** Yes, I attempted in my first year to teach a western civ[civilization] course with Dr. Finkelstein, and what I quickly learned is that the presidents love to have meetings. I was called out constantly to go to meetings. And I didn't think it was fair to the students that I

was missing all of these classes, so that sort of ended after a semester. It's one of my regrets; it's one of the things I missed most when I was president was teaching, so I sort of substituted walking around the campus all the time, having lunch with the students, going down to the cafeteria to have lunch, attending all of the senate meetings and so forth and so on. Because, you know, the whole reason we are here is for students. I used to make decisions: What's in the best interest of the students? Then, What's in the best interest of the faculty and staff? Then, What's in my best interest? And I think putting students first all the time, I think led to what I think people regard a successful presidency.

**Rudolph:** When you met with the students, say in the student center, would they come to you with their issues?

**Burke:** Sometimes they would. I tried to tell them to get involved. I said I was a member of the student senate when I was in college. I was a faculty advisor to the students when I taught at Boston State, and I said it's a great way to get to know the administrators and the other staff people, the inner-workings of the college, and besides it teaches you how to get up and speak on your feet and address problems and so forth. So I always enjoyed the senate meetings.

**Rudolph:** Do you remember any issues they might have brought to you?

**Burke:** No. Usually cafeteria issues.

**Rudolph:** [*laughs*] The food.

**Burke:** Yeah. They wanted more pizza or something [*laughs*].

**Rudolph:** You are now teaching Irish History at UMass Boston, so we've gone there. Would you talk a little bit about your teaching career versus your administrative career. How were those different?

[0:20:47.8]

**Burke:** Well, it almost was equal, except now the teaching is continued but in an adjunct sort of fashion. I really enjoyed both aspects, as I said. I sort of considered myself a people person, and I think the thing that I said I missed the most when I was president was not being able to interface with students all the time in the classroom. But I enjoyed being president; I enjoyed being able to do things. I always thought that Massasoit was a very

valuable asset for the community at large. I enjoyed working with the types of people we had coming here. I always thought of Massasoit as a second-chance institution. We took many people who had, for whatever reason, had not done well in high school. Or gals who had dropped out, gotten married, and decided to come back. I mean for me, graduations were sort of emotional highs, I mean seeing people who never thought they were going to go to college graduate and some of them do extremely well. And I was pleased that the number of students during my term as president who transferred to four-year schools was very good. But I enjoyed both, but when you're a faculty person, you're always criticizing the administration. If you will, Those dopes up there don't know what they're doing. So all of a sudden, I was the dope [*both laugh*].

**Rudolph:** I think being a president of a college is sometimes a political position. So the person who was in that seat has to deal with not just faculty and staff and students but has to go up to the Hill on occasion and deal with that end.

**Burke:** Many occasions. Well, we're a public institution, and I used to tell some individuals that if they look at their paycheck, who signs it and who provides the funds. So I think having a fruitful relationship with the legislature was very important, and I had the good fortune to be an elected official for twelve years, and I knew almost all of our delegation. And when I came here, out of the fourteen community colleges—or fifteen, we ranked eighth in terms of funding. When I left, we ranked second. I mean, it's great to have all sorts of ideas about new programs and new offerings, but if you can't get the funding for it, it's sort of a pipe dream. So I think that I was able to deal with a legislature rather effectively. And we had legislators [*clears throat*] my whole delegation, whether they were democrat or republican, were very, very supportive of Massasoit. And you know I wouldn't start mentioning some, but certainly the Fine Arts Building is named after Senator Anna Buckley, who was vice chairman of Ways and Means in the Senate, was a very, very strong supporter of Massasoit; and Senator Mike Creedon at the time was chairman of the Ways and Means committee in the House. Both of these were key positions, and they were very supportive of Massasoit and always very student-oriented. So there absolutely is a political dimension to being president because you're dealing with not only Ways and Means committee, but committee on education, and so forth and so on. And it goes right up the line. I never had a political person ask me for a faculty job—never when I was here. And on

occasion, which was very rare, when one would, I would simply say to them, Listen, you don't want to embarrass yourself; you don't want to put somebody in here that's not qualified and so forth.

So without telling tales out of school, I think that the positions they were most interested in occasionally would be staff positions or clerical or custodial and so forth and so on. And I would say as long as a person is qualified, I'm happy to interview them. So that was my outlook. For the legislators, all the public institutions, that was their bread and butter. I mean, if they had a constituent that was looking and was out of work or was looking for some sort of a position as a custodian or something, I would be happy to interview them. I didn't always hire them, but I think the political person who was asking was satisfied if you did that and then told them that they had been recommended, and so forth and so on. It's not a negative [*clears throat*]. 'Politics' comes from a Greek word meaning 'people', and that's what politicians do—they deal with people, you know

[0:26:58.2]

**Rudolph:** And your time in Washington did you well?

**Burke:** Yes, we were able to get several significant federal grants.

**Rudolph:** Now you said something about the graduation here at Massasoit, and I find as you do that is an emotional high to go to a graduation. Talk a little about what makes it so exciting.

**Burke:** Well, giving an award is the academically most talented student or the young lady who had a child at the age of sixteen whose parents thought that their life was over, and then giving them this award and seeing them major in biology and chemistry [*laughs*], go on to a four-year school on scholarship. And in that light, I was particularly fond of the CHOICES program, which we began here, which was the largest in the state, and which Governor Dukakis came down and cited it as a model program. There again, you're dealing with people who were looking for a second chance, and I would greet them when they came in here and talk to them when they first came in, and I would go to their—they usually had a little separate graduation—I would go to that and speak and so forth and so on. [*clears throat*] And that was a real fulfilling sort of thing for me.

**Rudolph:** Because perhaps someone who is listening to this doesn't know what the object of the CHOICES program is and who gets to be in that program.

**Burke:** Without simplifying it too much, I would say that we were dealing with women who \_\_\_(??) or even people who had experienced an unhappy marriage, for battered women, and so forth and so on. And they would come here with fear and trepidation, and we had an excellent staff—Alice Wallace-Moore, I remember, for years was head of that program and just gave them a very welcoming environment, and they surprised themselves on how well they did academically. And they came here with a serious purpose in mind and they did very well. I always liked the CHOICES program.

