

Interview Transcript

Narrator: Mary Alma Sullivan, BVM

Interviewer: Sandra LaBlance

This is Friday, October 20, 2000. I am interviewing Mary Alma Sullivan, BVM of Chicago, Illinois about her life experiences which led to and including her education at Mundelein College. My name is Sandra LaBlance and this is my tape number one, side A.

SL: Mary Alma, I'm going to go ahead and start and ask you when and where you were born?

MAS: I was born in Chicago, on the Southeast side I lived, with my parents of course, as we Chicagoans say, in St. Phillips Parish. And I pretty much lived on the south side until I was ready for seventh grade. My father was a practicing attorney with a specialty in real estate and tax law, regarding real estate primarily and he was born in Freeport, Illinois. My mother was born also in Central Illinois in a farming community, Strom, Illinois, and came to Chicago when she was eighteen and took law courses at DePaul University. She took the courses required for getting a certificate as a legal secretary and it was at DePaul University through her sister who was already in law school and a classmate of my father's, that the two met and ultimately married. So I've been a Chicagoan, in my heart I've been a Chicagoan all my life, seventy years now. I have

been other places as a teacher after I entered the Sisters of Charity and then was appointed to various community high schools and then ultimately Mundelein college.

SL: Do you have brothers and sisters?

MAS: I have three brothers – two of whom are deceased. I'm the oldest and, they took various paths in life. Well actually the older of the three and the youngest one went the way of investments, they were connected with investments, CBOE, and all of those letters that mark out investment brokers and investment bankers. My little brother went to St. Ambrose College in Davenport, Iowa, and at the time of course, drew a lot of hard time work, including working for John Deere International. He was invited on his graduation from college to join the John Deere International team. Consequently he spent a great deal of his working life in various places abroad.

SL: When you were growing up do you think you were close with your family, or how would you describe your family life?

MAS: We were extraordinarily close. We were not only extraordinarily close as a family unit but we were extraordinary, certainly by today's standards, in terms of the extended family. My mother's parents had died, actually my mother's mother died when she was only four years old, and her father when she was probably eighteen. But my father's side of the family, my grandparents were still living, one of whom was in Ireland. My grandfather was the son of folks who had entered the United States from Ireland during the real hard days in the nineteenth century.

Family was very important and we got together all the time. We would get in the car and I remember this even as a toddler almost. Get in the car drive, off to Freeport, Illinois, spend a weekend and either on Friday or Saturday night, we had a big family

gathering. There were two families still living in Dubuque - my dad's family and his sister were here in Chicago. It was very curious because -- we entertained -- everybody, everybody who could speak the language! You sang, you danced, sometimes in a team, sometimes by yourself and my grandparents sat in state and at the end of it my grandma went to the piano, they had a beautiful beautiful piano. I often wondered what happened to it. You lift up the bench cover and inside various and sundry things. His fiddle was there. Then at the end of everything my grandma decided he would fiddle and then she would take it away until the next time we were all together, which was frequent until my grandpa died. So we are extraordinarily close and even the younger generation families, my brother's families for example, their children are very close. It's not as it was but then times have changed and they're all going so many different directions and living in so many different places. It is certainly much more difficult then when I was their age.

SL: How would you compare your family to the other families in the neighborhood that you grew up in?

MAS: You know, that's an interesting question because up until I was through the sixth grade we lived in an apartment around 79th and Jeffrey, our Lady of Peace Parish. The owner of the building was a widow lady who had come from Ireland herself, Mrs. Phelen. I don't have a clear recollection of any other neighbors, but Mrs. Phelen was a member of the family. She was there at Thanksgiving time if we were there for any holiday time and not with my grandparents, she was with us. But I don't remember other neighbors and of course, accept for a couple of families who were there and had kids in school, and then we knew them, but just in passing. As children I don't remember being as mobile as children at the same age. I don't remember the emphasis on getting to know your

neighbors. Now, when my parents built a home out in the Edgewood area, and we moved in the seventh grade, my aunt and uncle, my father's sister and her husband and children, also built a home adjacent to one another so we were forever an extended family. And though I had no sisters, my cousin was one of the children next door and she and I are very close to this day. We are like sisters because she had two brothers and I had three brothers and it was always survival of the fittest (laughs). So in that sense we got to know people more when we had a home because there was a stability in the community that wasn't necessarily there in living in an apartment setting.

SL: Do you think your parents treated you differently as a girl since you had three brothers? Was that an issue for you growing up?

