So how does a high school student in San Juan, Puerto Rico, end up at a small liberal arts college in Worcester, Massachusetts, in the early 1960s? There was no Internet or social media, but there was a brochure about Catholic colleges, and Assumption College was the one that appealed to Jay Garcia-Gregory ’66 and his high school friend, Luis Brau-Cebrian, Esq. ’66.

Both young men were accepted to Assumption, and Garcia-Gregory set his sight on a career in foreign affairs. Assumption’s reputation for preparing graduates to enter that arena was well respected.

“When I started at Assumption, I thought the foreign affairs curriculum would help me in a potential diplomatic career,” he says. He credits Father Ernest Fortin’s courses in political philosophy and psychology with developing his passion for understanding human conduct, his thirst for wisdom, and his decision to change his major to philosophy.

“My thirst for learning was fueled by the metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas and all the philosophy courses,” Garcia-Gregory said. He also was fascinated by the theology and the classics courses, and was profoundly impacted by The Confessions of St. Augustine. The critical thinking, careful analysis and strong writing skills he honed, have served him well in his career as a lawyer and now as a judge in the U.S. District Court in Puerto Rico.

After his Assumption graduation, Garcia-Gregory studied philosophy at the graduate level in Spain, and then returned to Puerto Rico to study law at the University of Puerto Rico, graduating in 1972. He wanted to teach law, so he pursued further graduate studies at Columbia University Law School.

After returning to Puerto Rico and being admitted to practice, he clerked for the chief judge of the Federal District Court. Garcia-Gregory then joined the firm Fiddler, González and Rodríguez, where he practiced law for 25 years in areas such as federal litigation and appellate practice, banking, corporate, insurance, and the environment.

“My private practice career was varied and very interesting,” stated Garcia-Gregory. “I regularly presented arguments to the U.S. Court of Appeals 1st Circuit in Boston. In one case, I helped inmates in the penal system get improvements that affected their health and well-being.
“I also worked on a civil case for the U.S. Department of Justice against the government of Puerto Rico in 2000–01. Mentally disabled children had been marginalized and abused by the system, and we managed to get most of them placed in foster homes. I’m proud of what we were able to accomplish.”

In fact, Garcia-Gregory has received several honors during his distinguished career. He won a medal for service as editor-in-chief of the Law Review, and the West Publishing Award for outstanding achievement in Anglo-American studies.

At the end of 1999 he was approached and asked about his interest in becoming a Federal Court judge. “This was a dream come true for me,” he said. Nominated by President Clinton in April 2000, he was sworn in by August.

His days are packed with deciding motions and presiding over civil and criminal cases. “It has been a fascinating learning experience,” Garcia-Gregory explained. “Everyday I have occasion to decide motions and cases that impact people’s lives. I approach my work with a sense of awe, humility and respect for each person’s dignity.

“I believe our current federal legal system is unique and serves well the legal needs of citizens and non-citizens alike,” stated Garcia-Gregory. “The constitutional guarantees of due process, presumption of innocence and confrontation with accusers are unique and serve the dignity of humans.

“Throughout the years, you develop a sense of discernment. I believe our system could be improved through mandatory mediation and/or arbitration of almost all civil actions, especially tort and contract cases.”

He was appointed by the chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court to the Judiciary Committee of Rules of Conduct of the Judicial Conference, a committee that oversees and advises judges on ethical issues. Garcia-Gregory remarked on the importance of ethical conduct, a value that was fine tuned at Assumption.

“Doing what you have to do conscientiously, giving the best you can to please God and fellow humans, and doing your tasks with love is the best recipe for a successful professional career and a strong family,” he said.

Garcia-Gregory and his wife of 43 years, Myrella, have two grown daughters who are married – Myrenchu will soon complete a master’s degree in biogenetics, and Maite is in-house counsel for a Boston-based corporation.

He fondly remembers Fr. Denys Gonthier, A.A. as his most influential professor and mentor, and is proud to have received the Fr. Louis Dion, A.A. ’35 Outstanding Achievement Award from the Assumption College Alumni Association.

“We should always remember that God proposes Truth to mankind; He never imposes it, and it is up to each person to accept it and apply it every day.” And so each day Garcia-Gregory practices that philosophy.