**Rudolph:** It's still here.

**Burke:** Yeah, oh.

**Rudolph:** Still running. Under your leadership at Massasoit, you've talked a little bit about some of the programs—but some of the initiatives I wanted to particularly mention and have you talk about a little bit. You had an initiated several new academic programs, such as the Culinary Arts Program.

**Burke:** Culinary Arts Program. The Physical Therapy Program. There were several and at eighteen years distance now—I can't believe I left in 1996; I was just a teenager.

**Rudolph:** You were.

**Burke:** Yes [*both laugh*]. The Culinary Arts Program was a particular favorite of mine. And we were able to bring on a chef, really, who was teaching at a high school program. I don't want to mention names, but he was very, very good and began the program. I had visions of eventually setting up a culinary institute and sort of merging it with hotel/motel management, and I made one proposal to the trustees to buy the hotel up in the Westgate Mall, but they were not in line with my thinking. They thought I was thinking too far ahead. But then of course we had the good fortune to have Jeff Demarco come on. He was absolutely outstanding. I mean the program grew and we were very pleased with the program. It's still going on, isn't it?

**Rudolph:** It is still going on and you can have lunch any Thursday during the academic year—very delicious lunches. The merger with Blue Hills Technical School happened during your administration as well.

[0:31:41.1]

**Burke:** Yes, 1985. I was in my third year as president—going into my third year as president. And I was approached by the superintendent of the Blue Hills Technical Institute. His name was Mr. Richard Brennen(??), and his school was getting fewer and fewer students, and the tuition kept rising, so he asked me if I would attempt a merger, that it was very complicated but involved a lot of dealings with the legislature because he represented ten towns; we had a deal with all the ten school committees in the town, and we hired two consultants, and we brought off the merger in less than two years. And for me, I told my trustees, This is the best purchase since the Louisiana Purchase [*both laugh*]! The best—we get a fully operational, free-standing technical institute, okay? Our part of the deal was that we had to amortize what was left of their debt, which the state was paying 60 percent of anyways. And we got a very talented faculty. What made it easy is that they were the only the technical institute that gave out associate degrees. So, the merger was, you know, I don't want to say seamless, but it was very \_\_\_(??). And I made many trips over there to speak to their faculty and to assure them that if they wanted the job, they had a job here. But I think it added so much to Massasoit. It made us what we had always claimed to be—a comprehensive community college. But we really weren't comprehensive. Now we had everything from diesel technology to HVAC, and so forth and so on, to complement the academic programs that we had. I can remember the education advisor to Governor Dukakis at the time, whose name is just slipping now—a senior moment— but he later became chairman of the Board of Regents, and I was trying to get the governor's approval of this but was, at the time, I suppose a very exotic sort of proposal, and he took me to lunch at the Harvard Faculty Club. He was vice president of Harvard for I forget what the term was. But anyways, I can remember making a proposal to him, and he just shook his head and said, \_\_\_(??) "It's not going to work. It's too complicated." So we began talking small talk and asked me where I went to school and what I was doing in Washington and I said, "Well, you know, my uncle was Congressman Jim Burke from Massachusetts," and he said, "I have two heroes in my life. Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Congressman Jim Burke." So, after

that, he said, “Let me see what I can do.” And sure enough we got the approval of the governor for the merger and things sailed quite along. So, people can say that’s politics, but that’s, you know, I think it worked. \_\_\_(??) I think the benefit of Massasoit.

**Rudolph:** Well, it’s certainly a different building than what we have here.

**Burke:** It is—

**Rudolph:** A lovely building.

**Burke:** Yeah. You know, they have electronics—a host programs of programs that I think we should have more offerings in high school levels.

**Rudolph:** A lot of certificate programs.

**Burke:** A lot of certificate programs. And the students who graduate from there, whether it’s HVAC or—almost immediately get jobs. And we had a diesel technology program that we won a grant from the largest diesel manufacturer in the country—I forget its name. But they were going to set up their training thing right at our college, and our students were going to be the interns, and they made a commitment to hire them, and I forget at the time—this is like nineteen eighty-seven or eighty-eight, and they were hiring these young men out of there twenty-something thousand dollars, I mean it was just—

**Rudolph:** It worked.

**Burke:** Yeah, it was just wonderful.

**Rudolph:** You also were involved in the development of the ARC, the Academic Resources Center.

[0:37:30.1]

**Burke:** Yes. You know, we wanted to have access and excellence for students. Many of our students came here, quite frankly, not well-prepared for college work, and so I was particularly interested in having peer tutoring and so forth and so on, and we opened the ARC and we had a number of people who directed it. I’m trying to think of Mr. Johnson’s first name.

**Rudolph:** Peter.

**Burke:** Peter Johnson was very good. And it was wonderful when you walked down there—it was so busy with students and so forth. And I think it was for a lot of students, it was, whether it was tutoring in math or in English, it was like somebody turns the light on all of a sudden—oh they understood this concept and so forth and so on. And I think it was a great resource for classroom teachers to have this available to the students here. It was another area that I was pleased with.

**Rudolph:** That's still running as well.

**Burke:** Is it really?

**Rudolph:** And still just as busy. Very busy place. Another change during your time here was the addition of daytime continuing education courses called DCE.

**Burke:** DCE.

**Rudolph:** Which I understand happened during an economic downturn, when it was feared there would be layoffs and possibly fewer classes. Can you tell us a little bit about that time?