MAS: You know, I don't have any sense that I was ever treated any differently. I was my father's favorite, you know it's kind of cliché now, certainly with an only girl and her father. But I really had no sense that I was different. I was a tomboy. So I did a lot of things that the boys did. In fact I was quite good at it. We played baseball and all the childhood games. I don't know if that factored into it at all. But I really have no sense the entire time that I was living at home that I was any different. And in fact, my father told me in later years, after he had retired and I of course had been a BVM for a time, that he thought maybe I would get into law, he hoped. He hoped one of his children would. And, if it wasn't me it would be passed to the other three, two of whom did try the law. I think they were able for it, but the discipline just wasn't there. I don't think I was treated any differently, if that is a bellweather. Now of course I am reflecting on this from the distance of 70 years. Sometimes when I read and hear, especially in the early days of the women's movement, about how women were expected to work in my dad's generation.

His younger sister moved to Chicago to work and a good part of her wages went back home - to my grandma - who was trying to put one of her sons through medical school at the U of C. And one of her sons, to help out at least, with her other son who went to DePaul. My dad apparently paid for his own, but he was one of the older ones in the family so he kind of took care of his own education.

So the expectation was that these women in the family would get a good job, the best they could, and send the money home so that the men could be educated. I had none of that, none of that at all. The only thing that my parents wanted was that we all complete college. Which we did. And they both lived to see it and see people settled. I had no inclination or idea that I would become a BVM sister. In fact the whole idea was kind of repugnant (laughs) when I started college. When people say "well gee how much were you influenced by the people who taught you?" What can you say about that? The only thing I can answer is that after decades after the fact, I realized one of the reasons that I felt freer as a woman was that I attended Mundelein College where I saw women doing everything. The President of the college, the Dean, the heads of departments, the people on the recruiting end, all of those things, the business end, all of those people were women.

Now I couldn't have said that during my college days. Because so many of them at my time were BVMs, apparently I just kind of put that together and said "if I want to be like that if I want to have that kind of life, then this is where I should be." I wish I could say that it was some divine inspiration, but I think it was the spirit leading me by a way to which I could respond, rather than all the overtly religious pitches. Though, we were a really religious family, my parents were devout Roman Catholics. During Lent

my mother would rouse us every morning for mass. Their expectations of us as Christians were quite distinct, you know. You didn't lie, you didn't cheat, you were kind to people. It was the commandments for kids. (laughs) I probably got off the subject a little bit for you. But anyway, I think that as I look back honestly I can't say that I ever felt like I couldn't do what I wanted to do if I was willing to do what was necessary to get there.

SL: One of the questions that I have for you is that you were a teenager during World War II, and I'm just wondering what are your recollections of being a teenager during that time?

MAS: Let's see, the war ended in '45 (1945) is that right? So in '45, I was 15. The high school that I attended, Immaculata High School, it's closed now, but it was down on the lake and Irving Park Road, or the outer drive (Lake Shore Drive) and Irving Park Road, it was a BVM academy, I wanted desperately to go to Niles Township High School, because a lot of my grade school friends went there, because we lived out there right at the Northwest corner of the city. Of course Skokie and Niles were very close to us and, some of them came from that area and at that time went to Queen of All Saints School. I wanted desperately to go with them, even to the point where as an out-of-district person I would have had to pay tuition, like you do in private schools. Well, my parents would have none of the Niles Township high school, for one thing they were pretty stuck on Catholic education. But the thing that I think made them adamant on it and made them promote Immaculata rather than St. Scholastica's, which was really closer to me was that my dad, in his law office had from time to time, graduates of Immaculata who were working as secretaries and he thought they were the best educated and poised people he

had ever run into. That is the kind of education he wanted to be able to say his daughter had when she got out of high school. And that was really why I got to Immaculata.

So during wartime, I would have been there from 1943 to 47. The war touched us in school mostly, because we were knitting squares for afghans, a test that I never did pass. And the senior who was mentoring me [noticed] my squares always turned out to be 6 and one quarter and seemed to be at a diagonal. Finally the senior got me into rolling bandages. And we wrote to servicemen and that kind of thing.

On the home front, the only thing I actually remember was my father's air raid warden helmet. His white helmet, like they wear in construction, had some official seal on it that indicated he was an approved air raid warden. And then two or three occasions we had tests of the air raid system. He would go out, I don't know what he did when he went out, but of course we had to pull down our shades and the lights were off because we didn't have air raid shades - I mean the dark shades for air raid. So the lights went off and that's about it.

