

**Interview with Joan Frances Crowley**  
**November 16, 1998**

Oppenheim: Since the personal is historical...it seems that you are a big believer in that--

Crowley: Absolutely!

LO: Let's start with your early years. You were born in Chicago, April 4 of what year?

JFC: 1919.

LO: Could you tell me a bit about your parents, your upbringing?

JFC: They were just absolutely wonderful people. My mother gave me a great love of reading, gave it to the three of us--I just have two sisters--so from about the time I was little we read everything from Nancy Drew to anything that was going on. My father was a man of great joy, he was very handsome, he had a beautiful voice, and he played wonderful golf. I grew up thinking, Lisa, that all Catholics were Democrats and he played wonderful golf because that was the ambience of my family. I was very much a tomboy which stood me in good stead as a teacher. But then in high school I went to Immaculata, you drive past it on the outer drive there, and within a week of my being there with the sisters I knew whatever that was, I wanted to be it. Because these nuns were young, their whole lives were wrapped up in us and in teaching. I had a psych professor say once if in your teens you didn't have a crush on a teacher or scoutmaster or somebody or other that you weren't normal. Well, we had the usual crushes on different nuns, but I knew from the time I was in high school that I wanted to do that, whatever they were doing. I won a scholarship to Mundelein, and I didn't want to take it but the sister who was really directing me said "You are still too immature --you won't last in a convent" so I did two years here at Mundelein and then I entered. I found religious life *very* difficult because you're suddenly no longer an individual, you're learning a whole new way of life. And *everything* was hard for me--everything--but I still knew that this is what I wanted to do. When you're two and a half years in what we call the novitiate then you take the first vows. In Catholicism you can't take vows forever, for eight years, so every year you renew. When I finished at our Mother House then I taught in the war in Butte, Montana.

I had mostly boys, mostly poor children and I used to pitch for them on their baseball team--the name of their team was the "Seventh Grade Slap Happy Sluggers". We played on a big lot at the corner of the school. One Sunday after mass I was with the Superior; this was my first teaching assignment, I was trying to be very dignified and a couple came up to us and said "Oh Sister we watch you pitch everyday!" *Well*, I quit the team right away--I was very embarrassed. Everybody said, "Joan Frances you're going to be a boy's teacher," and that was fine with me--then I was suddenly changed. We used to get a letter on the 15th and it just changed your whole life. It could say, "Dear Sister you're going to Podunk Junction. Be there in four days or something." I was sent to the Academy Des Moines and then I taught for a few years in a school in Minnesota and then came to Mundelein. Then I taught eight years at Loyola and I just retired in May. I'm still doing things like guest lectures. I just did one the other day for a faculty member who asked me if I would do the Russian Revolution. But I've written on Russia, and I've published in Russia and gone to Russia a number of times so it works out nicely. Is that enough now, Lisa?

LO: Wow! You just took one whole page out. But if you don't mind, I want to back up a bit--thank you for that overview! Let's go back to your parents...your father was a democratic golfer--what was his occupation?

JFC: He was an auditor for United States Steel Corporation.

LO You lived in Rogers Park?

JFC: Yes, on Wayne Avenue--6400 N. Wayne. At that time, it was very bourgeois, middle class, *very* Catholic. There were no big families--we had three in our family--there were none of the traditional big Irish Catholic families. There were fewer girls than boys and I just grew up playing touch ball--before the Kennedys ever thought of it--[and] swimming all summer in Lake Michigan. I had a very happy growing up. It was mother--she was a great reader--and the three of us would go to the library and we'd all come home with a pile of books. At St. Ignatius Grammar School every Friday was library hour

and we could go in and get a book out which was heaven. So that's really about all.

LO: Your mother? She was a....

JFC: ...a homemaker. In those days, no mother would have been out of her home.

LO: Do you think that she just loved to read or do you think she may have had aspirations to be a teacher had she not have gotten married?

JFC: Could have been, could have been. She belonged to a club that still exists at St. Ignatius called the Glenola Women and they get together and do book reviews and read. I gave a lecture to them several years ago. So she was involved in that, but she adored my father. People have often said to me, "Your parents had such an ideal marriage." I was never attracted to that. I played with boys and I enjoyed them.... My father's health was not great and he died at the age of 51. We never got over it, it was so sudden. When his health was so poor, he began to golf--it saved his life. He was very good at it, so were his brothers. It was a very happy growing up experience. As a young nun, when I began teaching in high school and kids would tell you painful things about their own home life, I was in a state of shock. I think we had an idyllic thing. My father loved us. In fact, when I became a sister, the first six months it's called the postulate, and you're just learning about the community and then you get a habit. That whole year, you can write home, but you can't have company. My father couldn't stand it. He called Dubuque and said, "I have to see her," and really God is good because he came to see me and we had a wonderful visit and he died very suddenly within the year. My mother never really got over it.

I can't think of anything else about my religious life other than I was lonely. I hated the fact that you did everything together, Lisa. You never were an individual except when you were in chapel--even in chapel you came in two's. I found it *desperately* hard. Other kids that entered thought, Oh--everything was *WONDERFUL!* The day I left there to go out to teach, I was absolutely--I felt like I was free--and even to this day, the nuns laugh at me. I'm going to a history meeting there this weekend--our nickname is the BVMs, Blessed Virgin Mary--we have a history club and what we're doing is writing the

histories of all sisters--all the background. Even now, Lisa, when I go there and I suddenly see the towers...you know, my heart sinks. When I get there it's wonderful, it's loving, we have a ball, we do everything. But you know, when I get into the car, and we're driving away, ooooooh--I'm as happy as Larry! So I think it will always be with me.

