SHARE YOUR STORY: STUDENT LIFE AT MUNDELEIN

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Andrea Raila's Oral History

Women and Leadership Archives

Loyola University Chicago

2022

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Andrea Raila conducted by Melissa Newman on February 17, 2022. This interview is part of the Share Your Story: Student Life at Mundelein project, an oral history project to expand and enrich the Women and Leadership Archives' (WLA) records of Mundelein College's history through interviews with alumnae on student life.

Mundelein College, founded and operated by the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM), provided education to women from 1930 until 1991, when it affiliated with Loyola University Chicago.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the WLA staff. Timestamps are provided every five minutes, within a few seconds of that exact point in the audio. Actions and sounds such as laughter are in parentheses, and notes added for context are in brackets.

TIME LOG AND OVERVIEW FOR SESSION 1

[0:00 - 5:00]

Raila's family, religious, and educational background and her decision to attend Mundelein.

[5:00 - 0:00]

Raila's experience with Mundelein faculty, their activism, and their impact on her own activism and career.

[10:00 - 15:00]

Raila's job as a cartoonist, her time on the staff of the *Mundelein Review* magazine, human rights lectures on campus, and her class trip to Russia.

[15:00 - 20:00]

Raila's time in Russia including students smuggling in goods for Russian Jews, her world travels, and media that influenced her.

[20:00 - 25:00]

Raila's post-graduate career, starting her own business and her work with Gannon Scholars.

[25:00 - 30:00]

Raila's campaign for Cook County Accessor, her volunteer work, her marriage, and her relationship with Sister Mary Paul Frances Bailey.

[30:00 - 35:00]

Raila's parents, her siblings, her children, Loyola, and her high school education.

[35:00 - 40:00]

Raila reflects on choosing her major, her time as a commuter, and her experience with students in the weekend college.

[40:00 - 45:00]

Raila's political views, relationships with other students, how she kept in touch with fellow Mundelein alumni, and balancing work and college.

[45:00 - 50:00]

Raila reflects on attending lectures by Cesar Chavez and Mother Teresa, the effects they had on her activism, and her international travel.

[50:00 - 55:00]

Raila's time in Russia, trying to learn Russian, getting lost in Russia, her trip to Germany, and her relationship with Mundelein faculty.

[55:00 - 60:00]

Raila's time in Germany, her trip to Guatemala, and working on a mayoral campaign.

[60:00 - 66:47]

Raila's time working in politics, her arrest, and final reflections on her time at Mundelein and its lasting impact.

NARRATOR BIO

Andrea Raila was born in 1959 in the Edgewater neighborhood of Chicago. She is one of eight siblings to Catholic parents. She is one of eight children in a strong Catholic family. Both of her parents went to Loyola to become doctors, which is how they met, and encouraged their children to go there. Andrea decided on Mundelein because of their impressive emphasis on women's issues, social justice, service, and the arts.

Notable speakers came to Mundelein such as Mother Theresa, Cesar Chavez, Kath Kelly, and Pat Quinn, all of whom had a large impact on what Andrea as to what one is capable of and what

one can do for their community. Each faculty member seemed to have a cause he or she was passionate about, and it influenced Andrea to either take up the cause herself or search for causes about which she was passionate. This has been a lifelong pursuit, leading to her working on political campaigns, starting her own company, building foundations for homes in Guatemala, and serving on educational boards to continue the spirit of education, service, leadership, and research in the young minds of today. All of these things stemmed from the foundation of incredible scholarship, knowledge, and compassion she experienced at Mundelein.

She was the second woman to ever become a commercial tax analyst. She opened up her own company for tax consulting to help people to reduce their property taxes and changing legislation to make laws better for property owners. As a conscious choice in leading her company, sixty-five percent of her employees are women and seven languages are spoken. Her company won the BBB Torch award for market-play ethics. The company also offers paid internship programs to Ann Ida Gannon Scholars to pay it forward and keep the Mundelein spirit alive. Andrea has worked with and helped improve circumstances for many interesting people throughout her career, a passion that was rooted in Mundelein's values of education, leadership, advocacy, social justice, service, and compassion.