Strangely enough the one thing I remember was the death of FDR. In my family that was equivalent to Chernobyl. That was a national and personal tragedy. And I can remember my mother when she heard it on the radio. She went to her kitchen window and opened it and waited and simultaneously my aunt, who had just heard it on the radio and who lived next door, came to her living room window so the two of them talked back and forth and the two of them were crying. I remember that VIVIDLY. And other than that, I remember the end of the war, and the young men just older than myself who had gone off to war, friends of our family came back, --thank God. And that was about it.

I've often thought to myself, you know, when I see documentaries on Manzanar, my father and my mother who were very much up on current affairs and all that kind of thing must have kept that information from us. I don't remember reading the paper although I can't imagine in high school we weren't having to do that. But the Manzanar, thing - the interning of American citizens of Japanese decent, came as a shock to me when I first saw, "The Road to Manzanar," or something like that. That was maybe fifteen years ago, and I thought that was cataclysmic. My father would have been indignant at that kind of thing because he was spending time at free clinics helping people who were having landlord problems or whatever. So he had in his own way a very strong social conscienceness and I can't imagine if it made the paper that he didn't know it, but we never did.

SL: Do you think people in general were somewhat sheltered from what was going on?

MAS: Well I certainly was. You know, from the war. (Long Pause) I certainly was.

Accept for those little homey touches. It seemed to have no real impact on us.

Which, if I may editorialize, probably is one big problem that we've had as Americans, we've been self-sufficient. We've never had a war on our own land that was not a war between brothers and sisters. But, I mean, in a massive world war when you could see them coming, the tanks coming over the hills toward your farmhouse. I think it makes us somewhat naïve. And maybe one of the fallouts is our concern now with terrorists and how easily our walls can be breached, whatever those are, by people who are really intent on doing harm. I think that is for the first time giving us some sense of what it means to be besieged.

But in my time growing up, it was the Civil Rights when I got to Mundelein. That was the first time that I could actually say I had any real consciousness about how other people lived and what parameters existed in the lives of more people than I knew.

SL: Do you think in retrospect, looking at the time you decided to go to college, were there other women going to college at that time or do you think you were unique?

MAS: I think I was unique in terms of my family background. Well I shouldn't say that for sure because I've never seen any statistics on it, but I suspect that the majority were the first ones in their family to attend college. Now that was not true in my case, and I know there were a few others. Judy McNulty's father was a judge. I'm sure there were a few professionals and teachers whose children were there. But I think by and large, my classmates were the children of, if not immigrant parents, parents who had not had any kind of professional or educational background, or higher education of any kind.

Now, having said that, I went to Mundelein College and of course, the school was founded principally from that, not my background but persons who were going to college for the first time, the first representatives from their family to go to college and to complete college. So that was the clientele that the BVMs who started the college really had in mind. I'm trying to think in my family, I mean in my immediate circle (of friends) we were probably, maybe, one-third coming from families that you would say would be professional. And uh, the others were from working class middle class, working families. Without the benefits of higher education at that point.

SL: Did you realize your uniqueness at that time?

MAS: There was none of that. It's only been just recently that I have had any exposure to some of the background because of my classmates, even people close to me. Because I

did some oral history interviews myself. And then I discovered the background. What was unique about our college experience, I think, and that we were women. We were not cliquish. A whole group of us, I mean a big group came from Immaculata to Mundelein. That's just the way it was and had been for some years. Another whole group came from our rival, St. Scholastica. Not as large, but fairly substantial because they were mostly East Rogers Park folks. While we were rivals at basketball games, and football games where our heroes from Loyola and St. George High School which was a Christian Brothers School in Evanston, it's no longer there, but it's where my brothers went.

Still in all, when we got to Mundelein it was not cliquish in the sense that people got the idea they were excluded. I don't know how I fell together with the people that I did because I was coming from a school where most of the people, only one other person went to Immaculata. We would ride the Peterson bus to school almost daily. Mostly in our freshmen and sophomore years and then in junior and senior year we each had different college involvement besides our classes. She had labs at odd times, we both had committee meetings. I worked for the literary publication so we didn't meet as often on the bus as we had. But, except for the two of us, most of the people there were coming from miscellaneous spots and we didn't come with a natural group. I had friends from Immaculata that came with me but, at the end of it all, my closest friends in college were a real mix from the city and from backgrounds and from schools. So I don't think there was any consciousness of it. I was pretty naïve as a freshman in college. And I don't know if that was typical of my classmates or not. I never really even thought I'd have a problem because I wasn't astute enough or mature enough to even raise the question. I mean I had a group in grade school, I had a group in high school. I didn't even think

about their backgrounds. We all merged somehow. I'm sure that wasn't universal for everybody. But I think in the main it was true. I don't think we thought about any kind of a groups background, whether the father was a carpenter, shoe salesman. (Difficult to hear this passage on tape).

