

INTERVIEW WITH SISTER MARY JOHN MICHAEL DEE, BVM, for the Mundelein College History Project. June 9, 1999. Interview by Mary DeCock, BVM, at the BVM Mother house, Mount Carmel, Dubuque, Iowa.

Tape #1, Side A

MD This is Sister Mary DeCock. I am interviewing Sister Mary John Michael Dee, BVM. It is June 9, 1999 and we are at the Mother house, Mount Carmel, Dubuque, Iowa. This interview is for the Mundelein College History Project. The tape, when finished, will go to the Mundelein College Archives in the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership at Loyola University in Chicago.

MD Sister Mary John Michael, I am delighted to be able to interview you. Thank you for agreeing. I wonder, before we get down to the interview itself, if you would tell me a little bit about yourself before you entered the BVMs -- how you happened to enter, something about your education, your family, any of the experiences you might like to put into the record so we might like to know about you?

SMJM: Oh, there's nothing much. I'm the youngest of four children of a family that was very close. I went to St. Aloysius grade school, which was seven years. (Is this all right?) In those days in the Kansas City, Missouri schools we only had seven years in the elementary schools. So I was there seven years. We were supposed to go on to St. Aloysius Academy. My sister graduated from the Academy. But I didn't want to go to the academy.. Being the youngest, I expressed myself; my family didn't agree, but I said I didn't want to go to the Academy, and that I wanted to go to the public school. My father told me that if I went to the public school I should recognize the fact that I could never change; I'd have to stay there. So I went to Manual High School in Kansas City, which was a public high school. And I spent three years there. After I graduated, my mother felt that I was too young to go to Manual to the Teacher's Training, so she made arrangements for me to go to the University of Kansas which was closer to our home than the state university in Missouri. So I spent the rest of my time at the University of Kansas, and graduated from there. After I spent one year -- not doing too much-- I decided I wanted to be in the

community and I made my arrangements.

MD Despite the fact that you turned down St. Aloysius High School?

SMJM Right. The reason I turned it down was I had an experience -- not myself, but I knew about it -- and I was stubborn enough I guess, to act on it. And I'm not telling you, Mary, what it was, as I have not told others.

MD All right. That remains a secret!

SMJM Right.

MD So you were in the novitiate with Sister Mary Ernesta (Lacey)?

SMJM Right. When we were postulants Sister Mary Ernesta came in and replaced Sister Mary Angela (Fitzgerald). Sister Mary Angela was sick and Sister Mary Ernesta took her place. Sister Mary Verena (Griffin) was our postulant mistress and then we went down to the novitiate after we were received. There were too many in the novitiate, so we had to go back to the postulate, and Sister Mary Verena took us for the first year of our novitiate. Then we went down to the novitiate with Sister Mary Ernesta.

MD So, you were -- when you were professed you went directly to study? Could you tell me about that? There's kind of a -- we hear about the five sisters who went off to study, but it's never quite clear who they were, or where they went, or how they got there.

SMJM Yes. Well, as you know, on the day you're professed you're sent to a provincial to be assigned. I was assigned to Sister Mary Justitia (Coffey) who was the Provincial at that time. Four others of us -- there were five of us in our set who had their first degree. These sisters were Sister Mary Columba Kriebs, Sister Mary Irma Corcoran, Sister Mary Francine Gould, -- how many's that --three?-- Sister Mary Sylvester Geisler, and Sister Mary John Michael Dee. These five were all sent to Sister Mary Justitia, and I was told that I was to wait for further orders in Chicago and Mother would take care of us. I was assigned to Annunciation to wait for further orders.

MD Were the other four (sent there) too?

SMJM No. The other four -- two of us were sent to Annunciation, the others were at Presentation. Sister Mary Edma (Sinnott) was the superior at Annunciation at the time. One day she told me I was to go to Canterbury, but I didn't know where that was in Chicago. She said, "But I'll take you. You have an interview with Mother." It was Mother Isabella (Kane). And that

was when I was told that I was to go on to study. In the interview -- I always kind of smiled about it because -- Mother told me that "I'm sending you to a state university because you've already had experience at a state university and we know that you will conduct yourself properly."

I had courage enough to say, "But Mother I was not in a habit at that time."

But Mother said, "We will trust you!"

So, Sister Mary Columba and I were assigned to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Sister Mary Francine and Sister Mary Sylvester were assigned to St. Louis University, and Sister Mary Irma went to Columbia. We were there for one year.

MD What did you study? Were you told what to take or did you have a choice?

SMJM (Laugh) I had no choice. I don't know about the others. But I was -- I had quite a few science credits and psychology. The indication of my studies was that it would be in psychology, but I was told that I could not take psychology at a state university -- which I already had! So I was --

MD But they sent you there!

SMJM I was sent there, but I was to take bacteriology. Well, I had been able to get a catalog, and I found that I was supposed to have 15 hours of chemistry to take bacteriology. I didn't have one unit or one credit of chemistry. So I was sent off. And I told Sister Mary Justitia (Coffey) that I couldn't possibly take bacteriology. She said "I know that you will do what you are told."

So, four of us went to the University of Michigan. Sister Mary Columba and I were the two young ones. Sister Mary Alfonso (Byrne) was the older sister and Sister Mary Annette Therese (Langerbeck). There were four of us. Sister Mary Alfonso was more or less in charge of us. And -- well, that's beside the point. When I got to the chairman of the Graduate Division, and I told him that I wasn't too sure what I could major in, he looked it over, he said, "Well, definitely psychology. It's a breeze." I remember him saying that. And I said, "But Doctor, I couldn't possibly take psychology."

He said, "Well, about the only thing I can suggest is that you take educational psychology. That would put you in that (education) group."

And I said "Well... ?"

He lined me up for that program which was in education. And he said "Well now you have a lot of

science, so you could probably do that.”

And I said, “but I don’t think I --” you know, I wasn’t interested particularly. And I said “Well, for the time being I’ll register for the educational psychology.”