**Burke:** I don't know how detailed you want me to get in terms of politics of the situation.

**Rudolph:** As much as you would like.

**Burke:** Well, we had a severe recession in the late eighties and early nineties, and all of the presidents of all of the public institutions were called together, and we had a meeting down in Cape Cod. The secretary of Administration and Finance addressed us and told us that he expected us—we each were given targets. The target for Massasoit was I was to turn away 700 students and lay off the appropriate number of faculty. And being someone who was used to speaking out, I stood up and said that I was not going to do that, that Brockton was in recession probably on the \_\_\_(??) depression, that we were the biggest provider of services in our area, that if I were to eliminate 700 students and lay off faculty and programs, that it would cause the city enormous economic pain, and I was not willing to do that. So I was sort of looked upon as a maverick. And as the chancellor of Higher Education later referred to me as not a team player, I came back here, and we talked things over, and I said, "We're not going to do this." So we sort of brainstormed together, and we came up with this concept of bringing day DCE to the day school, and it turned out to be really a blessing for the college. We lost 30 percent of our budget during this time. I called each of

the separate unions together, and I said, “Listen, if you cooperate with me, I promise I won’t lay a single person off.” And that’s what happened. We took the cuts in our budget, we supplemented it with the funds from day DCE, and I never laid off a faculty or a clerical staff or a custodian; and so I think that probably would be one of my most satisfying moments as president. I took a lot of political hits for that up in the state house. I was accused by the chancellor of running an illegal thing and it turned out it was not illegal—not at all. But they put me through a great deal of unhappy circumstances. Sent a low spotlight team(??) down and investigated our finances and so forth and so on. But I was never sorry that I did what I did. And afterwards, within two years, every single community college in the state was doing it. And most of the state colleges, you know—they’d never acknowledge that, you know.

**Burke:** During the time.

[0:42:45.3]

**Rudolph:** What was the college like when you came here? How was it different than what it was? You told us a little bit about what it was when you left, but the physical plant, the students themselves, the faculty perhaps, or the setup? How was it when you first came?

**Burke:** The physical appearance was terrible. I called the custodians together [*clears throat*] excuse me, and said, “Listen, you are on the front lines—the first impression people get when they come here is what they see is a product of what you do.” And I put a bid out to landscape the college. We got a bid—low bid if you can imagine this, just to clear out the shrubs, I mean the weeds and so forth—forty-seven thousand dollars. [pause] So, the winning bid—the company that had the lowest bid, I spoke to the two gentleman who had come. One was a plant specialist and so forth, and they said, We’d love to work in a place like this. So I hired both of them instead of taking the bid. I hired two people, and we I think transformed the whole outward appearance of the college. In fact Bob Creedon(??) at the time, said he used to hate to drive to the campus, but now he said it was wonderful. There was a great, remarkable achievement, you know. But I think the college had gone through a—and this is no reflection on the president—but it had gone through a period of very, very bad morale. I think the faculty had a low opinion of themselves. I think they—not to stress it too much—but there were constantly bad articles in the newspaper about the school, so I can

remember in my interview with the trustees, I simply said that my goal was to make this the best community college in the state. And so that's why I took the approach I did with the faculty. I put a lot of emphasis in telling them how good they were, having faculty meetings with them and so forth and so on. Of course everybody has a different platform personality. Mine was that I would always get up and tell a story to begin with, you know, more to probably relax me than the people. We had a lot of—I don't want to say parties—but we had a lot of social functions to bring people together, and I have to say that the faculty and the staff got on board, you know, and pretty soon, we were the best community college in the state.

**Rudolph:** I think so. And the prettiest, perhaps.

**Burke:** Yes.

**Rudolph:** I think it's lovely.

**Burke:** Well, this was, you know, the site of this was a pig farm.

**Rudolph:** I know.

**Burke:** Have you ever heard that expression making a silk purse out of a sow's ear? I think the analogy [*laughs*] is very good in terms of what Massasoit became.

**Rudolph:** Now, about the students. What were the students like when you first came to the college, and how were they different when you left or even looking at your UMass students, what is the difference between those students when you first came—when you first started teaching—and how are they now?

**Burke:** Well, coming right from the classroom at Boston State, in fact I had been an undergraduate there. When I went back teaching, I always made the remark it was like—I don't know how many years later—all the faculty was still there, and I said, "I don't know whether this is a sign of stability or stagnation," I said [*laughs*]. But when I came here, I think the students had bought into the general atmosphere that morale was not good at the school, you know. But again, I try to make the students the central focus of my administration and to get to know them, and I think I can say that I knew hundreds of students by their first name, and you know, I didn't want it to be, oh, just a number. I wanted them to know that I knew who they were, and so forth. So that's why I would go in

the cafeteria all the time and so forth. And I can remember one young man—one of our minority students who got very frustrated and was leaving, and I had a talk with him. He was going into the service, and I said, “Listen, when you finish your tour, I want you to come back here, and I’ll be at the door welcoming you.” *[tapping sound]* And he did — he came back. He became a member of the senate—student senate. Graduated with honors, and went on to get his bachelor’s degree and so forth and so on. I could say the same thing about Pamerson Ifill. I can remember graduation, telling the story of Pamerson, and he would come and show up and try to get in, and at the time we had started a foreign student advising thing—Ida O’Donnell was the twenty-four-seven person running that program, and I have to say that the foreign student club—name escapes me right now—

[0:49:20.8]

**Rudolph:** International Touch *[talking at same time]*.

**Burke:** International Touch—was my favorite club. And Ida would come to me and say, “You’ve got to help this young man.” So I finally interviewed him. When he came in he said, “Dr. Burke,” he said, “I’m very big, and I’m getting in trouble in Brockton. People are picking fights with me,” and so forth. So I gave him a scholarship. So he came here and became very active in the student—in fact he became president of the International Touch Club and has gone on, of course, to get two masters’ degrees and is now chairman of the \_\_\_(??). I told the story at graduation. I said, “You know, he came to me about getting a scholarship and he was standing,” and I said, “Of course he’s six foot three, he happened to be light heavyweight boxing champion of the Caribbean,” and I said, “Look at me,” and I said, “What do you think I said to him?” They all yelled out, Yes! I said, “Of course!”

**Rudolph:** Anything you want. *[both laugh]*

**Burke:** I enjoyed talking to students and if I could help them, you know, I would do that.

**Rudolph:** Do you find that students who are at UMass Boston understand you’re not an administrator there and you teach a class there, but that you run into the same kinds of students that we have here?

**Burke:** Of course, I teach Irish history, so the students I get usually have a particular issue interest in Irish history or their Irish background and so forth and so on. But I find the

students very engaging. I find that, I think this is universal that the huge gaps in their education—their background—are just things that we take for granted, the knowledge they just don't—they know President Kennedy was a president and so forth [*laughs*], you know.

**Rudolph:** Yes.

**Burke:** But I don't find them too much different from here.

**Rudolph:** We're kind of changing gears here a little bit. Who were some of the colleagues that you remember from your time here at Massasoit?