LO: What was it then, if you'd go through it again: Why did you decide to become a nun?

JFC: It was the example of those sisters. Their love of each other, their laughter. I was very good at athletics and they followed.... Everybody had a home room team and the nuns followed it with great [unclear]. So it was very attractive to me. Every year in a Catholic school you'd have a three day retreat where they'd stop classes and the priests would come in and talk about the life of Christ, so when I got to be about a junior in high school I began to see the spiritual side of it. But I always say to people, "I think God didn't choose me, I just said, 'God this is what I want to do, you better give me a vocation!'" Oh no, I just nearly died in the novitiate. I was white as a ghost and hated everything--the food--and everything. They had very nourishing homemade bread, well I liked Wonder Bread or a good rye bread. So anyway, is that enough on the novitiate?

LO: Here's the part where I'm confused. I thought you got a B.A. in History at College of Great Falls. Where does that fit in?

JFC: Yes, well it's really the University of Montana. I went to Mundelein for two years then I entered then I was sent out to Butte and I finished my B.A. in summer school.

LO: Did you specifically choose that you wanted to be a B.V.M. or were you debating about what kind of nun you wanted to be?

JFC: No, in grade school we had wonderful nuns at St. Ignatius, gentle people of either English or Irish American background. I was never attracted to them--never. If anybody had said that I would be interested in being a sister when I was in grade school, nobody would have believed it. Even in high school, nobody really--well I really didn't talk about it--but kids were stunned: I was a class officer, captain of the basketball team. No, I was

just attracted, Lisa, and I've never lost that attraction, because the nuns I've lived with have been just wonderful women, we have had joys and sorrows together. As our community now is getting smaller, we're even more dear to each other. I was attracted, I would say, to a teaching order and just never thought of another order. When my mother saw the habit and realized I was going to wear it, she cried-- it was the most ugly thing she had ever seen. She was very good, she sketched, did dress designing just for friends and she was very artistic. But she... Our habit...the boys used to call us "the covered wagons" because we had a border that went like this [gestures] and it did look like a Conestoga wagon-- and that a over square that went like this [gestures]. Then we modernized later on.

[hard candy break]

LO: So your mother cried when she saw you wearing the habit?

JFC: Oh when she realized I'd be going to be wearing that habit she just cried. Then we modernized and wore the dress of ordinary professional women.

LO: What did your parents think when you announced that you were going to go into the order?

JFC: My father he said to the sister who helped me get ready to be a sister, "We don't feel bad because we know she won't stay." I was too lively. It's interesting, Lisa, I had hay fever as a child, but about a month before I entered--we entered on September 8-- there was a heavy summer rain in Chicago and I got a terrible asthma attack. I look back and think I was beginning to realize that I was leaving everything. Now I've read doctors say there isn't a psychosomatic connection, but I've noticed I will begin to wheeze and cough at times of stress in my life. So they just didn't believe that I would ever stay in a convent. The first time they saw me, they were stunned. I was so white and so quiet. No it was an attraction. Some people would call it a vocation, but I say, I just said to God,

"Hey this is what I want to be" and he didn't choose me--I chose him! I chose the life, I should say. Anyway I never ever regretted it-- once I got out of that novitiate--even the name Iowa I don't like--or Dubuque, I don't like it.

LO: You've spoken about your decision of becoming a nun. At one point you wrote, "Like so many Catholic teenagers of my generation, I was attracted to the idea of devoting my life to the service of others." How would you define that Catholic generation--this is during the Depression.

JFC: For Catholics of our generation it was either marriage or be a nurse or a teacher. They've said that at one time 75% of the teachers were from Catholic schools. So I enjoyed learning, I never worked hard at all in high school, and I supposed many people would say, "No, no, no God was really calling you," but the way I looked at it was, "I like what they do, and I love their friendship with each other and I thought what a wonderful way to live and as I got through my four years, I knew I wanted to be doing something which would be about helping others.

When I was in the novitiate, Lisa, the best thing in the world happened to me. I've been saving to give this paper to you, Lisa, when I gave this talk. A priest, Monsignor Ronald Knox wrote that "every single human relationship has is an eternal responsibility" and that's really how I lived my teaching life. When I got my roster of students, to me, these are people whom I will have for the next semester and I will touch their lives, either for good or evil. You certainly know, an unjust teacher can do outrageous things to a student--and they never forget it. This is the thing that has moved me so happily through this religious life. When I get that list of students I think I'm going to touch them--every human relationship involves an eternal responsibility. When the dorm year would open every year, I would talk to the whole resident body, and I would always say to them, "For the next nine months, you will live together and you're going to touch each others lives just as you do when you go home for the weekend and you touch the lives of your younger brothers and sisters." To me, it's a wonderful way to live.

I am not at all adverse to apologizing to a student. If someone is really outrageous in dealing with me I may answer in a very snippy way but then I always say "I'm very sorry." As a result, any time I've ever done that, about five times at Loyola, they become such friends, they're calling you up. One guy stopped me on campus the other day and he said, "Do you realize you saved me?" and I said, "James, what do you mean?" He said, "You blasted me in History," and I remembered that I had gone easy on him and he was still flubbing so one day in the office I just said, "James, get out of my life. You're going to go right out of here. I've given you every break...." He kept saying, "Yes s'ter, yes s'ter," he was from a Catholic high school in the East and I thought that's it and I felt ashamed. I remember looking up his dorm number, but it was right at the end of the semester. Didn't he appear in my next class! So I said, "James I thought I'd never see you again and I never got to say I'm sorry I blew at you," and he said, "Oh no, I wanted to come back." Now in just the last six months I saw him on campus--he must be a senior now--he was with his girlfriend, he introduced me and said, "You realize, you saved me life!" I think it's important for teachers...when I grade, I give back the papers but I always say to them, look through them and see if the grade is just and then we'll dialogue. Then I'll collect them all, then I record the grade. I find that girls will immediately compare themselves to someone else and say, "but you took off three from me and only two from her." But fellows say, "A d minus, hey did I really deserve it," and I'd say yes, and they'd say "ok."