When we got back to the house where we were staying, I told --- Sister Mary Alfonso had to call Sister Mary Justitia to tell her that we were all set up, but I was the only one that wasn’t very definite because I didn’t realize whether that would be acceptable. I didn’t know -- you know, I couldn’t decide for myself since I was told . Well, anyway, Sister Mary Justitia just told her -- she said “Sister can’t take bacteriology but she could get into educational psychology.”

And Sister Mary Justitia’s answer was: “Tell her to do what I told her.”

Well, I went to the chairman of the education department -- he was chairman of the graduate school-- and he lined me up in educational psychology. And then he arranged. . .he was a marvelous person. . . he arranged that I could go into a class in bacteriology without my chemistry. So he put me in a class with nurses who already had their chemistry. And I spent one semester in a course in bacteriology. I took an examination, and the professor said ”I’ll give you an open book examination” and that’s how I finished in one semester. I did take a course in bacteriology.

MD That’s a wonderful story though. It says a lot about free choice, doesn’t it.

SMJM It’s terrible. There wasn’t any free choice. But you’d never do that today. No one would ever do that today.

MD No. Not at all. So you finished your M. A. that year?

SMJM That year. Yes, we finished and we came back to Mundelein. Now Mundelein -- the building -- was not completely finished. This was in June of 1930. It was not completely finished. And the sisters were living in a small cottage, in the so-called “west campus” (laugh) and we were told to stay there. And there were thirteen of the sisters in the house. We were the ones that moved over to the building. We moved over to the building in July --with a lot of the material that had been stacked in the small cottage and -- we placed it in the new building.

MD So, you lived in the new building before school opened?

SMJM Oh, yes. Just about a month or so -- two months maybe -- to get things organized.

MD I read in The Skyscraper that registration was set for a certain date and that when three hundred people registered, they had not planned on that many, so they postponed the opening of school for a couple of weeks?

SMJM Well, we finally. . . it was difficult in the registration. I use that word difficult because it was not planned exactly the way that -- well, what happened changed the plans, so we really had our first day of classes on September 29, 1930. I remember it distinctly because it was my feast day, the feast of St. Michael.

MD You had good help. So the building was built and finished in less than a year?

SMJM Oh, yes. I don't know when it started . . .

MD Well the ground breaking was on November 1 -- the ceremony for the ground breaking was on November first. So you moved into the college just before school opened. And what about classes? How were you assigned to classes, or did you get to choose what you wanted to teach?

SMJM Oh no, we were assigned. I was told what to do. I remember that Sister Mary St. Victor (Lesner) was the biology teacher, and she had so many students that she couldn't handle them in the lab. So, Sister assigned me to take some of her classes in biology, so I remember teaching . . .

MD Bacteriology?

SMJM No, not bacteriology! I taught freshman biology. I don't remember if it was one year or two years. But she got help at -- say the end of one year or two years -- and then I was put into education.

MD I notice that there were a lot of student activities during the first year. Was that part of the plan that everybody would organize a club and get the students involved right off the bat ...

SMJM I don't know . . . I doubt if it was a plan. I imagine the sisters got -- you know-- to working, and getting things organized. I think that when we were moving into the educational aspect of the college, I think the sisters got a little bit more courage to do the things that we knew had to be done.

MD Were there sisters there who had taught at other colleges -- at Clarke or somewhere -- who could sort of ...

SMJM Well, as I recall, and I wasn't too familiar with all the sisters, I recall that most of them came from The Immaculata, because practically everybody would remark about Immaculata and I had never seen it. I didn't know anything at all about it. And it was new --- all of it was new to me, and I recall two of the sisters were very lovely to the young. Especially Sister Mary Janet

(Staples) and Sister Mary Consuelo (Ramaley) - both were very, very helpful. And, they heard me say I didn't know Immaculata and they arranged for me to go down to The Immaculata. They took me down one Saturday so that I could see things, and arranged with a sister who was down there to take me through every place so that I wouldn't say again that I didn't know Immaculata.

MD So you'd feel more comfortable with the conversation?

SMJM Right. Yes.

MD So Sister Mary Consuelo and Sister Mary Janet, I suppose, would be sort of like the mentors who helped you get going in the community there?

SMJM Well, to me they seemed to stand out. Well, they were very active and very friendly. But other sisters were -- I don't say they weren't friendly and all that -- they were, but these two seemed to me to stand out. Sister Mary Richard (Bordeaux) , of course, was to me one of the loveliest persons we had there. Sister Mary Richard. She was chairman of the English department.

MD What about -- there was a poet there -- Sister Mary Angelita (Stackhouse)? She was ...

SMJM Yes, she was there. I didn't know her too well.

MD I think she started the publications. What about the student body? Where did they get the students? It seems incredible that they could recruit 384 students for a college that was not yet built.

SMJM Well, I think that a great many were from The Immaculata and St. Mary's in that first year. And of course you know that we only had three years at Mundelein, we did not have a senior class nor did we have a graduation that first year. But Sister Mary Justitia had already asked Cardinal Mundelein if he would be there for the dedication, and he was. We had the dedication instead of a graduation, and knowing Sister Mary Justitia, she insisted that the Cardinal be there for our first graduating class. Now he had, as I understand it, a policy that he would go to a school only once, and he would already be at Mundelein for the dedication, so the idea would be that he would not come back again. But he did. He came back. She arranged for it; he came back and was there for the first graduation at Mundelein -- the second year.

MD It was sort of his flagship. It was named for him.

SMJM Well, I shouldn't tell you this now. Well I will. Probably you have heard about her arrangement for the dedication when she had Sheridan Road cut off from traffic?

MD Yes.

SMJM Did you hear about the police officers? Well, she called the superintendent of police and she wanted the traffic cut off, which she got, and she said she wanted six handsome, the handsomest police officers, on their six handsomest horses! The superintendent told her, he said "Now Sister, I'll be able to give you six handsome officers but I can't give you the horses because," he said "we have a limited number and we must keep them down in the loop for traffic. So he said, "I will allow you to have these six handsome officers." And that day, when they came to Mundelein and cut off Sheridan Road, they had six handsome officer on six brand new motorcycles! And those officers never lived it down -- from their brother officers -- that they were the handsomest! So that's Sister Mary Justitia.

MD Yes. She had power. And she knew how to use it!