SL: When you were a student what do you think was the purpose in educating women, what did Mundelein College see as their mission?

MAS: That's an interesting question because we are coming a little bit closer every day to the publication of a series of essays on Mundelein. I wrote a combination memoir or recent historical essay on my days at Mundelein with my particular class and in it I make two assertions. First of all, the obvious one, it was buttressing the Roman Catholic tradition, you could say that whether your father was a judge or whether your father was a bricklayer. Everybody there with few exceptions, we had a few Jewish students we had a few we had a couple of African American students from the Baptist tradition [was Catholic]. But in the main it was pretty Roman Catholic and I think the parents, our parents, my parents certainly sent me there because it would buttress my family orientation, my education to date and mature that. Then mixed in with that, a woman's college, because I mentioned I was somewhat naïve and immature, well my parents felt, and I think a lot of parents felt, your daughter is safe there. And I think immigrant parents were even saying, "my daughter's going to be safe there." That was one thing. The other part of my assertion though is that underneath that overtly Catholic orientation was another one that was really never articulated in any direct way. And I think it was one that gave us a sense of woman, of the role of women in the world, of social justice. Of all of those things that today schools probably articulate very clearly, because they

want all of those women to come to their institution, and a good many of them are looking for that kind of thing.

So I think if you had to say was there anything clearly articulated in the mission statement or anything which said, now you're a woman you're equal you're free you have a responsibility to the world, to the community. I think the founders would have said, we wanted our young women to be in the image of Mary the Mother of God. We wanted our young women to do all of those kinds of traditional things that women's role was. Not only in the church but as you might guess in American Catholicism. American – which is a little different than the Catholicism of the Vatican, even pre-Vatican II.

My parents certainly were devout Catholics. My father, as I look back, was verging very close to anti-clericalism, which probably came to him through his mother, who left Ireland at the age of about 20 and had a very, very strong contempt for the Catholic clergy in Ireland for their failure to speak out on behalf of the people. And I think this was somehow transmitted. Now it had nothing to do with faith, nothing at all. It had to do with the institution and the representatives of the institution in the lives of individual people. Well I don't know where I was going with that, but I think at home my father was aware of some of that. In some respects, that would come back to haunt him. He had a lot of affection for the sisters. Except for individual friends, he had a few friends who were priests. He thought that the clergy in America should begin to pay their dues. He use to say (laughing) “they go up there and play golf, they have a golf course up there at that seminary and a tennis court and swimming pool and what do the nuns have?” When I say that it came back to haunt him, that was when I went home and told them, “I think I'm going to choose to enter the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin

Mary.” Well they went ballistic. That was a whole different thing. In theory it was wonderful, practically speaking, when it touches my family well, I’m not so sure.

SL: Do you think one of the roles of the college was to educate women for marriage?

MAS: Oh I don’t think there was any doubt of it. I think in that respect, on the books again, yes I don’t think there was any doubt of it . Just some of the things we were required to take - - we had to have a marriage course. And we had retreats which were often focused around women’s role which was as wife and mother. So yes, I think our early foundresses wanted a college that reinforced Catholic values particularly with respect to educating young women as their role as a wife and mother. I don’t think there is any doubt of it. Now what they were saying with their words was undercut by a curriculum which was actually borrowed from the University of Illinois. So if that gives you any perspective with the addition then of religion courses, guidance courses, guidance periods in which you got a little more of the “be womanly” whatever womanly meant, and that kind of thing. But their lives, [the nuns] when we looked at them, sent a different message. Not a contradictory one, I don’t think it was contradictory, at least I didn’t have that sense. But they sent a different message because there they were, women running a college. They were teaching for heavens sakes - - physics and chemistry and creative writing and history and all of those things. So there was a subtle message that I couldn’t have articulated at the time. I know I couldn’t have. But with the perspective of time, as I look back, I think that was what was going on.

So most of my classmates were doing what ever they could to go over to the Loyola Union and jump the fence or invite the fellows over or whatever. I certainly count myself among them, in the beginning anyway. Well, really, all through college.

Most of them intended to marry, to find a good, as many of my friends said, a professional, a good professional man over there who they would marry and they would raise a family. I think at least among my friends those that chose that route were very successful at it. And then incidentally added on to that - - parish work, parish outreach to poor pregnant mothers, supporting food drives and all of those kinds of things. Some actually went on to become local politicians, serve on village councils where they could have a considerable impact. But the majority didn't, the majority did what my mom did and were very successful at it.

SL: What was student life like at the time?