**Burke:** I hate to start mentioning people. There were so many administrators and faculty. I would call them friends, you know. They were colleagues, but they were friends.

**Rudolph:** Do you see many of them now still?

**Burke:** Unfortunately, no. One of my best friends, Mo Foley, Morris Foley, passed away. I taught with him for sixteen years at Boston State and brought him down here when I came down. And I used to joke about Morris—he had an office that nobody could find. And I remember I used to walk all around all the buildings, and finally I found his office one day [*laughs*]. I said, “Oh here's where you've been hiding out!” and he had this sign behind his desk—it was a Latin phrase: *Illegitimi non carborundum amis*(??) which means, Don't let the bastards get you down. That was sort of his—he said, “You ought to adopt this when you're having a hard time.”

**Rudolph:** [*laughs*] A good mantra.

**Burke:** Tim Trask was just outstanding—TV studio. I mean there were so, you know, Ron Quelo(??). There are just so many outstanding teachers and friends that I had, administrators, I mean. My presidency would not have been as successful if I didn't have the staff and the administrators that I had. I used to compare the staff to the first sergeants in the army; they really ran everything, you know. We were we were blessed to have so many good ones.

**Rudolph:** When I first came to Massasoit, there was a discussion about an investigator trip that you and other Massasoit administrators and staff had taken to China. What was the China Massasoit connection all about?

[0:54:02.5]

**Burke:** Well, we had hosted four presidents of Chinese institutions here at Massasoit, and I can remember that Jeff had made this beautiful ice sculpture of a—it must have been an eagle or something—and they were so—snapping pictures, they were, you know [*gesturing?*]. So actually they extended an invitation to us then to come over and to look at some of their institutions in Beijing. Now there were two different trips. One that I went on with administrators. And then there was the Fulbright grant that we got that we sent faculty and staff over. The one that I went on, we visited several universities or satellite universities in Beijing. I mean it was one of these every morning you get up and you go tour a different university and so forth and so on. And one amusing thing I remember. I was getting sort of weary of this, and so I think seven days in or something like that I said I'm really tired at breakfast. I said, "I'm really tired." They were going to go to one of the universities. I said, "I'm very tired. I wish to go to my room and rest." "Oh, alright." Well, as soon as the van left with the administrators, I jumped in a taxi and went to and dawdled in Beijing Square and got a Big Mac and a Coke, and it was like heaven [*laughs*]. Because you know, when you went there, there was a lot of protocol and you'd be at a roundtable with a lazy Susan in the middle with various food items, and I knew where I was supposed to sit because my napkin would be up like this [*gesturing?*]. The deans' napkins would be down, okay? And the presidents of the college would sit beside me and would help me pick the food. "Ah, this is slug—very good!" So, I lost seven pounds when I was there, and I would not eat anything except if it was fried [*laughs*]. But it was productive, but really what they wanted to do is have an exchange of faculty, and we were just not financially in any kind of situation to do that—to put somebody up here, to pay them the salary, to house them, and you know, so it was not going to work out. But we tried to make Massasoit more international. We were the only community college that did it at the time, but we had agreements with Ireland, with England, with Japan, with China, with Russia. A whole group of us went over to Russia in 1993. And this wasn't a Fulbright—this was another trip that we went over and we brought faculty from Bridgewater State and Cape Cod. We brought all sorts of medical supplies with us, and our first visit was to the Ukraine. And I can remember going to what was the children's hospital in Kiev, and the head of the hospital was a woman, and almost all of the doctors were women, and she said, "We are not respected." And she took me on a tour, and

it was absolutely appalling—the conditions that these young children were in and so forth and so on. They had no medications, so they were very pleased that we brought over just basic things. And so we went from the Ukraine, we then went to Moscow. And we were going to a university that was two hundred miles north of Moscow, so we had a nine-hour train trip from the Ukraine up to Moscow in what would be sort of a reject from the old MTA. We had a guide. Malkova was her last name, Zoya Malkova, and she was the head of secondary education for Russia, and she was a great hero because she had been a fighter pilot during the second world war and had shot down I don't know how many numbers of German planes. But I can remember when we got to the Ukraine—Ukrainians and Russians do not get along as we're seeing today in Crimea—and I can remember we were greeted by the Ukrainians and they had a band, they had all of these young ladies dressed with flowers and so forth and so on, and then we went up to this—it was a monument to the defeat of the Russians by the Cossacks, by the Ukrainian Cossacks, in like 1572, and they had this huge cross up there commemorating and a monument. And we're standing there, and the head of the delegation from the Ukraine all of a sudden looked over and said, “Who brought that Russian woman here?” So Zoya kept in back of us, and they were calling Zoya a Communist, and she was calling them Nazis. But we had an interesting experience. So we got to Moscow—I don't know if you want to hear this story.

[1:00:50.4]

**Rudolph:** Oh, this is a wonderful story.

**Burke:** We got to Moscow and Zoya said, “I have one thing to tell you. When you get to Moscow station, hang onto your luggage!” she said, “And follow me!” So we get to Moscow station—it was chaos! Guys were coming up who wanted to take your luggage and so forth and so on and [*clears throat*], so myself and two other gentlemen's luggage, we ended up in the other side of the square [*clears throat*]; all of the other people—there were about eighteen of us there. And there were three gentlemen walking around our luggage with long, black leather coats, looking at our luggage like this [*gesture?*], and I said, “This doesn't look good.” And they were my idea of the old SS, you know, the second world war? And so we hurried across the square \_\_\_\_ (??) and we get to the other side, and Zoya said we were being met by two professors from the university that we were visiting and Zoya said,