SMJM That reminds me, we didn't have drapes -- this isn't a part of our conversation -- I don't think that you want to take this ---

The tape recorder was turned off, while Sister Mary John Michael told of Sister Mary Justitia requesting from the fire department the loan of long ladders needed to hang the drapes in the auditorium. The firemen came with the ladders, and she recruited them to hang the drapes!

At that point, I forgot to turn the recorder back on ! These next remarks pick up when Sister Mary John Michael was president of the College. Tape #2 of the second interview on June 12 covers the section of this first interview which I missed on June 9.

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MD You did not love being a fund raiser, Sister John Michael?

SMJM Hardly, because I had to go out -- well, I didn't go out too often, but I did go out, and, of course, another thing, I had to take a companion. And I would go out with the President of another institution. But, I usually took Sister Mary Columba because she was the treasurer; of course, she just sat there; but you had to interview the man or whoever it was at these different organizations, you know, to get the money. But, I mean, I think it helped a lot. And then, the Ford Foundation sent out a bulletin saying they were going to give out these amounts and you had to do certain things. Well, Sister Mary Columba didn't like the idea, because she said our books would be available to those people. I said "Sister, the books are available to the government and anybody else." Well, anyway, she did it. She said "All right, I'll try to answer the questions on it." And

then I sent it in, and I said the basis of our request was that we wanted to raise the salaries of our lay teachers. And I think that was the only reason we got the money.

Well, we got quite a bit on that. And, of course, I knew that in some instances you have to give the church a certain amount of money, but I thought that this was something we had to keep at Mundelein. And I also knew that when we got any money we were supposed to send it to Mount Carmel. And I knew we couldn't send this to Mount Carmel. Clarke got it at the time too. (They didn't get as much as we did. But, anyway, they got it.) I called Mount Carmel and told them that we had received this; but it was all in the paper that next day that we got our check. So I thought, well, the only thing I can do -- I'm going to offset giving any of this to the church to begin with, and I didn't want the money at Mundelein because Mount Carmel could say "send it." So I called the Cardinal's office -- and I knew the secretary because his daughter graduated from Mundelein. And I told him who I was.

He said "Oh yes, Sister."

I said, "Would it be possible to see the Cardinal today for about ten minutes?"

And he said -- he laughed -- and he said "I'll see, sister, I think I know why."

And I said "I'm sure you know why."

He said, "Just a minute." He came back and said "Sister, can you be here at eleven?"

And I said, "I'll be there."

So Sister Mary Bernarda (Welch) and I -- she was my first councillor -- we went down to the Cardinal's office (were you ever in it? He's away back in the room with red carpeting and he's up on a pedestal -- not a pedestal, a platform) and when we entered he got up and came over, stepped down and said "Oh, here are my Sisters in the money!"

I said "Well that's why we're here, your Eminence."

He said, "Come on and sit down."

So I told him, you know, I said, "We got this money."

He said, "Yes, I read it in the paper."

And I said "Your Eminence, this is quite a bit of money," and I said, "I really am not - I don't know how to use this money in order to develop it, and I said, I just need some advice."

He said "I know just exactly what you want." He picked up the telephone, called somebody, he said -- oh, I think it as Al -- "Al, he said, Are you open for business?" And he said that the sisters

were here and they had received this fund from Ford and he said Sister wants to know how she can invest it. And he listened and he turned and he said "Sister, could you be available at seven o'clock this evening?"

I said "Oh, yes."

He said "All right. Be there, Al"

So he turned -- he hung up and turned and said "Sister, this is my financial advisor; all the investments in the archdiocese are in his hands and he's a good man". He said, "He'll take care of you."

So I put that money in a portfolio. He came out and told me all about how he would do it ----within a portfolio -- the first one the community ever had -- and he said he'd look after it. He said, "You will be informed of everything that is done; furthermore, all the interest will be folded right back into your account. unless you want to take it. I said, "No, put it right into the account." So it was there. Now that was there at Mundelein and it stayed at Mundelein.

Now we got a few more things. So, I was able to send money to Mount Carmel after we paid the bills at Mundelein. The sea wall was put in and hadn't been paid; we had to repair the roof and it hadn't been paid; so I took care of that. And if you recall, the walls in the sisters' rooms had never been painted and the walls going down the staircases had never been painted. So all of that was done. So, most of my term was dealing with money matters.

MD Did you have anyone besides the Cardinal's investor to help you? Did you have any advisory group or anything?

SMJM No. I never let it get out of my hands and that man's hands. Well, I felt that, you know, if you get too many people in on this, I think that you're going to lose something. And, well, I just felt that I wanted it for Mundelein, and of course, what I did say to the Ford people -- I said it was for increased salaries of our lay teachers. And of course at that time they were getting not too much. We didn't have it to give, you know, at that time.

Now I was able to send to Mount Carmel , because nothing I guess had been paid on the building. I did get a letter from Sister Mary Realmo (Sullivan) right after I went into office telling me how much I was to send to Mount Carmel, every six months. And I don't know whether that letter is still there or not. But I wrote an answer to that. I wrote to Mother, and to Realmo, and to each member of the Council and told them what I expected to do. And what had to be done at

Mundelein while I was there -- and I needed the money there. But, I did do that. But I was able to send some money to Mount Carmel.

MD Would you say that Mount Carmel sort of tried to micro-manage Mundelein?

SMJM They never interfered with me, Sister. I will say that most deliberately.

MD They just wanted their money?

SMJM Well, no. See, Mother Josita (Baschnagle) -- she never asked for money. She did tell me that, you know, "We're in the red." And that was when I went in. Which I didn't know, of course. Because you didn't know -- you're a teacher and you don't know what's happening.. And I think that they got that idea from my sister, because Sister Mary Realmo kind of liked her. Of course, I didn't know until Sister Mary Realmo told me what my sister did for the fund for the infirmary, the Philomena Hall that later was developed (that was when it was in the infirmary) and they built that and the alumnae took care of sending money to Mount Carmel. They pledged a certain amount, and of course St. Aloysius alumnae was limited -- *(side two)*

it was a small alumnae -- and she said, others were waiting until they finished the pledge. And she (Realmo) said, "Your sister doesn't have an idea what that has done for us. She said we have bills coming in, and we haven't the money to pay for it. Then here your sister's check would come in for a thousand or maybe two thousand once in a while, and she said, eventually they did finish their pledge. I don't know where they got that idea -- I don't know where they got the idea of putting me in that job. That was. . . But anyway ---

MD By that time you must have had a good track record at Mundelein.