I think it's the same with people...right now I live in building where I'm really the only gentile on my floor--now there's one girl with a Greek background. The Jewish people are so good to me, they'll say, "Can we call you Sister?" There's two of them, they're in their '80s. A couple of months ago, one of them, Adele, knocked on my door. They had told me one day they no longer practice their religion since the death of their mother. So she came to me and said, "Sister, I have a favor," (in the meantime, they had given me a beautiful afghan one of their daughters, a very prominent woman living in

Hong Kong, had knitted for them years ago for one of them, and they had never used it. It's so beautiful, I hate to use it because then I'll have to wash it.) Anyway, she said to me, "Sister, I've come to ask a favor," and I said, "Oh, Adele I'll do anything." and she said, "Shirley's in the hospital, she broke her hip and I don't know how to pray. Will you pray?" So I did the praying for her. Oh, and I stick little notes under their door. The other day they came to ask me if I get a pedicurist to come to the house. Then there's a Mrs. Zeldon who's in her '90s and I see her once a week. She's head of the synagogue we have right in the building. We've had marvelous talks! She's had the courage to say, "Why do you Catholics make bastards out of the children of divorced parents?" and I say, "Mrs. Zelden that's not true!" Then she tells me stories of coming from Russia at the age of three...so now I'm getting off the track here. What I'm saying to you is "every human relationship involves a human responsibility" and I think we touch each other's lives and its a wonderful way to live.

LO: In going back to something you mentioned early, about coming to the dorms, if we could get back to that. You had mentioned you "got this assignment." You don't know what's going to happen, it's like Monopoly cards and yours said, "Go to Mundelein, do not pass go...."

JFC: They didn't tell me when I went there. I filled in for a sister who had gotten a Guggenheim Fellowship.

LO: I'm sorry, you were at Butte, and--

JFC: I went to the Academy Des Moines, and then Our Lady of Peace High School [in Minnesota]. On the outer office of Our Lady of Peace where there were our mailboxes, so we all came in during our lunch period and then get back to class. One day, the Superior, Sister Mary Cecilia a very teary, emotional lady, called me into her inner office. She had been crying, and she said, "Sister I have something to tell you." Mother General-- that was the title we used with our presidents before we got feminist--got rid of the "general" idea that we had gotten from the Jesuits. She said, "You are to report to



Mundelein College and take over for Sister Mary Crusentia." Well, I was so stunned, Lisa. I had joked with the kids in the fall, I had announced to all of them that I had entered a contest and I was going to win it and I would be able to take 12 of them on a trip to Europe with me. Well, on my Christmas cards that year, they would say, "Gee sister, my mother says I can go with you." We joked about it. Well, I got this announcement, my mail clutched in my hand, and I got over to my classroom and wasn't there a letter from....(what was the name of the company, I thought I'd never forget it) and it said, "Congratulations Sister, you have won a week's supply--no, a year's supply of Venamin Vitamin pills." That kept me from crying. [Later,] the class told me that I was just weird that whole week, I didn't want to tell them because you just really love the kids you teach. They said I was putting things on the board and erasing them before I talked about them.....

So I taught at Mundelein from January till June and then I went on to graduate courses at Northwestern. Then one evening after prayers, the president of the College, Sister Ann Ida Gannon, said she wanted to see me and we went down to the first floor, to what we call the Cardinal's Room and she said, "Sister, I'm going to have you in residence." I said "Oh, I had never lived with students." She said, "Do you understand, I'm putting you in charge of residents?" I said, "I couldn't possibly be it, I don't know anything about it," and she said, "I'm sure you'll be fine." So the next day my phone rings, and it's the laundry man to discuss what day of the week I want the laundry packages delivered. So I went into residence.

LO: Tell me about your responsibilities as "director" or is it "dean" of residents?

JFC: First I was director, and then--I'm always careful about saying this--at some point I was made "dean...assistant to the dean in residence, but I was the dean of residents. It's a clumsy title--you can put down anything. I've put down at times "assistant dean" but I think I was "assistant to the dean" but then the title had "in residence." I was Mrs. Full Charge.

LO: OK, so this is in 1962, Coffey Hall has just opened. Tell me about your responsibilities as dean, which you were thrown into apparently.

JFC: Right, I was in charge of everything in connection with residents, beginning with assigning rooms. I lived with the students, became in more ways than I really wanted to, their counselor. I lived on the floor with them--I was Mrs. Full Charge. When I moved into residence the kids were enthralled because they had been living on the upper floors of the Skyscraper, they were living across the street and now in this spanking new dormitory with drapes and everything from Fields. I just didn't know...I made up my own rules. They always had lights out before and I said, "Lights out? Kids study all night." I was just Queen of the May to the kids because this was all wonderful and new. I created a House Council, and I always like to say, Lisa, it's a good way describe how my life changed in residence: I started out as a benevolent despot and ended as honorary chairman of the board. In the beginning, I chaired the meetings, we had officers, but it was what Sister said. I established everything. I established a Sanctions Board that dealt with serious violations, but in the end, I had all the power really. And it worked out very nicely. You might enjoy this, to show you how I naive I was. I established [a room check system] where we paid students on student aid. They had a little slip of paper that has the room number on it listing bed, bookcases and my idea, I thought it was marvelous and it worked for years until the girls said, "You know, Sister, we think we know what you're doing, but we can do it by ourselves," What I did, Lisa, was everyday there was room check. So you went around as student aide, I think you had a master key, and you opened the door of the room--you were allowed to touch nothing private, but the bed had to be made and just external cleanliness. I explained to the whole group was that my reason for doing this was that you and your roommate may be soul mates, but one of you is a slob and instead of fighting with one another, if an outside force comes in and says you can't have banana skins in your waste basket...that worked for years. I still see these women, they're middle aged now with children now--I've gone to their children's baptisms. I