“There has been a problem.” This is a Saturday night. “The bus has broken down; you have no transportation; and it’s too late to get rooms at a hotel.” So, then the gentlemen in the long, black leather coats stepped forward; they said, “We have a bus and you will take our bus.” And the two professors said, “Do not go with these men. They are very dangerous.” Turns out they were the Russian mafia. So here we are in Moscow, Zoya’s crying—this war hero—and the professors say, “Do not get on this.” So we got on the bus—it was like something one of the TV shows about hillbillies—broken-down bus, okay, and the gentlemen in the black leather coats said, “You will get on the bus, or you go nowhere.” So we got on the bus, and he said, “You will pay me.” I said, “How much?” “A hundred dollars in American money.” So I literally had to take a collection up. Just a comic relief, there was one of the women there from Cape Cod, and she refused to get on the bus at first, and she was arguing with Zoya [*laughs*], and she come up to me later and she said, “She told me to shut up and get on the bus!” She had no idea what was going on, so we got on the bus; it was a 250-mile thing with their driver, okay. The fellow in the black leather coat gets on the bus, he collects the money that I gave him, and he got off the bus, and later Zoya told us he said, “Stop crying, woman!” He said, “They have paid us the money. They will be okay.” So course, I didn’t know that. We’re driving, and I kept looking behind for somebody following us, and he stopped about 100 miles in and we were all concerned, but he drove us on. We get in very, very late, like two in the morning, the chancellor of the university come out, the professors ran off, he comes out, and he started to apologize for how we had been treated and he said to us, “This would not have happened under the communists!” [*both laugh*] This is when Yeltsin was in there [*laughs*]. It’s an interesting story that one of the professors that was our host was a woman who had come here for summer at Harvard, and she took us to her apartment where she lived with her parents. It was like the eighth floor—this huge block of apartments, and she said, “I have a Ph.D. in music, and I have a Ph.D. in philosophy. I have written six books.” She said, “I make sixty dollars a year.” [*JR gasps*] She said, “This is how we are treated.” And she said, “I am very tough. I have only cried twice in my life.” she said, “Once when I went to Harvard, my friend took me to a supermarket, and I saw rows and rows of cat food and dog food,” and she said, “People in Moscow were starving.” She said, “The other time I cried is when I got home and the people were lining the streets outside of Moscow station selling everything they could, and I could

remember that—shoes.” So she wrote me several times. She wanted me to take her here as a professor, visiting professor, and I tried to do something with Bridgewater State, but the same thing, we can’t afford it; we don’t have that in our budget, and so forth and so on. But it was a very interesting experience. I must say the difference—it was a year between China and Russia. The Russians were very dour; they were not happy people. The Chinese were all riding their bicycles, and they kept staring at us because we were the only westerners wherever we went, but they were very curious about us; but they were very upbeat and so forth and so on. You know, I found the difference between the two countries tremendous. But anyways, that was my—

**Rudolph:** Your trips abroad.

**Burke:** My trips abroad.

[1:06:58.5]

**Rudolph:** One thing I wanted to ask you about. You mentioned before we started that you’re still singing. One of the things that I remember is the caroling at Christmas before Christmas break.

**Burke:** Oh yes.

**Rudolph:** We would all get together and sing.

**Burke:** Sing Christmas carols.

**Rudolph:** Who played the piano? Trying to remember someone came and played the piano.

**Burke:** Was it Steven, English department.

**Rudolph:** Oh. Steven Tooker. [*both talking*] Tooker, maybe?

**Burke:** Steven Tooker.

**Burke:** Steven sang too; he was in some sort of chorale and—

**Rudolph:** But he would have us all sing. It was a great send off for the break.

**Burke:** And we did also Thanksgiving. We would have hot cider and donuts.

**Rudolph:** That’s right.

[break in recording]

**Rudolph:** Alright. Boy this is a big stretch here from what we just talked about. What part do you feel the college plays in the community?

**Burke:** Oh, I think probably the number one resource for the greater Brocton community. We're the largest supplier of professional and trained personnel in this area. I mean, if Massasoit was to disappear, both campuses, it would be a body blow to the economy of the of the area. And not only from an economic point of view but from a social view. They add so much to the community in terms of its fine arts program—the plays that they have and the people that they bring in, you know. So I just think that they play a marvelous role.

**Rudolph:** What do you see as some of the college's biggest accomplishments? It could be during your time here or any other time.

**Burke:** Oh, well, I just think in my fourteen years here, the college grew tremendously in many, many different facets. Not only academically with the programs and so forth and so on, but I think the fine arts program, the TV studio that we began, the first child development program. And that was one of the women I brought down from Boston State that began that—that did all the licensure and so forth was very complicated, and then of course Marge [phonetic] for years was the head of that program, still going on—still issuing degrees in early childhood and so forth and so on. It was a pleasure—I used to go [*laughs*] I used to go and they would have little graduations, and I would go over there for Thanksgiving, and I would sit on their little chairs. And we had a faculty member here, and his son was in the was in the program, and he came home, and he said, “Guess who was at my Thanksgiving today, Dad?” He said, “The—the president.” He said, “Do you know his name?” He said, “Yeah, George Washington.” [*both laugh*]

**Rudolph:** They're so cute. Could you tell me if there were any disappointments or challenges that you saw in the college?

**Burke:** Oh, there's always disappointments, you know? I'm a positive some by nature, but there were there were challenges that sometimes, you know, I think some of the things we wanted to do didn't get done. I had started the initiative to buy the Christos II at the time and actually got the legislature to vote me three million dollars to do it. But a couple of my trustees who were quite put off by this; they thought it would be a white elephant and so forth and so on. I wanted to make a culinary institute. Not to rival, you know, what goes on

in Rhode Island but to give our students this opportunity, and so it was disappointing because a couple of the trustees made me return the money to the legislature, and the reaction of the legislative leaders was not a happy one: You mean we voted this money for you and you're turning it down? And I had to make up some sort of—without putting blame on my trustees—had to tell them this and that didn't work out and so forth and so on. But it was a huge disappointment for me, and so years later of course, the college acquired it. But afterwards, but I think that was a key, you know. Sometimes my ideas are too big.

[1:12:38.5]

**Rudolph:** They couldn't see the vision.

**Burke:** Yeah, I mean that's part of being successful, though, as a president. Getting people to share your vision. And you know, maybe it was too big a step for the time, I don't know. But I was disappointed.

**Rudolph:** What are the most difficult problems that you might have faced at the college, and what were their outcomes?