SMJM I don't know. The sisters were awfully good to me. You know, I think they realized that, as I was telling sister, we had 72 sisters there and I was one - - the seventh youngest. I went from that table all the way to the head table. We went by number you know.

MD We were still doing that when I got there.

SMJM I know. I know we were. All the time I was there we were according to number.

MD I liked that foot of the table down there at the end! (mutual laughing) So, one of the things that you will certainly be remembered for is professionalizing the fund- the account-keeping of the college.

SMJM Well, I don't know. I never thought of anything like that.

MD Well, the Ford Foundation grant was certainly one of the biggest the college ever

had.

SMJM Oh, yes, it was.

MD So, what about the faculty that were there? Is there anything you'd like to say about your faculty at that time?

SMJM Oh, I think that we had some very fine teachers. Of course, I mentioned Sister Mary Richard before. I thought she was one of the finest, I mean from the standpoint of a religious life. And Sister Mary Augustina (Ray) in history, also Sister Mary Harrita (Fox). They were excellent teachers. There were other teachers that I wasn't, you know, too familiar with. Sister Mary Basiline (Bates) was there. And I had the -- privilege should I say? -- of telling her that she was to come to Mount Carmel, which wasn't an easy thing to do. But, I recall that when Mother sent word to me that I was to tell her that she was to come to Mount Carmel and -- but anyway, I did tell her. And -- it was hard for her to accept.

MD She was retired to Mount Carmel?

SMJM Well, she still had a hold on things. You wouldn't do that sort of thing to Sister Mary Basiline. But I remember coming. I told her the day we would have to come. In those days we came on the train, the Zephyr. So I arranged for a Zephyr parlor car; I think Sister Mary Rose (Barry) was to come with me. We got in -- it was early morning when we started, and Sister Mary Basiline didn't talk the whole time. Well, I thought, do something. So I said, "I think I'd like some breakfast." So, I said to Sister Mary Basiline, "would you like something?" She said, "I want nothing." And I whispered to Rose Barry earlier -- I said, 'Sister, now when I say something, you agree with me.' So I said to Rose, "Wouldn't you like a little bit of coffee or toast?" I knew Sister Mary Basiline loved orange juice. So I called the porter and I asked him to bring breakfast. And I asked her what she wanted. So she got into the little lavatory that was there and she closed the door.

Well the porter came and we gave our order, and I said "a double order of orange juice, a large glass of orange juice," and I ordered something for a plate for her, and when they brought it I knocked on the door and said, "Sister, won't you come out?" So she came out. I said, "Our breakfast is here. There's a little orange juice there for you." She sat down. She looked at us. I don't know what I had on her plate. She started eating. Then she started to open up. And she was really nice toward the end -- until we got there, and two sisters were meeting us. Now I don't know,

I didn't know Dubuque. And St. Joseph's Sanitarium -- was that here?

Well, the sisters said "You are going to St. Joseph's Sanitarium. She threw her hands up and said "I am not going." Well, of course we were here in Dubuque. They said, "Sister, there's no room right now at the infirmary and Mother said you should have a room over there (at St. Joseph's) until there's a room at the infirmary ready." So we took her over there, and had to leave her there. So we went back.

But anyway, I want to tell you this about Sister Mary Basiline. I came in to see her very often while she was sick. St. Columba (Kelly), the nurse, she was her nurse. She used to call me once in a while and tell me how she was. Well, I came in this one time and she wasn't good. And she talked to me, but not very much, you know. Then I said I think we better get started home and I got to the door, and she said "Sister come back." So I came back.

And she said, "Will you shake hands with me?" And I said "Oh, sure." I took her hand in both of mine. I said "Why not, Sister, you're going to be all right" -- or something like that. And she just looked at me. She said, "Sister, I'm sorry for what I've put you through. Perhaps, if I had a superior like you in my early life I would have been different."

MD How wonderful!

SMJM And she died about two days later.

MD What a story!

SMJM Well, I didn't do anything to her, but I did say to her, you know, when I told her about coming, "Well Sister this was not my doing -- this is not my decision. This comes from the Superior General --

MD You were kind to her.

SMJM Well, I suppose. But I mean, you know, it was certainly a change. But anyway, that's my story.

(At this point, a sister who had come in during the interview told us she must leave)

SMJM Now that's enough for me.

MD What would you say -- was there anything you wanted to do that you weren't able to finish?

SMJM Yes. What I wanted to do was -- I wanted to build a residence hall. You know, Sister Mary Ann Ida (Gannon) did it. And, that was all right. I had plans -- I never presented them

-- because it was only in my mind and I had it all worked out on paper, but I didn't present it. And I had asked engineers, some engineers who worked at Mundelein, and contractors, and I wanted a 400-car garage, underground. And I was wondering about the lake, because Mundelein is on the lake -- I guess I wanted to know if it was possible. And I was told it was. And, I thought it would be a marvelous thing to get all the cars out of there, but I never presented it because I knew I would never be able to -- wouldn't have the money to do a thing like that.

MD I take it the building was never paid for?

SMJM As far as I know - I was never told -- I doubt it. I doubt it.

MD It was a tremendous undertaking.

SMJM Yes.

MD Well, Sister, is there anything else you'd like to say about Mundelein College and yourself that I forgot to ask?

SMJM Oh, I don't think so. Of course that's my whole life. I was never any place else except the Cedars, and that's it. So, I don't know too much about the community's -- you know, the convents, the schools that we had . . .

MD Have you ever regretted that your whole life was Mundelein College?

SMJM Never. Never. I just felt that that was what the community expected of me, and that was what I was told to do. And I would do it. That's why I entered. And that's what I did. I entered and I knew that I was in the hands of other people.

MD And so your life took a different direction than you ever envisioned.