INTERVIEWER BIO

Melissa Newman was a graduate student in the Public History program at Loyola University Chicago and a graduate assistant at the Women and Leadership Archives 2020-2022.

Transcriptionist: Keeley Shoudel | Locations: Chicago, IL and Evanston, IL via Zoom

Narrator: Andrea Raila

Interviewer: Melissa Newman | Date: February 17, 2022

[BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW]

[0:00]

Q: For the record, my name is Melissa Newman. I'm a graduate assistant at the Women and Leadership Archives, interviewing Andrea Raila, class of 1983, on February 17, 2022, for the Share Your Story: Student Life at Mundelein Project. I'm in Palatine, Illinois, and Andrea is in Chicago, Illinois. So to get us started, Andrea, could you tell me a little bit about your background, your family growing up, that sort of thing?

Raila: Sure. I was born in 1959 in Chicago's Edgewater neighborhood, where I reside now only ten blocks away from the Mundelein Center and Loyola. I was one of eight siblings, and we were all raised Catholic. We went to the Catholic elementary schools, the high schools in Chicago. My father got his medical degree from the Loyola Stritch School of Medicine, and my mother also attended Loyola, hoping to be an aspiring doctor as well. But she ended up having so many children that they did not admit her, even though she had the great grades for it. But my mother was an only child, and when she and my grandmother moved to Chicago, they converted to Catholicism. So my mother graduated from an all-girls school, it was called Immaculata. And during her time at Immaculata, she had two goals. She wanted to become a doctor, and she wanted, most importantly, to become a nun. So she was a very zealous convert. And I had learned that she recruited the most Immaculata students to go into the Catholic program as

aspiring to become nuns and that she was a major leader in that program. My father and mother met at Loyola, and they fell in love and decided to get married. And then when she reported her decision to her mother superior, who was overseeing her work there, she was very disappointed. She said, "I fell in love, I'm going to get married." And the mother superior was crushed. But my mother said to her, "Don't worry, sister. I will have twelve children, and I will name them after the Saints and the Apostles." So I was born, and I was named after Saint Andrew. And then I was born at Resurrection Hospital, where my father was a resident doctor there. And my mother almost died in her last childbirth, and the doctors told her that she could not have any more children, so she never made it to twelve. We had eight. When my mother brought home our first pet dog. She named the dog Revelation. So I entered Mundelein College in 1979, it was a very conscious choice because I knew that my mother really wanted me to go to an all-women's Catholic College and an all-women's high school. So it was my mother, my father, my uncle, and my aunt and cousin that all went to Loyola Medical School or Nursing School. And there was a lot of pressure on me to go ahead and enroll in Loyola, but I was adamant sticking with Mundelein because of its values, because of the interview I had there. It emphasized women's issues, social justice, public service, the arts. It was everything that I wanted. And I had to apply for scholarships. I got a BEOG, that was the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant. That's now the Pell Grant, and that's for students who don't have enough funding to get in. And at the time Mundelein, in 1979, the tuition was $6,400. You think, oh, that was so little. But in today's economy, it was $24,000, and the tuition was comparable at Loyola. But I stuck with and was fixated with Mundelein. I lived off campus. I never lived in the dorms. And I graduated in 1983. And I just missed the new Sister Ann Ida Gannon Scholarships that were created in 1983. But I was out the door, and it was a great grant to be working with. And my degrees, I started out as a

fine art major with a minor in English, and I did that for three years. And then I decided to change to economics. I switched to social economics, and I'll tell you a little bit more why I did that.

[05:00]