MAS: Ah, well, let's see, we're talking about Mundelein now. We would of course go to our classes, we were, again the persons in my little group, conscious stricken and if we cut a class we counted very carefully the number of cuts we could take before we were called on the carpet. (difficult to hear tape).

And the cuts were sometimes to finish writing a paper or something that was due at some other class where it was really necessary to have it done. But I don't think it was odd, the odd person who might go over to the Loyola Union to meet someone or a whole group to go over and play bridge. Bridge was big! Bridge was big. And of course playing bridge over there as a foursome, you might spot somebody, one of those young professionals you'd like to get your hooks into. And of course we had the usual old college dances, formal dances and each class had those kind of things too. We had father-daughter breakfasts, somewhere along those lines, usually as a sophomore ... so we had those kind of fairly traditional things for a comparable college that was not Roman Catholic in orientation. For a good many people in my group our social life,

certainly in junior and senior years, were focused on our activities. For example, I was connected with the literary publications - - The Review, which was a quarterly publication, and then the bi-annual, is that every two years? We had a poetry anthology that happened to come when I was a senior at Mundelein. And so getting ready for all of that in publishing took a lot of time and actually I count my best friends coming out of college as people from that group because you were with them day and night, you know. And I think it was true for my scientist friends. I had a good friend who was a chemist and another who was a physicist and I think the same thing. They would be going off to conferences they had their own clubs, we had a lot of clubs that were really co-curricular, connected to a department and in some cases (connected) to clubs, different in orientation, connected to the same department.

And of course we had a lot of all school committees that we helped to plan with the faculty. Our all school assemblies. When I think of the people we had speaking to us, we had Graham Greene, I mean people from all walks of life. Again often connected with departments, we had Robert Openheimer, and then we had entertainers like, oh the Irish tenor who just died. I think Cornelia Skinner all the people at the time that were in literary pursuits, scientific pursuits, political life. You know I just wonder, we were probably sitting there wondering, "when is this gonna be over so I can get out and get this paper revised," you know, as college kids do. That layer underneath, that sub-strata of message that was coming just in seeing those people from out there in the world. It was just remarkable in our education, which we only come to see when we get a little distance from it.

So we would come to school, go in the west door, go down the steps and in the whole lower level of the skyscraper building there was a little lounge and then the rest of it was lockers and a big bookstore. For me junior and senior year, it was a question of my co-editor meeting me and saying the graphic we expected from blah, blah, blah, in the art department wasn't available. What are we gonna do? And then we would just go to our classes when we had a chance, we were up in room 506 with Sr. Mary Irma Corcran figuring out what we were going to do. And that was pretty much it. Considering the fact that I wanted really to go to Clark College, but for various reasons didn't, I did pretty well at Mundelein. My mother would complain vehemently that maybe I could come home a little earlier than the supper hour, and set the table or help my brother with his homework, or whatever mothers are preoccupied with. Certainly as a junior and senior I was there every waking hour and sometimes on Saturdays as well.

SL: Did you live at home?

MAS: Yes, I commuted. There were very few residents on campus. Mundelein was a commuter campus, it did not have facilities for living. Which meant that students from out of town - we had a few - (and sometimes out of town was Naperville). In fact a good many of them came from suburbs that were where it was very inconvenient for them to commute, not to mention expensive. So those folks had to find housing in the city that their parents had arranged for them, so an aunt, an uncle a responsible cousin, a friend of the families; someplace like that where they could go you know. (flipped tape over). One exception, I think was when I was a junior. Of course the whole European scene after World War II was a mess with much of Europe divided between, the French, the U.S., and the Soviet Union, which then included many of the countries within Eastern

Europe that are now ostensibly out from under the yoke of the Soviet Union. But we got two, I don't think they were even exchange students, I think they were two students from Eastern Europe, somewhere perhaps in Poland. Because of persecution of Catholics there they came. Mundelein agreed to give them an education and arranged for them to live on campus. But that was pretty much it, students, especially on weekends, were expected to be somewhere else.

And I suspect, in a way, it was the only time that the sisters had the place to themselves because they all lived in the building. So they were living, with their work. Even though that was far more acceptable than today. Sisters today prefer not to have their work place and their living in the same spot. At that time it was fairly acceptable. The problem at Mundelein was, if you did have boarders during the week, and there were some, the weekend was about the only time when every body could do their reading and research, if they were lucky to do that. Sometimes it was a matter in the early days, much before I got there the sisters were doing all the work, I mean they cleaned the corridors, they cleaned the bathrooms, they cleaned everything. As it got on, certainly during my period more of them were involved in study of one kind or another, research, or just keeping up with professional reading. And that was an important time to do that.