**Burke:** Well, I think that the difficulty was, first of all, we had to do a makeover image. As I said, not putting any aspersions on the past president, but the image of the college was not a healthy one, and I think that was one of our major goals was to address that issue and make the college a very positive image in the community. And I think we did that. I can say that in the fourteen years I was here, we never had one single negative story in the newspaper. And if I remember, the editor of the newspaper, was Mr. Fuller [phonetic] at the time. He happened to be on the board of trustees and one-time board of advisors, and he had negative articles every single week about the college. And he got off, you know, when the board went from an advising board to a trustee level. I went to see him. And [clears throat] explained to him, Listen, you know—I think we have the same goals. I want to make Massasoit into a model community college in the state, and so he told me then, he said, “I will never write another negative article about you.” So getting the newspaper on board behind us was, you know. And as our public relations guy, we had Ed Lyons [phonetic]. Ed Lyons was married to the sister of the publisher at one time and had worked for the paper, so we had a very good relationship. I remember Bridgewater State president calling me one time saying, “How do you get these articles in the paper? I mean what is the secret?”

[laughs] So we try to fluff up the image of Massasoit and so forth and so on. But budgetary issues were always a problem, and sometimes my ideas went ahead of the budget, but I have to say that the legislature was always very supportive. Every year I had a legislature breakfast here at the college and would give them a report of our progress and what we'd done with their money and so forth and so on. I have to say, I don't think we ever had a negative incident with the legislature. And that was very, very important because four years previously, they didn't give money for one single program. Couldn't get a single program in and as I said, we were fifteen community colleges, we were down here eighth in terms of funding, and I was pleased that we were able to address that issue and correct it.

**Rudolph:** Would you tell us a little bit more about what you're doing now. I know you're teaching.

**Burke:** Well, my wife and I are very busy. We have seventeen grandkids total.

**Rudolph:** Congratulations.

**Burke:** From five to twenty-two. So, we spend a lot of time there and we have kids in four different states, so we do a lot of traveling that way. I remain on the board of Catholic Charities for the south here Brockton surrounding communities; I've been on it thirty-two years. I'm chairman of the trustees. We had the largest distributor of social services in the state next to the state government itself. And we have a whole variety of programs that my wife and I are involved in. And we had been involved way back when we had foster children back in the seventies.

[1:17:35.9]

**Rudolph:** I was going to ask you a little bit about that. I know that you had have had several foster children, and this is quite a large undertaking when you have a number of biological children as well. Could you talk about that a little bit?

**Burke:** Yeah, I can remember we were in Our Lady of Lourdes parish in Brockton, and the pastor made a plea—I think it the pastor—for people who might be interested in helping Catholic Charities out by being foster parents. And so we had a discussion because we had five children at the time, and we decided that we would we would offer our services. So as it turned out, we had—the book says twenty five—we had thirty-five foster infants; we were

the infant people, so we got them four days out of the hospital with just their diaper, that was it. And they sent them home and as the social worker first explained it, we want you to make them part of the family, and the first six months of their lives are very, very important and so forth and so on. So I can remember them lining our kids up in this thing and talking to them about the children. We got much more out of it than we gave. It was a tremendous experience; it showed our own children how well off they were off compared to other people, and our three oldest were daughters, were girls. By the end of the process, there wasn't anything they couldn't do with a baby, and they were the top babysitters in the whole community [*laughs*], you know. And even my son Dan was only five, and Gerard was seven; but everybody pitched in, and they loved taking the babies for strolls and so forth and so on. But when you think about it, we got them four days old and Rosemary had to put them on schedule, so for ten years she never really slept through the night.

**Rudolph:** I was going to say.

**Burke:** And my job was I gave the midnight feeding. I was the one who was up late, you know. But we had so much pleasure out of it, and they would stay anywhere from a month; some of them stayed eleven months, nine months, and of course you get very attached; they're part of the family. So what would happen is that we would give up the baby for adoption on a Friday, and we would have a new one on Monday, and of course the neighbors were amazed . [*both laugh*]. But each parting became more emotional. The girls especially became very attached, and so the baby would leave, and there was always crying and so forth and so on, which was rectified because we had another baby pretty soon. And of course they had no names, so I had a bowl and we would all write names, and they would put them in a bowl, and I would put ridiculous names in like Rumpelstiltskin [**Rudolph** *laughs*] and occasionally I would win, and they would all yell at me [*laughs*]. But, it was a real joy for us, you know, and it taught the children an awful lot about life and about—I would say that 99.9 percent were illegitimate, usually teenage girls, and the only difficulty I ever thought was if the father showed up at the door. The girl would come to the house—the mother would come to the house. Rosemary would teach them how to change the baby, how to feed the baby, etcetera, etcetera. And I would say to Rosemary, “What if the father showed up and insisted that he see the baby?” So I think they must have had some sort of an incident because after a while, we had to bring the babies to Catholic Charities center and

then the mother would, you know. Three years ago, Rosemary and I were honored at a Catholic Charities gala and Susan Wornick was the emcee, and she had come up to me before, she said, “Oh,” she said, “I got? almost \_\_\_(??); we have a big surprise.” So for the program she called out the woman who was head of the service to come out, and she said her baby was one of the people that we had fostered. It was a big surprise to us and to her, but it was very emotional.

[1:23:11.1]

**Rudolph:** Yeah. That’s wonderful. Are there any questions that I should have asked you or that you would like to address? Something that I missed?

**Burke:** Not really. I think that I had a very positive experience here at Massasoit. I hope I left it a better place than when I came. We weren’t without our challenges and so forth and so one, and sometimes you can’t please everybody. But I think overall, I think that I accomplished a lot of the things that I wanted to accomplish that I used to say as a faculty person, If I was a president, I would do this, and all of a sudden—

