

PATRICIA KARRAS GREVAS (`51)

Interviewed by Mary Alma Sullivan
on November 10, 1998

Mundelein College
Oral History Archives

Mary Alma Sullivan: The following is an interview with Patricia Karras Grevas, at her home in Rock Island, Illinois. The date is November 10, 1998 and the interviewer is Mary Alma Sullivan, class of 1951.

Okay, Pat, what is your full name, including your maiden name, your graduating class, your major, and your degree?

Patricia Karras Grevas: Patricia Karras Grevas, class of `51. My degree was a Bachelor's Degree in English.

MAS: Can we say something about your family and your social background? For example, things like immigrant parents, working parents, brothers and sisters, war time experience or anything like that kind of identifies you and your background, when you arrived at Mundelein College.

PKG: My mother and father both came from Greece. Immigrants. My dad came over in 1917, no, excuse me, 1907. My mother came in `22, 1922. They married and settled in Chicago. And I had two older brothers and I was born in 1930. Greek people have a ... you

know, at that time, were very, very careful, especially with their daughters. And so my mother sent me to a Catholic high school for girls, Mercy High School on the south side of Chicago. And she said it was because it was close to home. But, you know, I knew what the reason was, because she didn't want me, you know ...

MAS: She wanted the environment that

PKG: Absolutely. And they always, of course, wanted us to marry like. She wanted me to marry a Greek boy. And I might get involved maybe in a public high school. She never told me this, but I realized it then and then later. When I graduated from Mercy High School in '47, that fall I went to Morgan Park Junior High School [sic] for a semester with some girls that had been at Mercy with me. And it was all right. It was fun. And ... but I wasn't doing well. And I wanted to finish college and my parents always stressed the fact that we should go to college, my brothers and I. And it was normal for me to go from high school to college. We all felt that way. And so then, some of my friends who had been my friends at Mercy were at Mundelein. So I enrolled at Mundelein in January, that would have been the beginning of the semester, right? Of '48. And I stayed at Mundelein 'til I graduated. And enjoyed it very much. I just ... I can't say that I enjoyed my high school years so much. I don't know why. But I really enjoyed Mundelein. I really did. The other

girls were nice. The teachers, you know, the nuns were very, very nice to me. I never felt different when I had them.

MAS: We'll probably get back to some more specifics that give you a chance to comment. I assume that your father was employed and your mother was at home.

PKG: Right. My dad had his own grocery store on 43rd Street, underneath the el, all Black, you know. His customers were all Black. It was a Black neighborhood.

MAS: Interesting. Very interesting. Well, you told me a little bit about how you came to attend Mundelein College. Did you come to Mundelein knowing your major? Or did that somehow evolve? Or do you remember how that happened?

PKG: I liked to read and I was interested in reading poetry and literature. And I think that's just what I chose.

MAS: Okay. Can you recall some of the activities, events or experiences that you found most satisfying in your college career? Activities, events, experiences.

PKG: It was all fun. I liked all of the ... I liked the girls. I enjoyed the girls in our group, you know. And I even enjoyed going back and forth on the el. It took me an hour and a half to get to school.

MAS: I'm sure, from that distance.

PKG: It was 8200 south to Sheridan Road and the Lake.

MAS: Well, let me ask you this. Was there anything frustrating during those four years? Any experience or activity or whatever that you would consider frustrating? Or perhaps even distateful?

PKG: No.

MAS: Nothing.

PKG: Well, maybe ... this is not distateful. I wanted to learn how to swim but I went in in mid-year and I got into an intermediate class. And so I would sit at the end of the pool and just, you know, play with my feet in the water. And the other girls were at the other end of the pool. And I never learned how to swim. And to this day, I can't tread water and I'm afraid of water.

MAS: So that was the only class you could get into. You got credit for it but you didn't learn [laughs]

PKG: Right. Absolutely. I got credit. And that was when it was important at that point, right?

MAS: Exactly, exactly. What was your most enriching experience? Have you already mentioned it?

PKG: No. My most enriching experience was having ... now I can't think of her name. She was a history teacher. World history. I think her name was maybe Sister Mary Ambrose?

MAS: Yes. Exactly. Yes.

PKG: Small woman.

MAS: Right.

PKG: Was she a history teacher?

MAS: Yes, she was. Yes.

PKG: She was wonderful. She was the ... one of the ... if not the best teacher I ever had in all my years, not only from Mundelein but Mercy and grade school. And she was ... she was just very good.

MAS: You might be interested to know that when she went to Dubuque to retire, she was ill, she stayed ... we developed a senior citizen center in what had been the old barn. And the barn was never used any more. I mean, it hasn't been used in recent memory. So it was converted to a senior citizen center. And she continued to kind of teach a course once a week for the seniors who came from the city of Dubuque, including other BVMS who resided on the hill on current events and some of the implications and how it came to this point. So she, practically 'til the day she died, she was ... she was still involved in teaching.