SL: Was there any one in particular on the faculty or the staff during the time that you were a student that you remember that really stands out in your mind?

MAS: Yes, it would be Sr. Mary Irma Corcran. Mostly because we lived in 506 and that was her place, that was where all the literary publications used be. And of course because I was an English major, with a particular interest in writing I had her as a junior and senior for a total of 4 courses. I'm not honestly sure that she was a good teacher, but

she was an inspiring one. And I can remember having courses with her in which I'd have my Physics friend or my Chemistry friend. I think we were all required to have one creative writing class no matter what your major. They would come in with their notebooks and their pencils poised. Irma would come usually a couple of minutes late and had this enormous armload of books which she would dump on the desk and then she would start. And periodically she would pick up a book that all had little pieces of paper tucked in and she'd pick up a book and read and it was always related to whatever we were doing; crafting the short story, poetry, play writing, whatever. And she was reading from those.

For me it was like I had died and gone to heaven. And I never expected to take a note. I also knew I never had to worry about a grade because whatever exams we had I'm sure she never read them. Or at least we never got them back. She may have read them for herself to know what wasn't coming across to people, but we never got them back. And we would get things back if she felt that anything was Review material we all agreed we got things back -- Judy Holland, Katie, and myself -- those of us connected with the Review. We knew. Now I think the others must have gotten things back, for most of them they were putting in time. So for most of them the grade was just fine, nobody got lower than a B. And that was fine. But for me, for a particular kind of student interested in a particular area, it was wonderful [working with her].

Sr. Mary Irma and I became good friends, remained friends for my entire life. She just died in the winter, in February [2000]. We remained friends for my whole lifetime. Right up until the end until she was no longer able to talk and really not conscious at all much, and it was kind of a joke, and I think she knew it, if you had a lot

of time, you would have lunch with Irma. I don't think there was a thing she ever experienced that she ever forgot. I don't think so. And I would listen to her even when she was 82 or 83, I would think to myself, "I don't remember as much as she has just reported to me in this conversation." It was amazing. I just loved how her mind moved from place to place and she integrated a reading from this writer or that one. She had a plan.

I really have to say Sandy, that when I came to teach creative writing at our high school in St. Paul after I was a BVM, it's really the best way to teach if you're ready for it, and if you have any kind of inclination for it. You can't teach people to write. But if you can expose them to what has been written, the best of what has been written. And if they listen to the cadence of the writing. Look at the word choice and look at how precisely writers, skilled writers, can put things together and the effect they achieve. That's really your best education. The Physics majors and history majors and others were interested in making poetry in some other way. And of course she would just bundle everything up again. And no matter when you saw her in the corridor, she would have her bundle of books with a paper sticking out at every angle, some of which she got to in the course of the classes, some of which she didn't. So when I say teacher, if you're talking about fact and that kind of thing, no I don't think so. Not even in this course I had her for. She couldn't teach for fact, or at least what we thought was fact then. And again I think for her, because I was called to that particular area and I was exposed to her style so much that she certainly would stand out.

But I have to say with few exceptions the education I got [was excellent]. I had professor, a Sr. Mary Virginia, who taught a Shakespeare course, I think it was the

tragedies. She taught the tragedies and the comedies and I took a semester of each. I'm telling you when I went to graduate school for my M. A. at Loyola in English, I wouldn't have had to study. I was every bit as prepared and more so, as my classmates in that master's program. With few exceptions, and of course many (teachers) I didn't have contact with, but the teachers were excellent, just excellent.

We had people like Therese, Sr. Mary Therese, the first woman Astro-physicist. She was always out at Mount Palomar in California, confirming this and that. My friend Peg Nolan, who was Peggy Egan, who was the Physics major, loved her classes. She couldn't teach as well as Irma. And I said, "Peggy, there you are, now see that's because the stars and the planets, and the universe, (laughs) that's your thing!" Well she kind of agreed, but she had the information she just couldn't communicate it. But in the main they were wonderfully educated people. And they must have been wonderfully talented because people like Irma, when they decided to build the college during the height of the depression, they got no help. I guess they got an organ from Cardinal Mundelein, but otherwise they got no financial help, except from our sisters at places like (Tape over) Sr. Mary High School on the west side, Immaculata up here on the drive. And from other places throughout the community where we had parish schools and academies. They had no one ready with PhDs, so these folks like Irma were appointed to the college and sent immediately to study. Sr. Mary Joseph Therese in science, I think she was a chemist, biologist. She couldn't even at the time be in a lab with the men. She was the only woman there, a nun, and she couldn't sit in the labs with the men, she had to go after hours. And she would have to listen to the lectures sitting on a folding chair outside the door.