remember the class group where the officers came to me and said "J.F." because by this time, they used to call you J.F. behind your back, it's short for Joan Frances, but now everybody calls you J.F. It was when I first went into residence, I remember meeting boyfriends and fathers, and they'd say, "OH, so this is J.F.!" and the girls would [gestures]. So anyway, the girls finally, in about '66 said to me, "You know, Sister, your idea is great, but we can handle it ourselves." Although one of them, Mary Kirby later said to me "J.F., you can't imagine how many times I regretted we ever told you to drop it" because her roommate was sloppy. So anyway, I had full charge of them, there were sisters living on each floor, but I was Mrs. Full Charge in every way. I established the rules...

A couple of painful things happened where one girl whose aunt was chair of the department of the XXXX at Mundelein, her father was a big contributor to the college, and this kid, she was too sophisticated really for the kind of rules we had. I had given her lots of breaks. When everybody had to go home for the Easter break, she would have had to go home to Kansas and I let her stay which was a big break. Her boyfriend was in the suburbs. I let her come and go. I trusted her. On Sunday night when everybody had to report in by 10:00, she wasn't there. She wasn't there by 12. It finally dawned on me and I asked one of the girls--I finally remembered the name of the boy she was dating and married and divorced, named XXXX--so she was able to get in touch with XXXX. I had it with her. The Sanctions Board of students got together and I said, according to the rules she would have to leave residence for the rest of the semester. Here her aunt was a very prominent B.V.M. on campus and Sister Ann Ida and I would always say of her no matter what the rule--if I said I thought this had begun she would disagree with me. She sent for me and said, "Joan Frances I've had a call from the Mother House about this. Isn't there any other way you can sanction her?" I said, "No. If I let this go, every girl in residence will know that XXXX got a break because of the BVMs." So XXXX had to leave residence. What hurt me so terribly was on graduation day her parents were there. Now she had finished school and was always gracious with me. We met, you know. Her

parents were coming down the main stairs and I just beamed and they just cut me cold. Then a sister was having a jubilee--this was years later-- and the parents, XXXX's father, sister, mother, and brother were there, so I saw them in the chapel--and I thought to avoid them. But don't you know, he saw me and came over to the pew I was in and kissed me and then we met later on upstairs. So I had complete charge: I made all the rules...

I don't know if you have time for a hilarious story...but the boys at Loyola..if you notice at Coffey Hall there is a bridge that goes from Coffey Hall to what we call Piper today, that mansion. Well, they crawled in and got into the second hall and they had a panty raid. *Well I was outraged!* So I called Loyola. When I got a call back, and I said to the kids later--all I could picture was that guy at the other end--his name was Adams, he was my equal, he was director at Loyola. Loyola was very upset and said the dorms may be closed. He called me up and asked "Sister can you get me a list of all the clothing lost." I got all that and I made the great mistake of not having any students with me when he called me or I called him. "Sister could you itemize?" Well I said later to Mary Kirby who was my vice president at the time, "Kirby, I could picture that guy saying 'ten bras' then putting his hand over the receiver, 'HE HE HEH,' 'three chemises and how do you spell that Sister? And what is it Sister?'" I could have killed him. So I reported.... He said the boys wanted to come over and bring everything back. He said, "Would you like them to give everything back to each girl?" and I said, thank you, no. Well the boys arrived and they were scared skinny of a nun and all of that had gone on. So I said to the officers, "you've got to stay with me." [The boys] came in with a big laundry bag. I've never gotten over that man Adams--he must have had the laugh of a life. I always tease the officers that [they] were leaving me to do all the dirty work. And they say, "We would have died of laughter, you would have never gotten through the conversation." So I don't know if that tells you enough.

LO: How did you see this job as part of your mission?

JFC: Oh, very definitely. I dealt with everything: suicides, twice. In both cases they

were cries for help. I was able to get one set of parents to realize that she did not belong in college. She was in misery. I forget what happened to the other. I had a terrible run in with the police because this girl who tried to commit suicide, she wouldn't tell them her address or anything. The police came to me and I told them I can't tell you either because her father, when he came to see me about something else, said "Sister, if you ever have problems with her, never call my wife. Never." I had an idea his wife was very nervous. So I said no and the police said "Do you realize your in violation of the law?" Again, I was a nun--a nun--you don't know what to do with her. Then I got in and talked with her and we got her father and eventually the mother came in on it.

Oh yes, there was a wonderful woman in residence, XX. She had about five children: a couple of them were at Mundelein, she had graduated from Mundelein. When kids came to me thinking they were pregnant and were terrified I would just call X and say, "I'm not the one to deal with this," and then I'd say to the kid, "She's the most wonderful woman." Then I'd never hear about it again; X would take care of it. Then for awhile a young priest who was getting his Masters in History at Loyola and he was also saying mass for us the sisters at Mundelein, Father Austin Walsh. We became very dear friends--we still are. He's a New Yorker. When kids needed a confessor I would say, "he's a wonderful guy." I would see occasionally Austin walking up and down the lakefront with a girl. I'm sure she was going to confession. So I had marvelous spiritual backing.