SMJM Oh, yes. When I was going to Mundelein, as president -- it never, never entered my head. Or superior. I never thought of anything like that. I was glad -- I think I left it in good financial straits, I mean as far as Mundelein was concerned. And I was glad for that. Because it was in a bad way for a while.

MD And, well, you pulled it out.

SMJM Well, God did! Not I. Sister, I as a person, I could never have done it. It was the Lord who did it, Sister. And I'm not being just pious. You know, I had to have some kind of help.

MD You had seventy-five people there.

SMJM Yea. There's one thing though that I should tell you. And that is, when I went in, there were seventy-two sisters, and on an average -- of course, at Mundelein, a lot of sisters in the

community think that the sisters at Mundelein (did) everything -- just what they wanted to do. Well, we went to the community room, you know. We had night prayers; we had spiritual reading in common. Well at that time, it was very regular. It was very regulated. We did it according to the times. And at night prayers we had an average of twenty-nine sisters out of seventy-two (at community exercises). Now as a superior, I just felt-- there's something has to be done. Sisters would come in, and Mother had told me this, that I was to send the list to her. They would come in and ask for going to bed early, and I would put the name down and say "yes." I'd always ask -- well not always, but sometimes-- ask if they felt better, or was there anything I could do for them, when did they go to the doctor last. Most of them were very nice about it. That must have been two or three years.

Well that was when I realized that Sister Mary Richard -- she was one of the oldest in the house -- she never asked for one thing, Sister. She was always there. And I thought-- that sister needs a little extra rest once in a while, but she's there every night. So one night I said -- (after supper prayers we always knelt down, you know, in the dining room, and said after supper prayers)-- as soon as I said grace I rang the bell. So they didn't kneel. I said "Sisters, how would you like to go to the chapel and say our prayers together and I said anyone who wants to go to the community room can go but if you want to go to your room, go to your room and get ready for bed or get ready for tomorrow, but be on your own?. Well they clapped. So the next week I did it one night. Then I skipped a week. Then I started another week and then I started two nights a week.

You won't believe this, but I got a letter from the Superior-General. And it said-- well to the effect that is -- as Superior you can't change the Rule. It was really an awful letter to me. Well, I wasn't changing the Rule, but I was so hurt that I didn't answer it. And I continued to do what I was doing. And when Mother came for visitation -- of course I was always the last one to go in -- when I was finished I started to go and then I settled back and I said "Mother, I would like to say something. You sent me a letter one time and I said, I want you to know I wasn't trying to hurt you or anything, I wasn't trying to be impolite. I just felt that I couldn't answer because what you said to me was not true. And I said, "You told me that as a Superior I didn't have any right to change the Rule." And I said "I have never changed the Rule. I never changed any Rule."

She turned and looked at me, and I said "I understand according to religious life that a superior has a right to interpret the Rule. I said, for example, one sister needs to go to the doctor

but the others don't. I said some need a special diet and others don't. So I said we make exceptions, and, I said, I make an exception to different sisters and that's what I did. I said, "What I did was changing going to bed, or going to the community room; I did that periodically for the benefit of all the sisters. Some sisters got the permission each month. But some of the other sisters need it and, I said, they don't ask. So I said when I changed that and allowed the sisters to go to bed early, for the whole house, I was interpreting the Rule for the other sisters. That doesn't mean I changed the Rule. She said, "Don't worry about it. Don't worry."

At the end of the second year, we got a letter that went out all over the community that the horarium of the community could be changed and you had a choice of three. And they had three identified. Well I looked at it, and I read the letter to the sisters and I posted it. One of the sisters came and she said to me, "Sister Mary John Michael, did you notice anything in that letter you got from the Superior General?" I said "Well I knew it was the horarium and it said we could decide on it." She said "Yes, but did you notice?" "Well." I said, "not particularly." "Well." she said, "the last one was the one that you've been doing." (laugh) I hadn't paid any attention to it. I was glad I was able to do that. You know . . . I know Sister Mary St. Columba came to Mundelein and she said to me -- she came to me one day and said "I haven't carried as many trays that whole semester as I used to carry in one week, because you've given them rest and they needed it." So that part I liked. I mean I knew that I had done something for the entire house . That wasn't much, but it was something.

MD It was a great deal! So you left the college in good shape?

SMJM I hope so.

MD I never think of you in those years I was at Mundelein that I don't think of Sister Mary Bernarda (Welch).

SMJM No?

MD I think of her as being one of your great supporters.

SMJM Well, I've been told I was a good sport before. But, Sister Mary Bernarda (Welsh) was another person who did an awful lot for Mundelein. And she certainly knew the student body. Oh yes, she did. She knew those girls. Sister, she knew not only the girls, she knew their boyfriends, she knew their husbands, she knew their children.

MD She was a wonderful Dean.

SMJM Yes, she was.

MD Well, sister . . .

SMJM Well, I hope I gave you something. But I hope you edit that tape or something.

MD Well, it's coming out fine. And I thank you Sister for giving me this interview.

SMJM Oh, not at all.

MD I'm also glad I was at Mundelein for two years while you were, while Sister Mary John Michael was at the helm..

SMJM Thank you, Sister. I'll always remember you at one of the Senate meetings. You were talking, I know the group was around me. . .

The June 9 interview ended here. What follows, without introduction, is the beginning of the second interview on June 12. The question asked was about Sister Mary John Michael's impressions of Sister Mary Justitia.)

SMJM I would say she (Sister Mary Justitia) was a very open kind of person, very kind. As I mentioned once before, a large woman, but had a heart as big as her person. She was most fair in her dealing with me at least, and I think with everyone in the community, and was vitally interested in what we were doing as teachers. She was very much interested in the young sisters, and of course, had young sisters there. But she just didn't have young sisters around. She looked after us, and every Sunday she took us for direction and gave us regulations on how to conduct ourselves, what we were to do, and expected us to carry out the work that we were given, as far as we as young as sisters in the community life.

MD How about her ability to raise money ?