Now imagine, so many of them had that experience. It's just mind boggling to me, the natural talent, the natural intellect that those women had, coming from all walks of life, professional families or not. They were assembled on that first faculty. And a person like myself can say, and I don't think it is out of any loyalty to the BVM community, because there were difficulties as well. I mean there were some that didn't teach and were interested in proselytizing. But in the main, if you applied yourself, you got an education that was comparable to many and better than most.

SL: One of the things, in reviewing your background, in the Mundelein Review, you were really involved as an editor and in many capacities you were a writer. There were two poems that I found that you had written, and I typed them out. One is "Perspective" and the other is "Abdication." I was wondering if you would be willing to read one of them or both of them for me and tell me what you remember about them.

MAS: Well first of all, I don't remember what I remember. And secondly I figure whatever it means is for you to take away. But I'll read "Abdication" since it's the most frivolous and if I make a mistake, it won't sound quite as bad.

We had a cat once, not the garbage kind, but one strawed warm milk like a lady.
 Wooed and being wooed by a stove leg of soldiers. She gave up her wicker and
 pillow her warm blooded lieutenants for a call from the alley. The queen is dead.
 She died without telling us.

We actually never had a cat. My recollection of that is that one of my friends, and I can't remember her name, was very broken up, or maybe this was when she was younger and

she recalled being very broken up as a child. But this cat who she looked upon as her companion in crime, just one day disappeared. And they blamed, a tomcat in the back alley. But the friend's cat, for a lot of the time, was confined to the kitchen when there was company in the house and actually preferred the kitchen especially during meal preparation or shortly there after because it was warm. And, she had her little pillow that she cuddled on and I think that was actually the stimulus and the poem was probably written for a class in poetry. Because it wasn't an experience that I ever had.

We had dogs, who also liked the stove. But unlike the cat, they didn't desert their post. But they were probably not as mobile, not as free as I had the idea that this particular cat was. She would go out all the time. She went out one day and her heart took over (laughs) and that was the end of it.

SL: Obviously you love writing and you loved your friends in college. What do you think you took from your undergraduate experience - what is the most important thing that you took from that experience?

MAS: You know that is really hard to say. I look upon my college, as I think many college graduates do as the last time of innocence where you really had no responsibilities. I couldn't even work. Consider this Sandy, I couldn't even work in college. My parents took the position that my dad worked in his office, my mother took care of the home and the family. My job was to go to school. And if I had any extra time, I would be using it to read, to study, whatever. And I guess I just kind of accepted that as my thing.

But I remember coming home once and it was after a psychology class in which the teacher directed us to our library and said I want you to read "x" essay. It's in the

book in the back and there is only one book, so you're going to have to share. And I remember I was a class with 22 or 23 people and I never did get that book. And I thought to myself, at that time, the Mundelein library was in what is now Piper hall. The Stacks were upstairs on the second and third floor. So you went to the desk with your little call slip and the student librarian, usually a student, would go up the stairs or go up in the elevator, and bring your book down. Only employees could go into the stacks. So I thought to myself, that would be a good job. It's a win/win situation. Because the minute I got an assignment on a book or a magazine that could not leave the library, I could race over there run up to the stacks because I was an employee. That is really the only reason, I was able to get a job. My father and mother thought, "yeah that's a nice place to have a job, in a library. Good surroundings!" (laughs). And, now I forget why I got off on that, I'm a really high intuitive, so you'll have to understand I go from subject to subject, and sometimes I'm surprised at where I am.

And you asked about what I took away. I guess it would have to be, although I didn't recognize it at the time a real sense of my self. Not so much as a woman but as a human being with a lot of potential who could make a contribution. I guess that's what it would be. Because we weren't even woman conscious. Honestly, we had Loyola next door so if we ever wanted a man it was REAL simple. And we had mixers and such and we always had plenty of people coming from South Bend, coming from Rennseler [Indiana], just for a dance! They came from Catholic colleges and Universities and they would come by the busload on Friday night or Saturday night. And so I guess we never suffered when people look at women's colleges and say "oh gee, deprived of men." We weren't deprived of men - we were real happy to have our space. Honestly. I mean even

those who were really on the lookout for a man and were as the joke says, looking for an M.R.S. instead of a B.A. or a B.S. And some did, some dropped out of college and made very happy marriages and happy homes.