PKG: I'm sure she was considered a fine teacher.

MAS: Yes, she was. Yes, she was. What about your ... Can you say something about your recollection with different classmates? Your experience of your classmates? Were you, for example, involved in activities that would bring you in touch with ...

PKG: I really wasn't so involved in activities. I guess maybe I didn't want to stay after school because it took me so long to get home. I don't remember that. I don't think I was.

MAS: But, you had friends.

PKG: Oh, I had friends. Yes, I did have friends. And we had a good time going back and forth on the el. And in the cafeteria and we just had a good time. Even in between the classes.

MAS: Were you a frequenter of the Loyola Union?

PKG: No.

MAS: Do you remember that? People would cut class to ...

PKG: Well, it was open I think maybe in the latter part of my schooling.

MAS: It was I think probably junior year or mid-junior year.

PKG: Yeah. Well, I guess we did go. Yeah. But not often, no. I don't think I cut a class to go. Not that I remember.

MAS: Can you say what you did in the first ten years following graduation?

PKG: I graduated in June of '51. June 5th. And then applied for work at the Chicago Board of Education. And then I obviously did not have enough education classes. However ...

MAS: Did you want to teach or work at the Board?

PKG: No, no, no. I wanted to teach. And I was called to a school on the south side of Chicago the very first day of school as a substitute and I stayed there for two and a half years because they needed someone there. However, I did go then to Illinois Teachers College. I had to fulfill those requirements. And then took a test and got my certificate for teaching. But then I was married in '54 so it didn't last very long. You know,

my teaching career didn't last very long. That was on the south side of Chicago, about 65th and Central.

MAS: What grade level?

PKG: First grade most of the time. You know, they changed every six months ... not every six months, but semesters. You know. So most of the time I was a first grade teacher.

MAS: That takes a lot of flexibility to go from, you know, one semester the first grade and the second semester the third grade.

PKG: Yeah, right. Well, that didn't happen but maybe once or twice. But it was fine. And I really liked little ones. I really liked teaching the little ones. _____

MAS: In what ways has your life been influenced by the years you spent at Mundelein? For example, in what ways do you feel you were changed? Or challenged as a result of those four years?

PKG: _____

MAS: Or both.

PKG: Probably ... certainly learned a lot of prayers. [chuckles] I really learned those in high school. I don't know. I think I'm better for having gone to Mundelein, a better person. Meeting so many different girls and I do remember also in our junior or senior, two Black girls came. Do you remember that?

MAS: Yes. I do.

PKG: They were the first two, I'm sure. And they were wonderful young women.

MAS: I think they were from Evanston or something.

PKG: I don't know but they were wonderful and bright. And that was a nice experience. Although our family always felt kindly towards Black people because my dad had the store there. And they were nice people; we saw them. Although I wasn't allowed to work there. My brothers did. _____ ... it was not a sisterly environment. But I can't remember being challenged. How do you mean that?

MAS: Well, for example, in your course work, were you ...

PKG: Well, I studied. I think I developed study habits and I did much better in college than I did in high school. But I liked it better. I liked the whole atmosphere than my high school. And so I studied.

MAS: What was that atmosphere? Can you identify ...

PKG: At Mercy?

MAS: No, the atmosphere at Mundelein that you think was ... made it different and therefore more satisfying.

PKG: Well, I think the teachers were ... the nuns maybe were more educated. Maybe they were. I don't know at the time. But I just kind of felt stifled in high school. And in college, I liked almost all my instructors and I wanted to do well for them. And for myself. I certainly wasn't a super student. I wasn't a valedictorian or salutatorian or whatever. You were, weren't you?

MAS: No! Not at all. [laughs]

PKG: I thought you were. I wonder who was.

MAS: I don't remember that myself.

PKG: _____

MAS: Yeah. How about a senior moment? [laughs] No, I really don't. I'll have to look. Yeah, I mean, it's in *The Skyscraper*. The last issue of *The Skyscraper* but I never ... What clubs ... Oh, I asked you about clubs, didn't I?

PKG: That's right.

MAS: And I can understand if you were an hour and a half going home, that certainly preclude membership. Especially in the winter months.

PKG: I did run for an office I think in the senior year but I didn't make it. You know, class _____ and I didn't make it.

MAS: Yeah. Student activities officers or something.

PKG: Right, right, right. I can remember wearing our caps and gowns _____. I bet they don't do that any more.

MAS: Say that ... yeah, that has never come up in any of the interviews I've done.

PKG: That we wore caps and gowns to assembly. It was our senior year. I'm sure they don't do that any more.

MAS: With the ribbons.

PKG: And the ribbons were on the other side and then they day we graduated we got to put them on the other side of the cap.

MAS: Right. And were forbidden to take off our caps and throw them in the air. I remember that.