SMJM That I don't know. But I do recall hearing that Mundelein was about to be -- the construction of Mundelein was about to begin and I understand she went down to State Street and wanted -- I don't know what she wanted, but she went to consult the gentlemen down there and they kept telling her, "Sister, you can't build now -- you can't build now." And after they would talk to her, her final word to them was "Well I know you will help me. I know you will help me." Whether they did or not, I don't know, but she built the college and it was during the depression --

naturally -- 1929 -- when it was going up.

MD And if nothing else she made friends.

SMJM Very, very much so. She was the type of person that could win people over. She had a personality -- at first you wouldn't think she would be that way, but it was just her manner that she had. For example, the Cardinal came one day to the door, and the sister who answered the door didn't know -- she just thought he was a priest. He said he wanted to see the art teacher, so she had him come in and she took him down to what we called the Cardinal's Room at that time, and she went to get Sister Mary Janet who was the one she thought she ought to call -- she was head of the department. And she (Janet) told Sister Mary Justitia that there was a priest down in the reception room. Again, Sister Mary Justitia went down, and of course when she saw him she recognized the Cardinal. And he told her what he wanted, and so Sister called -- Sister Mary Janet came down and she walked to the door, and Sister told her to come in, and what he wanted was -- what he wanted was that the whole archdiocese of Chicago was sending a spiritual bouquet to the Holy Father for some reason or other, and they all had contributed these spiritual prayers and he wanted a spiritual bouquet made and he wanted Sister Mary Janet to make it. And it was a work of art. Truly it was.

MD I can imagine.

SMJM In fact, I had a part of it. Sister Mary Janet collected some of us and said she would like to have us do some of the art work. Well the art work she had was --she had the decoration ready but she didn't have all the colors in. So she told us how to put the colors in. So all we had to do was follow her directions. But it was a white vellum book and it was about ten pages in length and it was really a gorgeous thing.

MD And it went to the Holy Father?

SMJM It went to the Holy Father. And sometime later the Cardinal consulted Sister Mary Janet about some art work that had some significance for the archdiocese.

MD Well I hope that's in her archival collection. That she made a spiritual bouquet for the Holy Father.

SMJM Oh, yes. It was really a beautiful thing. Of course we all had a hand in it!

MD That's right. You put a color in !

MD So, Sister Mary Consuela (Martin) was there for three years.

SMJM Yes. I think I mentioned that three of us had been sent for study during the summer. We hadn't been away. I know Sister Mary Justitia told me, "She (Consuela) said, 'You haven't been away for a long time.' " And I said I hadn't been away any summer. And she said 'Would you like to go.' " I said, "Well, that's all right."

The three of us went to summer school. And in those days you had no contact, no letters, no contact with the sisters during the summer. And when we came back, it was late at night and quite a number of sisters were waiting up for us. And one of the sisters said to me, "Sister Mary Justitia wants to be remembered to you." And I said, "Oh thank you, is she visiting now." And she said, "Well she's here."

Well, we just thought she was visiting. And pretty soon they kind of looked at us, and the others didn't know what had happened. And then finally one of the sisters said, "Well no, she's here."

And we said, "Yes, you said that."

"Well, she's the President."

And right away we said "Where's Sister Mary Consuela?"

And they just said, "Well her term is up."

And that's how we learned that we had Sister Mary Justitia back. But I would say that the sisters accepted her. They were very happy she was there. I don't know why Sister Mary Consuela was not. But, of course, the term was three years... but I think she was accepted in a very positive way.

MD Sister Mary Consuela?

SMJM I think Sister Mary Consuela ... yes. I would say she was a very fair person, rather regal in her manner, but she was not distant. If you had a problem... at least, I would say she was always fair, would listen to what you had to say, and would give you her response straight from the shoulder. But she would really support you in anything that would happen. That was my experience. And, I think, to me, she was a very fine selection, and I think she did a good job while she was there.

MD All right. Then Sister Mary Josephine was the one who was in there before you.

SMJM Yes, Sister Mary Josephine (Malone) followed Sister Mary Justitia's second term

of six years. And Sister Mary Josephine was there for six years. She was not a type of person that was dominating, but she was very kind person. And I didn't know her as well as I did the other two sisters, but I found her --always anything I had to do with her -- I found her very understanding. And I think she was concerned with the college from the standpoint of education and was willing to help in any way possible.

MD Tell me, how did you learn you were going to be her successor?

SMJM Sister called me down to the office and handed me a letter. She said this is from the superior general, and you can go up to your room and read it. So I did. And I could understand -- but anyway, I considered it and went back and handed Sister the letter and told her what it was, and she said to me "Are you going to accept?"

I said "Well I have to think about it." So I went up to the chapel, and wondered what to do, and I wrote a letter and accepted the assignment.

Somewhat later, Mother sent for me, told me to come to Mount Carmel, that she wanted to talk to me. And when I came I asked her "Why me?" I was one of the younger sisters there. And, you know, we always sat according to number, and I was the oldest at the last table-- the seventh table, and I went up to the first table which was not easy. But I will say that the sisters there were marvelous.

MD What did you enjoy most about your years as President of Mundelein?

SMJM Oh, I never really thought about it, because I was so concerned about what I was supposed to do. And when I was here, when Mother had called me and I asked her why, and she said "You know the condition of Mundelein?"

And I said "Mother, I am only a teacher, I don't know anything about what's happening at Mundelein. I teach my classes, and that's it; and we don't hear. At least I don't hear anything that's happening. And I will use the expression that Mother used..... she said "It's in the red!" *(end of tape #1 --side 2).*

Tape 2--Side A

MD So Mundelein was in the red! That was your first introduction to ---

SMJM That's right. And she said "You are there to get it out of the red!" And I said to

her, "Well, Mother, I don't know Chicago. I don't know -- I can get downtown, but I don't know the people in Chicago, and how do you expect me to get that --- "

Well, anyway, we talked for quite a while and then I introduced what I thought was a very important item. And I said, "Mother, have you ever considered having a President and a Superior; they really should be divided, because, I said, the Superior's job is one thing -- I said that's community life, religious life -- but I said the President is an entirely a different type of person, position, and" ---well. she hadn't thought of that.

And I said, "Well Mother I'll let you know right now if you want me to stay I will work with anybody you assign , and you can assign them as either as a President or as a Superior, and I'll take the other job. And I'll do the best I can."