We weren't women conscious, but we knew somehow that there was a lot you didn't have to explain we did when we were in clubs that were mixed. When you had to sort of provide a rationale, which seemed kind of fundamental but then men seemed to need it with all of the questions they were asking. You know, where did this come from or whatever. And so we all came with things we could assume about one another. Not all of the assumptions of course were accurate and that made for conflicts occasionally. But basically, as women, we all kind of assumed the same things and there was no problem with standing up in class and saying, I really don't think that would work or I don't think that's a good policy. We never had any sense, any conscious sense of being women as opposed to men. We never had any sense of the other. There was nothing like that. But we were proximate to an area where if men were needed for one thing or another, there were always men that were there. Now in another place probably, a more remote place, either a men's Catholic University, private university or a women's, that could be problematical. Although today I wouldn't doubt that kids couldn't get on a commuter plane if they wanted badly enough to go wherever they wanted to go.

But I think there was a sense of, you were a human being with something to offer, and with the sense that you had been given a lot. Because as we went out, all of us, there weren't a lot of people in my grade school class out there in college, but some were very affluent, living in Saugenash and Edgebrook and Lincolnwood. Many of my classmates never went to college, because they were children of nuveau rich. They had opened a

factory or some small business or maybe turned a fishing cottage into a little motel resort facility or made a little business out of it. And they were successful without having to go to college. So there were a lot of people we ran into, even from affluent places after the war that had become affluent as a result of the war. And were not particularly interested in or feeling the need for a college education. So in a sense I think we ended up feeling blessed that we had had the education we had and that our parents made the sacrifices necessary to make sure that we did. Now if you got me after graduation at the age of 21, and said, "now what did you get out of this," I'd probably cry a lot. I don't know what I'd say. But at this distance and certainly after finishing graduate school it is clear to me that my education was superior. For a small college.

SL: Did you think of yourself at that time as an undergrad as being progressive?

MAS: I didn't. And I don't think my friends did either. They might now look back and say, "yes, yes we were progressive." And there were certain things in Mundelein's history at the time that were pretty progressive for a small Roman Catholic Liberal Arts College. The Catholic Student Association started to get up and running at the time and that took over a lot of our thinking, and not just among those people who were trying to get a charter and trying to plug into it. But for all of us we were educated in and what it would mean to become a member a charter member of this student congress -- what our rights were what our obligations were and responsibilities. I think looking back that was groundbreaking.

And it certainly then provided the ground work for a lot of other organizations that developed from it. But no, I certainly can't say I was conscious of it. I think we were doing things and having our consciousness raised before a lot of other places. But then

my dad would come home when I was in grade school and talk about some elderly lady whose landlord put her furniture out in the sidewalk and a nephew or somebody a niece came and they had no money to help. And then my dad worked on her behalf. So we heard a lot of those things at home and I didn't think of that as social justice or helping the poor and disenfranchised or any of that. I just thought that's what you did. That's what you do for a living. So I guess it was never a conscious thing to me.

Yet, there were many innovations, and even in the realm of entertainment, Mundelein was the first in the city. Now consider the University of Chicago, Loyola University and the bunch. But Mundelein was the first in the city to have a projection booth in the Auditorium where you could show 35 mm films. The faculty members made friends with the Granada Theatre, I don't know if he was the owner or manager at the time, of course, which was a very popular place and the nuns couldn't go out. So he would show these, and someone would bicycle 20 minutes down to campus with the canisters. That was before movies became digitalized. The projectionist would finish one reel and then a bicycle brought it down to Mundelein, and the nuns would be sitting there watching, any movie they wanted really. And of course if students were around, they were welcome to see it as well. So there were lots of innovations from both the point of view of technological and little recreational things too. I think the student association involvement, which was right at the beginning, was right at the cutting edge, with other forward looking places. The Civil Rights Movement, that came later of course, but I was teaching here at the time and the students and the sisters were getting on the buses and we had one person on the faculty who was an attorney actually she Catherine Brophy, who was sister Mary Lougory. She was in my dad's law class, my dad and my aunt and

Lougory, and probably 20 others graduated from DePaul law School together. Sister Lougory was teaching her classes, she wasn't a real good teacher either. She knew a lot, she was a no good teacher. She should have practiced law but nuns didn't practice law at the time. And that was sad. But anyway, my father said she, probably had the best legal mind in his class. Which is saying something cause my father had a fine legal mind.

So if he was saying that about her, she was pretty good. And on her off time, Sister Lougory worked at a legal clinic, accompanying an elderly person or a disabled person, or somebody that needed somebody to speak for them in court. There was a lot going on before that became kind of a regular occurrence. And before people were writing about social justice in books. So I don't know, that is a very long winded response. I hope you can get something, a nugget, a gold nugget from this.

SL: Is there anything else about your undergraduate experience here that you would want me to know?

MAS: You know Sandy I can't think of anything.