I had a wonderful girl whose boyfriend was in grad school..his priest friend was doing his Masters on the affect of Hugh Hefner's what do you call it?

LO: Playboy?

JFC: Yes, Playboy's effects on high school students. This girl said to me, "Sister, Hugh Hefner has invited" her boyfriend who I guess was part of whatever they were doing for the masters and the boy had this priest in high school and the boy asked her... "Hefner told the father that he doesn't believe there are kids like Catholic kids." I said, you mean he

wants you to come there? Her father was from Ireland. So I asked, "Ok, what do your parents say?" and typical Irish parents said, "Good God, ask the sister!" This was a very sophisticated senior so I said, "Yes, ok, I think you should accept it and go." The minute she left, the kids, her roommate made a big thing of a playboy girl with their uh little bunny outfits and they hid in her room. She had a wonderful evening there--he questioned her and she invited him. She said, "If you come up to Mundelein I will show you girls for whom sex is after marriage." That night, she called up because they were having such a wonderful evening, Hefner was there in his pajamas and a coke, and he showed her everywhere: the swimming pool where you can look from under and see the girls swimming. I think she was supposed to be home by 10 and she called me, she said, "Sister, can we stay longer?" Hefner just couldn't believe that she felt free to make this call. I said, "Yes, as long as you get home safely." Anyway, at midnight she got home, arrived in the Hefner limousine. Now the kids and roommate were hiding in her room--if you look at Coffey Hall from Sheridan Road, her room was on the first floor so that night when Kay came in, the kids were in there and just gave her a terrible time, teasing her. She told me after graduation, "Sister, as much as you trusted me, I made a point of being at the mass you went to every Sunday so you could see me going to Holy Communion." Catholic kids, if they're in sin, don't go to Holy Communion. So Kay said, she made a point of going to the 11:00 mass that sisters go to and students can attend.

[interlude for drinking water]

LO: As the residency director, responsible for the spiritual and psychological and actual health and safety of the girls, you saw this as part of your mission--

JFC: And Loyola boys were very helpful. One man, now president of a bank out in Des Plaines, Jacques Brown, he wouldn't mind me using his name--the funniest, funniest fellow. I knew the fellows, and they'd often say "J.F. come down and say hello before we

go." One night they were going to a dance or something that Loyola was having and Jacques cruised over to me and he had his back to the fellows waiting for girls. He said, "You see that guy," and he described him, "he is a wolf. Don't let any freshmen go near him." I knew what floor the girl was on, so I got somebody on that floor to come down immediately and I said, "I really didn't know what to do about this, but this boy has a terrible reputation." So the girl went back upstairs and apparently went to this girl's room and said, "Look, be very careful, don't let him take you anyplace..." The fellows were darling that way.

Oh is this is really one of the happiest things that every happened to me. The kids gave me a boyfriend. His name was Harry. You could say, "Stop it!" So I'm not going to fool around; the girls would say, "Oh Sister, how's Harry?" and I'd say, "Oh, he got his beard cut off in the revolving door of the nursing home, but he's all right." Well, one day Sister Ann Ida and I were in a serious conversation in the main corridor or Mundelein and XXXXX--an absolute villain shot who was shot to death by her XXX daughter XXX years ago--she came down the corridor and asked, "Hey Sister, are you and Harry going to the dance on Friday?" and I said, "Yes, yes!" Ann Ida was utterly stunned--she knew me very well. Do you know even till this day I will get valentines signed in real shaky handwriting, "Passionately yours, Harry." At Christmas, Ann Jones, in her Christmas letter always writes "Dear J.F. and Harry" and I always sign it "Love, J.F. and Harry." So that part of my life I wouldn't trade for the world. They're so funny.

I had a suite of rooms on the first floor, and the kids used to come in, we'd sit on the floor and talk. I'd keep my bedroom door closed. One night that awful Ann Jones-- and I'm *sure* she's behind my valentines, I'm still getting these love things from Harry--the door opened, the freshmen kids were sitting on the floor talking about something, and Ann Jones started by, doubled back, and went in and threw open the door to my bedroom and said, "Whoop--Harry!" and closed the door. *I could have killed her!* They were wonderful, wonderful kids.

LO: Just by chance you ended up doing this--you're just told to take it on...

JFC: Now I see those students after a period, at every alumni reunion for that reason and I don't know if this is too long, but it's a very important part of my life, Lisa.

LO: Well, tell...

JFC: We had Northland, which is now part of a parking lot, and Sister Helen Mary, who has since left the community--a wonderful nun. She came from a very wealthy background--the kids loved her--but she was very uncomfortable living with them. She called me one night and said, "J.F., there is a rumor that one of the girls on the floor is pregnant." So before I could even know what to do, my class president, Mary Alice O'Connell, a darling little blond, she and another girl came over and told me about it. I didn't know what to do--and this is very unCatholic of me because I thought, this girl's parents are big wheels in their parish, they give big talks on how to raise teenagers, and this girl was pregnant and was talking about it and was going to have an abortion. That was why the sister called me. So Mary Alice O'Connell, very Irish Catholic background.... What I did, I called a young married couple I had known, I had been at their wedding, and they were praying their heads off and they couldn't have children! It was Chuck and Ellen XXXX. So I called Chuck, and said Chuck would you help me. In the meantime, I called a the head of a fraternity, they were getting thrown out, because of having trouble with Mundelein, and said, "Is there...do you know on the underground if a girl is having an abortion, to whom would they go?" Because I knew there was an underground. There is one on every university you go--Catholic or non-Catholic. Tom Garvey called me back--and I'll never forget that address: xxx S. xxth Street. in Chicago and the man's name was like xxxxx. So I called Chuck, and said, Chuck, if I don't do something, next Monday at 6:30 one of my students is going to have an abortion. I thought if a male voice called this abortionist--now this would have been about in '68--so Chuck was more than glad to do it. Well, he called him and the man, he was supposed to be a podiatrist, and I didn't realize it, I didn't know the South Side that well, he was an African American man. Chuck called