**Rudolph:** You were.

**Burke:** I mean, for a whole year when people would address me in the hall as Mr. President, I would check around and see who they were talking to. I always felt I was a faculty person. I never—that never left me, and when I retired, the first thing I did is call up UMass. Many of the people who had gone over from Boston State were in very high positions now, and the dean of academic affairs happened to be a colleague of mine at Boston State, so I said, “I noticed that the courses that I taught in Irish history are carried in the catalog, but they have never been taught since I left.” I said, “How would you like me to come back and teach them?” So he said, “Oh we’d love so.” He said, “I’ll set up an interview with the chairman of the department.” So I went in and talked to him. He said, “Oh,” he said, “We have African history; we have Italian; we’d love to have Irish history,” he said, “but ah, we don’t have any money in the budget.” I said, I’ll tell you what, “I’ll teach it for nothing the first semester; see if it will go.” And I went down to write some terms on the board the first class, and there were forty-seven kids in the classroom. They were literally standing along the sides of...and I said, *[laughs]* “Are you all here for Irish history?” and they said, Yes. So, it just happened that my elective and one other elective

were the only two electives in the department that year—that semester. So I think, I’m surmising, that some of the senior professors’ noses were out of joint. Not only did I take their students, I said, but I was doing it for nothing. So what happened is the next semester, the chairman of the department said, “We’re bringing it up at a department meeting.” So he came out, he said, “It was very acrimonious,” he said. “But the good news,” he said, “is that the course has been approved, we’re going to pay you, but they did change your schedule a little bit.” I was teaching Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at one o’clock. They changed it to Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at four thirty in the afternoon. So I said, giving my Dorchester colloquial, I said, “You don’t have to hit me in the head with a two-by-four,” I said, “I understand what’s going on, unfortunately,” I said, “I have a commitment on Monday evenings.” So I went down to Continuing Education where the dean was—a gal that I had taught with at Boston State—and she said, [*whispering*] “Come and teach for us! We need the students, and we’ll pay you six hundred dollars more than the history department.” So, that’s what I’ve been doing. I go through the history department but—

**Rudolph:** So do you teach at night then?

**Burke:** Yes, mostly at night. Summertime, I teach in the day. And I love it. I think good teachers have to be something of a showman. So I read them poetry; I sing Irish songs if I think it’s appropriate. We usually go out to an Irish pub after the final exam. We do a lot of things that are different.

**Rudolph:** Well, this is a good point for me to ask you my last question.

**Burke:** Sure.

**Rudolph:** Which is one of the fond memories I have of you is your ability to make anyone feel comfortable with a story or a joke. I wondered if you would have a story or a joke for us today?

**Burke:** Well, there was this elderly Irishman who went to his doctor for his annual physical, this is in Ireland, of course. And the doctor said to him, “Listen, when you’re finished dressing, I’d like to see you in my office.” And that’s what transpired. About a week later, the doctor is walking down the main street in the village, and across the street he sees his patient, and he has this stunning blonde in his arm with a big grin on his face. Well

the doctor didn't wish to embarrass him in front of the lady, so he waited. He saw them a couple of days later, and he said, "What's with the grin and the blonde?" "Just following your orders, Doctor." "Which were what?" "Find a hot mamma and be cheerful." "No, I said, you have a heart murmur, be careful!"

[1:28:29.4]

**Rudolph:** [*laughs*] Thank you very much. I appreciate your coming in.

**Burke:** Oh, you're quite welcome. [*talking at the same time*] It's a pleasure and an honor.

**Rudolph:** I enjoyed our conversation very much. Thank you.

[End of Recording 1]

[Begin Recording 2]

**Rudolph:** This is Jennifer Rudolph, coordinator of libraries here at Massasoit, and I'm going to ask you this question again, Jerry, about who were some of your colleagues at Massasoit that you remember?

**Burke:** Well, again, I hate to single people out because it really was a team effort. I mean, I simply would not have had any of the successes I had if it wasn't for the fact that everybody really shared the same vision of where the college should go that I did. But I would be remiss if I did not mention—I mean I had wonderful administrative people—but the one who stands out in my mind was Lou Colombo. And Lou was a fountain of information. He had been president of the city council in Brockton, and he had a great deal of practical knowledge, and he really was my right-hand man, and I simply would not have been anywhere as successful as I was if it wasn't for the contributions that Lou made. So of all my administrators—and I had wonderful administrators—he would be the one that I would single out as having been the most helpful to me.

**Rudolph:** What position did he hold here under your administration?

**Burke:** He was he was my advisor—presidential adviser. He would do anything I asked him to do. I mean he really was my eyes and ears in the college community, and he eventually became Dean of Administration running all of the operations of the buildings and so forth and so on. And eventually he became vice president and when I left became acting

president; I think was a tribute to his overall knowledge of how a college should be run and so forth and so on. But he was very down to earth. I mean he was quite witty. We had a lot of good times together. And when you think about it, not to stress the political aspect, but he was president of the city council. I was chairman of the Plymouth County Commissioners, and we were able to do things far beyond our positions as president and presidential advisor—I'm talking about the community at large. And I think through that connection, we were able to get funds far and above what other colleges could get, and there was nothing shady about it at all; it was just advocating for your college and for the needs that we had, and I think that - I know that Lou was absolutely vital to the success that I had as president.

**Rudolph:** It shows what we were talking about earlier when we were discussing political things, but you really need to have some kind of a pulse on what's going on and have others know you and getting out there and having another person who can also get out there is an advantage.

**Burke:** Yes, absolutely. I'm always amazed when they—and this is not a, again, a slight at anybody who preceded me or came after me, but I'm always amazed when community colleges pick people from Minnesota and other states who have no knowledge of not only Massachusetts but certainly of the community that Massasoit serves. And it takes some two or three years just to find out who to deal with in the legislature because it's a vital part of being president is being able to advocate for your school, to get the funds necessary to pay for the things that you have in your vision for the school. And I've always been amazed at that; why they don't pick people from Massachusetts that are familiar with the system and so forth and so on and can sort of take off running it when they become president. But that's, you know, my own personal feeling about the community colleges. It's nice to have fresh blood, but it makes little sense to me to pass over local people who know the community and know its needs and so forth and so on to pick somebody that's the furthest point distance from the job you're trying to fill. That's always attractive to people on search committees. They think there's something glamorous about people who come from Alaska or some other distant point in(??) filling(??) and I would say that's pretty true about positions in state government as well.

[1:34:12.5]

**Rudolph:** Okay. Well, thank you very much. Is there anything else you'd like to add about what we've talked about.?

**Burke:** No, this has been a wonderful experience.

**Rudolph:** Well, thank you.

**Burke:** I've always been amazed that I'm still teaching, that they pay me for talking—something that I like to do [*laughs*].

**Rudolph:** [*laughs*] And very well; you do it very well.

**Burke:** Well, thank you.

**Rudolph:** Thank you.

[End of Recording 2] [Beginning of Recording 3]

**Rudolph:** This is Jennifer Rudolph from Massasoit Community College Library and as part of the Oral History Project, I'm going to ask some questions here. And my question today is for Dr. Gerard Burke, former president of Massasoit Community College. We were talking about colleagues that you remember from the time you were here, and I wonder if you would talk a little bit more about that.