So she said "I'll talk about it. By the way, there's a Sister here, maybe I could ask her." She told me her name. I said, "I only know her by name, I've met her only once, but if she is the one that you name I'll work with her." And, well -- she told me the next day that the sister wouldn't do it, and I said to her "Well, did you offer her the two jobs?"

And Mother laughed. She said "No, I didn't."

Well, anyway when Sister Mary Ann Ida (Gannon) went into office I told her this was something I think should be done. Because I said, "The two jobs are really not -- shouldn't be together," and I said "To me, the only problem would be in the use of money. I said the Superior should know that the President has the right to use the money that comes in for the college.

And, she said, "Oh." And that was all.

MD And so Sister Mary Ann Ida did get it ---

SMJM Yes, she did get it, because she realized - - I said, "You're going to realize it, and I told Mother at the time, I said you will notice that in all -- like the Jesuit colleges, they have a Rector and a President; and," I said "DePaul has the same thing; I said all of them have, and I said the President's job is quite different from the Superior's." And --- but anyway --- that was one thing that I had hoped I could accomplish; but I didn't; but at least I planted the seed.

MD You planted the seed. So Sister Mary Ann Ida inherited some of your good ideas!

SMJM Well, ah, we didn't do -- we had different kinds of benefits along the way. But, then the Associated Colleges of Illinois, the smaller colleges grouped together -- however, the three universities were there. Chicago, Loyola, and DePaul belonged to it because they were private

institutions. But they -- at one meeting they decided that they would have another section of the organization just primarily to get money, and the presidents would have to go out and try to get the money from different organizations and different factories or whatever you call them. So they said they had talked about it, the officers had talked about it, and they said that if you wanted to belong to this other group you would pay down \$1000 and that would be the fee to begin the work so they would have money to start. And they went around to all the Presidents, and I couldn't understand -- I didn't know what I was going to do because I knew I couldn't say I'd give \$1000 without permission, so I- uh -- one of the officers when they asked him, he said "Well I will join, but, he said, I'll have to ask my Board of Trustees before I say yes." So I said -- well that was my out. I knew that I could answer when my turn came along to be asked. When he came to Mother Burke and they asked her if she would join, she said "Oh, yes," and she went over to her purse . . .

MD Who was Mother Burke?

SMJM Mother Burke from Barat. She took out her checkbook and wrote the \$1000 check. Well I couldn't do that. And when they came to me, I just said I would consult the Board of Trustees (and at that time Mother and the Council were the Board of Trustees). Well, I had a little difficulty in convincing the people at Mount Carmel that I should spend a thousand dollars for that proposition. Well, I had asked the treasurer down at Rensselaer who had come to the meetings quite often. He said "Join, Sister. Join."

 "Well," I said "I'm having trouble."

 And he said "I know what you are going through -- I had the same trouble." But he said we finally agreed."

 So I said -- I did call Mother again the day before I had to give an answer. And she -- Sister Mary Viatora took the call and I asked her to please to ask Mother if she would say yes or no, so that I could go to the meeting. And she came back and she took the telephone and said Mother wished she'd say yes. And as soon as she said "yes," I said "Thank you Sister, Mother said yes. That's my answer." And I said "I appreciate what you've done," and I said, "I'm hanging up" so I did.

 So I went to the meeting the next day and said we would join. So, we were fortunate, and I think we did get quite a bit of money from that source. And it continued under Sister Mary Ann Ida. In fact, Sister Mary Ann Ida was the one who told me it was a Godsend. Then I said we got

a grant from the Ford Foundation...

MD Yes, I -- you gave me the information about the Ford Foundation grant. You said that. And I remember that because it had come through shortly after I had come to Mundelein.

SMJM Did it?

MD Yes, one of the first things I remember was that Sister Mary Madelena (Thornton) was doing publicity on that Ford Foundation grant and I was very impressed.

SMJM The -- a number of college didn't respond, and it was really unfortunate for them. All you had to do was to give them a reason why you wanted any funds. My reason, as I mentioned before, was to raise the salary of the lay teachers, and I think that made more of an impression than if I were to say that it was for something else.

MD Now would you tell me a little bit about the student body when you were president. What kind of a student body did you have?

SMJM Well, I think we had some -- I think the girls were very lovely, but I think we had some very fine students and a great many of them probably never realized how bright they really were. And I think they liked Mundelein, and were very --

MD Would Pat Ewers be one of them -- Patricia O'Donnell?

SMJM No. I don't think so.

MD Would it be Marjorie Frisbie? and Peggy Roach?

SMJM Right. They were there. And -- oh I can't think of her name right now. But --

MD Juanita Serafin, maybe? They're all run together --

SMJM Yes. Well, as I think I mentioned before, I think they were a little bit more mature than the ones that were there in the early -- the first year. And, uh, they -- a little bit ---well, I put them mostly on their own. After all they were mature.

MD By that time they were young women.

SMJM Yes they were.

MD The first college enrolled girls.

SMJM "They've been very loyal. Yes, they've been very loyal.

MD So when did you hear about Mundelein being merged with Loyola?

SMJM Um ---I think that Sister Mary Helen told me first ..

MD Helen Garvey?

SMJM Then Sister Mary Ann Ida was here visiting one time and she came in and she told me. Of course she was out of office by that time. And she just told me, you know, that conditions were such that -- she gave me a little of the background. Then later on Helen gave me a little bit more day by day about the situation.

MD So you think that in the long run it wasn't such a bad way to end.

SMJM No. I really don't --- much as I --- I sometimes see that picture of Sister Carolyn (Farrell) and the President of Loyola and Sister Helen signing Mundelein over to Loyola. (Long pause) That was -----

MD That was hard to look at.

SMJM Mmm -- uh -- yes. After all the years that , you know, that we -- the BVMS -- had Mundelein. When you come right down to it. I think it was a marvelous situation that it came at that particular time when Loyola was able to take over. And I think that President was magnanimous. Looking at it from the outside and not being a part of it -- that he would undertake to take on all the expenses, all the debts, and not a question. I think he was a magnanimous person. I don't know him, but there are very few that would do it.

MD Well, he got sixty-five million dollars worth of prime land and buildings.