and the man said, "I don't know what you're talking about." Chuck said, "All I'm saying, if you keep your appointment tomorrow night at 6:30, you're going to be facing the police," Chuck was very manly. The man gave himself away, he said, "What is the young lady's name?" and Chuck said, "I didn't mention whether it was a lady." Well, the next thing was frightening. Mary O'Connell and another girl came tearing into my office, they clung to me--I keep kidding them--like kittens, "Sister, her boyfriend, XXXX"--apparently the abortionist called him--and XXX came up all over Northland saying, "Who is playing God in our lives?" Mary O'Connell was sure it was connected with the mafia and we were all going to be bombed! (chuckles) But you know what was bothering me, and a priest friend of mine said, "You know I'm really shocked that you would even have a question." I kept thinking, Lisa, I'm going into their lives and what am I....And this priest said to me, "Come one! You're thinking in terms of the killing of life." But it's never left me. And it turned out very beautifully. Anyway, the kids were scared to death that XXX was....well anyway, the girl left school, had a big wedding. What was so strange, the following nine or six months later, I was living in Coffey, and the girl at the switchboard said, "there's somebody here to see you." So I came down, it was a young man I had never met before and he said, naming the girl and the boy, "I was best man at their wedding and they wanted me to tell you they had a beautiful baby boy this morning." So I'm bluffing all the way, and I say, "Oh how wonderful, how nice for them to tell me" but never admitting. But Lisa, do you know, for seven years, every Christmas, I got a picture and a thing that just said "gratitude" and after seven years I didn't year anymore so I thought they had divorced. Well, I was at the Mundelein reunion and Mary Alice and I were talking about what we had done and Mary Alice said, "I see him. He's 18 or 21," and she said "they've never divorced." In that case it was a happy thing that you gave life to somebody. We didn't know what was going to happen to that girl's parents, but it turned out to be...they're still together and they had the one son. So that's enough stories!

LO: It leads into what I've been wondering. The time in which you were director was a

very volatile time--the '60s. Here you are from '62 to '70, an extraordinary change not only on the national scene but in terms of women and what are expected of them--

JFC: And the Catholic Church because--

LO: And in the Catholic Church which we will most certainly get to. How would you characterize the change in the student body from the '60s to the early '70s?

JFC: I'll begin by saying again I went from benevolent despot to honorary chairman of the board. I think I was smart because as the kids--they remained my good friends--but as they changed, [I changed]. We went to later hours.... When I started, almost every night there's mass at 4:30 at Loyola and I would say that half of the residence of Coffey Hall--I'd say that would be around 200--doors would begin to open and they would head over to mass. That was just part of life. That was pretty much the same at Loyola. By the time I left residence, I was having a mass for them on Sunday night and we would maybe have out of all the residences--600 or 800--we'd have maybe 60 kids there. That was the change. Because Vatican II, which was a calling together of all the hierarchy of the church--the archbishops, the cardinals, and this wonderful pope, Pope John the 23rd--they described it as opening the shutters of the Vatican and allowing in fresh air in. The students coming in from high school were taught by the nuns who were reading the new scholarship from the clergy. So they were coming in with a new idea of sin--a very healthful new idea of sin--and so I changed with them. At first, if you were caught drinking you were out, by the end, I was saying to the advisors I had now, "If a girl comes in at 1 in the morning and she has liquor on her breath and is able to carry on a conversation with dignity, don't ask questions." Whereas before...I won't tell you the funny story...we sent them home. I ended up being sued by a very famous Catholic scholar--whom I still have no use for--over this whole thing. But anyway, I changed with them and more and more they would say. "Sister, this rule..." so it began to be more they talking to me about what changes could be made and I was flexible. But I don't mean I ever deviated from what was right and what was wrong in my estimation in terms of

condition in the dorm, et cetera and so forth. At Loyola I racked the whole Catholic rule by allowing the kids to wear slacks. Loyola sent me word: "Please don't ever have our girls come on the Loyola campus with slacks," but the kids thought I was the greatest thing since sliced bread because they could wear slacks in Lewis Center, but I said not in Coffey Hall, McCormick Lounge--because that's their living room of their home--and they could not go into the dining room with slacks on. This was very liberal and from other Catholic colleges, their residence people were calling me and saying, "How are you doing..." or "What did you do...." or "We heard that...." So I think I was able--not without the help of wonderful kids who just didn't let me hold them back in pantaloons when everybody else was so .....

LO: I read the Student Handbook from '62-'63 that talked about "Good grooming at dinner, no curlers, no sweatshirts"--

JFC: (chuckles) Oh absolutely.

LO: And it talked about you could never wear shorts or slacks in the main building, the library, or facing Sheridan Road--

JFC: Oh I don't remember facing Sheridan Road.

LO: Yes and the Loyola campus or in the Lounge. It said, if you had on sports attire, you had to wear a trench coat--

JFC: That was true on every Catholic college. You rolled up your pajama legs, and put on a trench coat. Everybody knew it. I remember the rules, but not about Sheridan Road. Those rules were made by me with a group of senior girls I had never met because I came in January and in August I was calling girls, saying "I'm the new director, I wonder if you can meet with me." In fact, I remember the seniors saying, "Sister you're not strict enough about the dining room--we're slipping. Kids are coming down from the biology lab and they're still looking messy." Now those were the seniors. They had lived under stricter rules their freshman, sophomore, junior years.