PKG: Right. And also, I remember the Jewish girl who was in our class. I've seen her since then at class reunions. I can't think of her name but if you tell me, I'll remember.

MAS: I couldn't say either.

PKG: And she ... I remember one of the nuns telling her, "Now, you're going to have to kiss Cardinal Spritz's ring and don't feel that you're being unfaithful to your own, but it's just a matter of authority." So she didn't want any snafu the day of the graduation.

MAS: Now, the next ... this next one, maybe you want to take a chance, take a minute to think about it. So if you do, after I say all this, if you do, let me know and I'll stop it. What I'd like you to do is to respond to one of the statements that I'm going to read that you feel is most accurate in your case as a student at Mundelein. And I think particularly as a student who came from another Christian tradition, from Greek Orthodoxy.

A. The Mundelein College environment during your college years supported both the Catholic religious tradition of the time and a climate of social responsibility.

Or B. Your religious faith was nourished but the encouragement of social responsibility was negligible.

Or C. You were encouraged to have a keen sense of social responsibility with little or minimal attention to strengthening the Catholic religious tradition of the time. [tape turned off]

Okay. So, could you comment then? You feel your religious faith was nourished but the encouragement of social responsibility was negligible as far as you're concerned?

PKG: Yes. _____ what our religion was called. Actually, I learned more about our religion from going to a Catholic high school and a Catholic college than I learned in Sunday School that we had. I just remember Biblical stories, you know. And ... But I don't remember any social of the responsibilities. _____ many years ago. I'm sorry to say.

MAS: No. Well, in the intervening years now, have you been involved in some of those things, as an adult person?

PKG: Yes, I have.

MAS: Could you speak to some of that?

PKG: What I've done? Well, at our church, I ... we work ... we have this organization called Thelopopous which is called Friend of the Poor. And I help raise money and different _____ for our charitable things that we do at the church. I also have done tutoring of public ... We bring children from a public grade school, first graders, and I go and tutor once a week the ones that aren't up to par. On a one to one thing. And ...

MAS: Well, that's okay.

PKG: I'm not very aware of helping other people. I don't ... I _____.

MAS: _____

PKG: A bleeding heart liberal.

MAS: I see. Oh boy.

PKG: He's very Republican. We get into things about that. I mean, he feels badly. It's not like you do. You know, you think everybody's ... should be _____. He thinks people should themselves up. But not everybody can do that. I'm so sure if I were a man, I wouldn't be able to _____ something _____.

MAS: Yeah. It's kind of _____. Sometimes the social structures don't allow people who want to.

PKG: Yes, I know that. _____

MAS: Yeah. And coming from where your father's store was, I would think that would be very ... at a very young age, you would become acutely aware of folks who just ...

PKG: _____

MAS: Yeah. Is there anything you want to say? Because I'm fresh out of questions.

PKG: You are?

MAS: Yes, I am. Is there any ... do you have anything else? Anything I didn't touch about the Mundelein experience? Or as you reflect on it ... For instance, one question that I might ask because it's come up in other interviews is going to a women's college and seeing women administrators and teachers and, you know, staff members and so on in deans' offices — do you think in retrospect this helped you as a woman to really do what you wanted to do? Whether it was to keep ... to make a home and to become a member of the area in which you are, to be involved

in that. Did you ... just somehow felt you could do whatever you wanted, whatever that was. Or did that ...

PKG: Just looking at the good and I have to say I was ... I was proud that I graduated from Mundelein and proud that I had a degree because when I moved here ... forty-four years ago ...

MAS: Here to Rock Island?

PKG: Yes. So many of the girls my age who had Greek parents, and then others ... a very few of them had gone to college. So I was proud of myself that I made it through. [chuckles]

MAS: And it's interesting — why do you think your parents kind of created a climate where it was kind of an expectation that you and your brothers would ...?

PKG: I have no idea. I have no idea. And I've met other Greek girls too that tell me the same thing. But very few. Others ... now a friend of mine tells me that her father said, "Ohh, you don't need to go to college. You're going to get married and it'll all be wasted." And that attitude. But, mainly I'm proud of the fact that they did. And I knew I had to graduate. You know, _____.

MAS: Actually, it's very enlightened for immigrants because generally they were ... of course, your father came early.

PKG: He was seventeen. He was born in 1890.

MAS: Yes. Some more recent immigrants, you know, before 1930, were concerned with just making a living. And so, often, children had to go to work — especially the girls.

PKG: Yes. I know that on a whole _____ over the Greek immigrants, they have a lot of professionals so ... not my dad alone ... my brothers went to graduate from school. But there are a lot of attorneys and doctors in that generation. It's amazing.

MAS: Well, Pat, thank you. This is great. This is it!]

PKG: It wasn't very enlightening.

MAS: It was just fine. [End of interview.]

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