**Burke:** Yes. Well, I was fortunate to have an outstanding group of not only administrators but faculty and staff. But certainly a few stand out in your mind, and I would be remiss if I didn't speak a little bit about Dean Peg Donovan. She was the dean of students. Peg was here when I came here, and I recognized right away that we had somebody very special. Peg had been the dean of students at Regis College for ten years before she came here, and Peg was a quintessential dean of students. She was a role model for not only the women students but for all of the women here at the college. And she had a presence about her that you saw immediately. Peg set the gold standard for dean of students in the whole system and was looked upon by other deans of students as their mentor. And Peg would come in at six-thirty in the morning and was available to students at any hour and was not only was a great leader of the student services but was a really a tremendous resource for the female students here. And Peg was co-founder of the professional women's group in public higher education and was a leader in that group. Peg and I were not only colleagues, but we were very close personal friends and that friendship still adores(??) right down to today. And I count Peg as

one of my closest friends and certainly one of the key factors in my success as president here at Massasoit. And so I couldn't say enough about that. She was just not only a terrific dean of students but just a wonderful human being.

**Rudolph:** I think she was mentor to a few of the staff here as well.

**Burke:** Absolutely. She had a young staff of mostly women in her capacity as Dean of Students, and she was a great role model and a great mentor to them. And many of them went on to achieve higher positions within the system, and so I never had to worry about the Student Affairs office. Peg was not only a wonderful role model but she was a very classy lady, too—always dressed to the nines. Was, as I said, a terrific role model for young women in the school.

**Rudolph:** Do you remember any particular stories about Peg that might be—

**Burke:** Well, Peg was a great advocate for promoting talented women into positions. When I came here, there were two women in the administration, one of whom was Peg. And when I say administration, I mean deans and division chairs and so forth and so on. Through Peg's encouragement, when I left, fifty percent of my administrative staff were women, and Peg was a great advocate of the CHOICES program here. And there were so many wonderful efforts made in student affairs that Peg was responsible for initiating. So I can't say enough about that; she was a wonderful colleague—very loyal, very knowledgeable, and very empathetic to people who had problems.

[1:40:00.0]

**Rudolph:** Well, it's a testament to both her and you that the staff changed in becoming more—there were more women after she did her work here.

**Burke:** Yes she did. She was always nudging me. *[laughs]*

**Rudolph:** She did have that way about her.

**Burke:** Yes. Now Gerard. *[laughs]*

**Rudolph:** Well, are there any others that you'd like to remember today or—

**Burke:** Oh, you know, you get into this difficulty of there were so many wonderful people that helped me here. I mean from the women who worked in the kitchen to the custodians. I

really hesitate to mention names because really, we really were sort of like a family. And I try to engender that sort of atmosphere here. We're a team hoping to strive to accomplish certainly a vision I had in and that others shared in, but we were very close in terms of personal relationships.

**Rudolph:** Makes for good working conditions.

**Burke:** It does. It certainly does, and you know, when I came here, we initiated a lot of things, a lot of programs for the staff—athletic programs, you know—I think I might have mentioned them earlier, the volley ball league and the softball league and the game Julie Ready—

**Rudolph:** Julie Mulvey

**Burke:** Julie Mulvey.

**Rudolph:** Julie Mulvey, yes.

**Burke:** Julie was wonderful over in the athletic department and led us in aerobics. I used to participate in aerobics, and my theory was—I think I mentioned our predecessor had a very high incident of sick leave, and part of what I was doing was to cut down that sick leave. So we had a lot of activities, and I think I mentioned that I would tell the deans and the division chairs, Listen if somebody is five minutes late, don't give them a hassle. And I think that in the course of the fourteen years we cut the sick leave more than half and I attributed to the activities—physical activity.

**Rudolph:** You were ahead of your time. Those are called wellness now.

**Burke:** Wellness, yes. They didn't call it that at that time. My objective was teamwork. And we would mix the teams so that a custodian might be playing with a dean and so forth and so on. I thought it worked well.

**Rudolph:** Well, Julie's still doing Zumba and things over in the field house.

**Burke:** Julie is remarkable. Just a funny story that when Julie Ready got married, of course Julie is a rather tall individual; Julie is six-two or three. And she had an assistant at that time who was almost as tall as Julie. And Julie got married, and I went to the reception and so forth; we had a lot of the faculty and staff were at the reception and so forth, and Julie

insisted on having her picture taken with me. So as a sort of a joke, I had a chair pulled out; I stood in the chair [*laughs*] and had my picture taken between Julie and her assistant [*both laugh*]. I said, “Now don’t take my feet.” But we had a lot of fun, you know.

**Rudolph:** It sounds like fun.

**Burke:** Yeah. She’s sure just a wonderful person. As I said, if I start thinking about it, I’ll think of fifty—

**Rudolph:** Fifty more people, yes. Well I want to thank you for taking the time to come in again and talk—

**Burke:** No, it’s my pleasure actually. It’s sort of an honor to be able to come back and to reminisce a little bit about my time here at Massasoit; it was a very, for me, rewarding and fulfilling time. My actually fourteen years here as dean of college and thirteen as president. So, I had—

**Rudolph:** Well, you have left your mark, that’s for sure.

**Burke:** Well, I have very fond memories, and people would ask me how I liked being president, and I would say, “I love the people.” [*both laugh*] I didn’t like all of the meetings; we were constantly, I mean the presidents were meeting at the drop of a hat and I was always having—because I used to minister by walking around and would walk around the campus every day and if I should run into people, then naturally human nature being what it was, they tell you what their problems are. My assistant Lou Colombo said to me one day, I came back and I said, “Oh, kind of had a—” and he said, “I told you—don’t walk around because people tell you all their problems, and you come back and they’re relieved of their problem, and—“

**Rudolph:** You have it.

**Burke:** Yeah. You would have it. [*laughs*]

**Rudolph:** Well, thank you Jerry.

**Burke:** Well, you’re quite welcome.

**Rudolph:** Glad to have you back.

[1:46:02.7]

[End of recording 3]