LO: And they weren't ready for the change?

JFC: No, but I was happy as Larry and I loved the kids.

LO: Yes, it sounds like you really fell into a perfect place. What about the other changes going on in the '60s: did you participate or were you counsel to the kids that participated in the marches or the freedom schools in Alabama?

JFC: Yes, I was involved with them to this point that ...I spoke earlier of Ann Jones. Her father was General Earl T. Jones of the Alaskan command. Ann Jones was Miss West Point--she lived at West Point, and her roommate Judy Whitman was dating a West Point man and then another student who just got back from Spain was dating a West Point man. What I want to bring out here is that the Vietnam War was going on, and in residence where the freshman, sophomores, juniors, seniors lived on every floor--so Judy and Ann Jones with their handsome cadets. When they came on campus I would let them change into civilian clothing in the guest room. When the Vietnam War began, the kids who were anti-war as I was, as most as our nuns were--broke the hearts of Ann and Judy. They would say, "How does it feel to date a killer?" Friendships ended in the dormitories and some students were angry with me because they felt I was more friendly to the students who were anti-war--which I was. It was true, Lisa, it got so bad that one night...

[switch to side 2]

One night Russ stayed overnight. The kids adored him, he was a handsome guy, a pipe-smoking, tweedy man--he stayed overnight talking to the kids who were really leaders in the movement. I'd love to claim that I was a leader, but I wasn't. I was with them, went through lot of wild experiences with them because at the same time we had a black revolution which was just terrifying on campus. To make a long story short, Mundelein went on strike as did Northwestern, we had no school. It was a beautiful sunny spring. Every night kids would stand at the corner of Sheridan at the curve holding up a big anti-Vietnam war banner that said, "Honk twice if you're against the war." But there was a lot

of phoniness, I think on every campus, because there were kids that were just enjoying being out of school. Someone told me recently that only 2% of American young people really on campuses were that involved. Now you were on Wayne State where those young kids were shot to death--

LO: That was Kent State.

JFC: That was Kent State, oh excuse me, I was thinking it was Wayne. What I want to say is I would say, and maybe some would disagree with me, it was a minority, but there were bright kids. Their boyfriends were going into the service or were talking about going to Canada--it was a painful, very painful time. I'm trying to think of a....One funny thing. There was a very conservative, lonely, little kid on my floor and she said, "I want to be a part of everything Sister, but I'm afraid of movements." I said, "There's going to be a nice candlelight movement. We're just going to walk down Sheridan Road and Winthrop." So she said, she'd go. She wanted to be a part of things. Well, didn't someone throw a pail a water--and wasn't she the one that got it! She never let me live it down! So I would say it was a minority of our kids, but with their full heart and soul they were involved. I remember we went on marches--and my family was pro-war. One Saturday I was in a march downtown, clutching my daisy, feeling so stupid with all these younger people. There was a guy next to me from Chicago U. and when he found out I was a nun, he said, "Sister, why didn't you wear your habit--it would look better?" But one of my sisters was downtown that day and she said, "Where were you today?" I said I was down on State Street, and she said, "I might have known it!" It was a time of friendships breaking up in the dormitory. I urged the girls who were against the war, I said I would invite a man from Great Lakes to talk. But they didn't do it. They were very reserved, very angry. Then the girls who were involved were really emotionally shaken, it meant so much to them. Then our sisters, I'd say most of the faculty...the science department refused to close school. They said, some kids were going on to med school, they've got to have this science. So the anti-war people went up to the sixth floor where the science department

was and stood outside the door--some of them knocked the students going in and it has to be said, because it's truthful--but it was a romantic time, Lisa. Sullivan High School, they went on strike because they heard about Loyola and Mundelein, and they marched over, these high school kids. Then Loyola had a big field mass out of the campus and a wonderful black girl from Northwestern--I often wondered what happened to her--Eva Emerson or something. She was responsible for the laid-back Northwestern also going on strike. So it was a romantic time in some ways, and the minority that cared deeply really made a big difference.

The same thing with the nuns who went to Selma--I couldn't go I was chair, I was in the dormitory, I had a House Mother who was an alcoholic and the two young sisters who lived on the third and fourth floors wanted to go terribly. It was announced to the student body that some of their activity fee would go to help pay for the bus going to Selma. A group of anti-black, against the black movement, threatened to throw themselves across the parking place so the bus couldn't go. It was mostly nuns that went. We're freer. We don't have a wife or a husband or children, but for our nuns it was a part of what you were doing to make a better life. And the nuns that did it, if you know, one of the nuns, Mary DeCock she's a marvelous, she's one of writing a book on Mundelein. Wonderful nuns went, marched, lived experiences they never thought...living in black homes that were very, very poor. But it was wonderful.

One more thing if there's time, that I experienced in residence that was awful. With the death of Martin Luther King. I had always assigned African American kids with white kids. I just took it for granted; and they had friendships, etc. When Martin Luther King was shot the black students from Coffey Hall disappeared over into Northland with black kids who had apartment living over there. We didn't see them for 24 hours. When they came out, they had stopped speaking to anybody white. I was in the unenviable position of living in the dorm, trying to handle this. White kids coming in, crying "Sister...." One night a black kid came in, closed the door and just threw herself in my arms and wept, and

said "I'm leaving, I'm transferring, I'm going to Morehouse." I said "Why Diane?" and she said, "because my friends" (many of them were white, she was an English major), "we're not to be speaking to them. I can't live like that." I had kids come into me privately and talk.