SMJM Well, I know that. But there was plenty of work, debt that he didn't have to accept. But , what would have happened if he hadn't? You know -- I think it wouldn't be ours at all.

MD There was a school of thought that we could have kept Mundelein going on a smaller scale. Maybe as adult education or something like that. We didn't have a chance to discuss that or try it.

SMJM But, Sister, where would you get the funds to carry on? Now that is what I have in mind that happened -- it was such a large debt it couldn't be met.

MD And you've had good experience in paying off debts.

SMJM Yea. Uhhh. It would have been on the market. Anyone could have ---- and it was a beautiful place. And as you say, look what it was worth. Just physically --the building the content. The property, the ground. What it was worth! And to let that get out of our hands! To someone who wouldn't appreciate it! But it went to a Catholic institution and one that will appreciate it, I really think.

 However, if I recall, when we started out, the President of Loyola was very much incensed

because we chose to build there -- that's what I understand. And they had -- well they were told that they had to supply certain faculty. It wasn't easy for them; however, I think they were perfect gentlemen because -- this is just an aside.-- the first New Year's there, the President and the Dean, on New Year's Day, in the spirit of the old time procedures that used to happen, they visited Mundelein on New Years Day to greet us. It was one of the -- it showed that --

MD Well, it was noblesse oblige --

SMJM -- that we should be friends.

MD There's a letter in Sister Mary Justitia's file saying something to the effect "I always kept an eye on those wily Jesuits next door."

SMJM (Laugh)

MD So she had her ...

SMJM ...her difficulties. Yes, I know. The time that they pulled out at the end of the first semester -- now that was when Sister Mary Josephine was there. And, you probably know that?

MD No.

SMJM Well, they said that they needed the priests, and we had priests teaching the philosophy and also the religion. And they were all pulled out at the end of the first semester and she had nobody to teach those courses the second semester. So the only thing she could do was go to the Cardinal. And the Cardinal said --

MD That would be Cardinal Stritch?

SMJM No. Cardinal Mundelein.

MD Cardinal Mundelein?

SMJM No. Cardinal Stritch. He said "Now don't worry, Sister, I'll get somebody." And he got a Dominican to teach -- I know I was --- we had a sister in every class of a lay teacher, a priest, and we were "caddies"--

MD What's a caddy?

SMJM We went in and took care of the enrollment, and gave them their class cards and told them any announcements they should know about what's happening. And, so they pulled out and the Cardinal set he would get someone to teach the courses in philosophy , and it was at that time that they made -- why don't you say that the sisters were to teach the religion classes. And we really had quite a few --well we only had one Dominican priest come. I know I sat in on his logic

class.

MD Is that how we got Father Murphy and Father Clarke and ---

SMJM Oh, yes it was. And they were heads of the departments. Father Clarke was first, Father Murphy came later, and when he came we all went in --each one of us teaching a religion class -- we were supposed to tell him what we'd do. Well I took my lesson plans and when I went in I had them all written out and I said "Well, Father, do you want these?"

He looked at them, and he talked to me for a while, and I left, and he said "Sister, could I keep these for a while?" I said "Oh, sure." I suppose I shouldn't be talking like that --- (Laugh) I don't think we -----

MD This was Father Clarke?

SMJM No, Father Murphy.

MD Oh, Father Murphy. Well, our echoes roll from soul to soul! (Laugh)

Well, thank you, Sister . . .

SMJM Oh, you're welcome.

MD And as I mentioned when I was changing the tape, you are a very patient woman.

SMJM Oh, why?

MD I've been -- made several mistakes in this taping. We've got it all, and I think we've got a very good story ---

SMJM Well, I don't think it's much. I mean I wish I could remember some other things

MD Well, you remember all the big things.

SMJM Well. I should tell you about Father Murphy.

MD OK.

SMJM Well, when he heard that I was made the President, he said to Sister Mary Madelena, "Well I probably better say goodbye to you now. She won't keep me." Well, Sister Mary Madelena said "Why, what do you mean?"

He said, "She knows I'm no teacher. And then he told her -- he said-- "You know when she came in -- you know, the time they all came in to see me" he said, "she brought in her lesson plan and you know I'd never seen a lesson plan before. (Laugh) She knows too much about teaching."

Madelena said, "Well I don't think she'd do that, Father." But when she told me, I

used him the whole time. And one time, Sister Mary Irma -- she had the book -- you know what they did, the girls -- she had the Review -- well, the girls -- one girl wrote a story. It was a true story in her life and Sister Mary Irma said "Sister, I don't know what to do -- I want you..." So, I read it. Well, it was a situation in her home, I think it was her grandmother who was dying, and they sent for the priest; he wouldn't come, he said he didn't have the time. And that had struck with this girl. She told a few more things, and I read it and then I called Father Murphy, and I said, "Father I'd like this one on the quiet, but would you read this story and tell me honestly what you think and should it be published?"

So he took it, and he came back the next day and said (with emphasis) "Publish it!" And I said, "Well, Father, I want to ^{it}very sure."

He said "Sister, if that girl's word -- if this happened, and it does happen, if that girl is worried ..."

And I said "I think she is." So I published it -- I said to Irma, "Publish it." I

"Oh," she said, "I'm so glad., Sister. I think it would mean the world to that girl." And Sister, did I get the response through the mail from pastors! (laugh) I never told a soul, but I never answered any one of them, you know, that coming -- you know -- criticizing the priest. Well, she wasn't! Well she was criticizing, but it was an honest criticism. And it was something that bothered her and her family. You know .."

MD Yes...

SMJM It was beautifully done. You know, it wasn't cantankerous or anything. But it was beautifully done and well-written, and she should have her chance. What Father Murphy really said, he said, "Publish it, Sister," Right away.

MD So -- you didn't hide behind Father Murphy.

SMJM No. But I wanted to be sure, you know, that --- but I didn't answer these priests, these pastors. In fact, his own pastor wrote.

MD He may have heard the story! ... Well, those were great days.

SMJM Yes, they were.

MD And thank you , Sister, for letting me put it on t ape

SMJM Oh, I wish I could help you more.

MD What I have is wonderful.