You will enjoy this, because I'm sure with your background--Oppenheim--you're Jewish, right? We had a wonderful rabbi who had an office here [Sullivan Center] and he taught in this building. One day we got a bomb scare. Sister Ann Ida was very clever. She said to the bomb people, "I think it's a hoax. Could you come without any noise?" There was supposed to be bombing here and in Northland. So they came out very quietly. The rabbi--I can't think of his name--he was in this AV-1--it was a big popular class, it holds about 80 people. It has a stage there and Rabbi had an attache case. The bomb squad came in, and he asked the students very quietly to clear out, and in the clearing out he left his brief case behind. Well, when the bomb squad came around, they saw the briefcase, they threw a hook in and pulled it out, and did whatever they had to do. When they opened it, the rabbi said, they found dirty old running shorts, and his running shoes, his Reeboks. For years, he said, whenever there was going to be company his children insisted on putting that thing in the living room.

LO: The famous case....

JFC: Yes! It was funny... the white kids from that time on, said "Sister, I think I am going to move out this Spring. My parents are coming for me. We're going to commute." Like 40 miles every day rather than live in the dorm! They just stopped speaking to us-- unless they were alone. If you had a good friend--I remember I had a girl on the third floor who taught me what "hot buttered soul" was. Isaac Hayes had a record, she gave it to me to play. But it was terrifying. They took over, they demanded--what we call Piper, the mansion Piper--

LO: I'm sorry, when you say "they" you mean--

JFC: The black students. They demanded their own stationery, they wanted free

stamps. They painted the rooms that still have terrible paint jobs. They took over. They wanted separate dance...they called a meeting and I thought I'm going to get crucified in this. One of the girls who had come from an upper class African American home in Memphis, when her mother came to bring her, her mother said, "Now Sister, I am going to give you the names of two families she is allowed to visit. And of course, you will take her downtown when she goes downtown." I said "Students visit anyone they want. I would never know." She was horrified. That student turns out to be fouled-mouth, everything. One day the second floor came down and said, "Sister, we've had a meeting. Either you do something about her or none of us will sign up for the floor. We're not coming back into this next year." I had to send for her and I had to tell her that her foul mouth--she would be on the phone just spewing out terrible stuff. She said, "Sister I have to do it. We're in a new world." But she was leading the meeting and I thought, "Oh my lord, I am going to get crucified. She is going to say that I did..." Then I thought, "Well faculty is going to have to judge me." She never said a word about me. She got up and said we were a racist crowd, demanded all sorts of things....One of them because a very famous newscaster out at Channel 4 in Los Angeles. She left school because all her friends were white.

It was a frightening time...I don't know how to describe it. They were middle class blacks. They invited up the Black Panthers from Northwestern and they took over McCormick Lounge to give a talk. I had two maids, Mary and Irene, and they wonderful women, barely educated women, they could read and write. They knew me very well. Mary would lecture me whenever she felt like doing it. I adored them. I was sitting on the steps of McCormick Lounge and Mary came down in her blue working uniform. She signaled to me and said, "*How can you stand that filthy, dirty language?*" She just killed me--this was a black woman. The Panthers came out and talked and just spewed out hate, and we just kind of let it happen. I would say it was...I don't know if our white kids learned anything from it because they saw us handling it, just stepping back and letting the



black kids have their way a bit. This was '68 and I left in '70. The kids signed up with roommates for the next year so I never had to handle any of that again. It was a frightening time--and it was a sad time. Our help in the kitchens were all black. We went to their funerals, we went to their weddings if they invited us. We drove out to the South Side although the minute the nuns appeared, a great silence fell. We'd come in on the wedding and they'd be having a hilarious time, and the sisters from Mundelein would arrive and the poor black people would be so uptight, stunned at nuns in habits. They had such reverence for us they'd immediately stop talking, we would get our piece of cake and our coffee and *be in misery* but we'd stay there and they'd be so relieved when we'd leave and the party would go. I think I'm rattling on.

LO: Let me ask you one last question about the dorms. You talked about living in residency in the dorms--what did it mean for you to live apart from your BVM sisters?

JFC: That's a very good question. I was very cut off. During that time, they were reading all the new theology, they were forming groups and discussing ideas. I ate very often with the students because I'd be up with them--till two in the morning if someone needed me. I ate a lot of my meals with them So I felt out of things. Yes, it was hard on me in that way. I didn't even go to mass with them. They would all rise and be at morning prayers and mass and I would maybe up till 2 and go to mass at 11 and then to save time, students would ask if I would have lunch with them to discuss whatever their problems. I'm sure, Lisa, I missed a lot because even these last years I was in teaching at Mundelein my best friends--one black, one white--everyone in the college but me knew they were lesbians. They had to explain it to me (chuckles) because to me, they were just girlfriends. In fact I was invited to the lesbian marriage of one of them in California. Is that's enough about that?

Spiritually, I did feel cut off and there's all sorts of movements going on in the church, movements about women and these exciting discussions. Even to this day when they refer back, I am just lost. I wasn't reading what they were reading.

LO: You were so much involved in the daily lives of the students--plus your history work.

JFC: Right--exactly. I *was* a historian too!

[End of Interview]

Follow-up questions based on phone conversation, November 25, 1998:

LO: Is Joan Frances your birth name or your name when you became a nun?

JFC: My birth name is Dorothy, but my friends called me, and some of the old nuns still do, call me Dory. Joan Frances is for my two sisters--their names. I was so happy when I was given that name. You pick a new name because you are starting a new life. You are allowed three choices and it is a great worry; you don't know which one you will receive until the archbishop, who has the name on a little white card gives it to you in a formal mass. I prayed I would get my first choice and I did. Some didn't and after Vatican II, changed back to their birth names, but I didn't want to go back--I liked Joan Frances or J.F.