Raila: But I was very much impacted by the Sisters and the lay professors at Mundelein College. Sister Irene Myers [Sister Irene Meyer, BVM] was a—taught psychology, but she was very active outside of the classroom, and she was a strong death penalty abolitionist. And she visited Illinois jails and prisons, and she brought her students there. And she was a fervent believer that your behavior during your time in jail and after your time in jail was the key measurement to your rehabilitation. And she had made friends with this one prisoner that he was convicted on death row, but she was convinced that he had rehabilitated. She got her students and other groups and herself [to] write letters to the governor for a stay of execution. She used the media to get the whole talk about the problems with capital punishment out there. And ultimately his case went up to the Supreme Court, and they ruled in his favor. And twenty years after being in prison, he was released on parole. That made a big impact on me. Everything important in my life has always been connected with my Mundelein connections, the BVMs, the lay teachers. And the mission there has always been creating women leaders, and it's still there. That is the mission of the Gannon Scholars, and it really resonated with me. But, you know, you first have to be a follower before you can be a leader. The teacher appears when the student is ready. So my takeaway on the Sister Irene is that I became a very advocated person for restorative justice. I worked with groups that wrote letters to the governor for pardons for women. And I worked with

the former governor, Governor Pat Quinn, who ultimately, in 2014, signed the law that banned the death penalty in Illinois. That was very satisfying to me, but I also visited, wrote letters on holidays to women in Division 17 of the Cook County Jail. We still organize unified bus rides so that we can get their children out there to see them on holidays. Funding for that had been cut, totally cut. And I support a group called the Women Justice Institute, and they are at the forefront, only being three years old, for all issues of incarcerated women in jail. And I served on the board of the Chicago Legal Advocates for Incarcerated Women for four years. So I think Sister Irene made an impact on me. But there were other instructors. There was Bill Hill, Dan Vaillancourt. They were philosophy and theologian professors, and they were really deep thinkers, and they were really fascinated with the aspirations of women in the religious world. I also took a class with Sister Ann Harrington [BVM]. She taught Eastern history, Asian studies, and I remember being so fascinated with that. And she had a program that we're supposed to talk about the Japanese learning their first language from China and then how they evolved over the millennia and how they became a great power. And I decided, instead of writing this project, I would do it in caricatures and cartoons. And she was so impressed with that. And she said, "You really have an artistic talent. You're a fine arts major, but you really have it." And she encouraged me to take my cartoons and submit them to the Loyola newspaper. It might have been the Loyola Phoenix and a local newspaper. So I submitted some drawings and hope to be their character drawer, and I didn't get it, and I felt, "I'm a failure." But when you think about it in the early eighties and even now, where is there a great political cartoonist that's a female, so it's a pretty male-dominated position.

[10:00]

Raila: But I took her encouragement, and I ultimately became an anonymous cartoonist that no one knew. But I did the cartoons for an elected official for over twenty-five years when he would go out and talk about tax reform, pension reform, banking reform, and laws like that. And I would do— and like, ballot initiatives. I would do all the cartoons, and you would see them on television, or you would see them in the newspapers. And that got that cartoon thing out of my system. And I enjoyed it tremendously. And that person happened to ultimately become the governor of Illinois. I didn't have a lot of activities at Mundelein that I participated in. I think the reason was that I lived off campus. But I did staff the Mundelein Review magazine, it's the literary magazine, and I worked—it held essays and poems, and I wrote some poetry for them. And I also designed that magazine's cover, and I designed it in that art deco that you see in the Mundelein Center for [Fine] Arts and Performance on the elevator doors. So I imitated that, put it down on that Mundelein literary cover. It stayed there. I think we published that for about five or six years. They took that exact design and put that on the street, walkway on Sheridan that curves around the Mundelein center and the Loyola buildings. But I was very active in social justice issues. And Mundelein would hold lectures that may not even have been associated with class, but they had lectures on human rights issues, on gender equality. And it happened that in 1981, Mundelein had it's fiftieth anniversary. And who do they bring on campus? Mother Teresa. And who followed then? Cesar Chavez, the Union farmer. So I got to hear them. That was very inspiring. So I went to other human rights lectures. One that was the most profound to me was in a building—we called it the Yellow House. It's by the library. I can't think of what the name of it is, but it's a Loyola lecture hall. And we heard several lectures on the 1980 murders of Bishop Oscar Romero and the Maryknoll American nuns that were brutally slain and murdered in El

Salvador in the Civil War. And they were there just to assist the poor in getting housing and education. And they died for their cause. And it was such a powerful thing and it resonated with me. They later wrote a movie about it called "Choices of the Heart," and I believe we might have watched that. But I also think I remember hearing Kathy Kelly speak there. Kathy Kelly has been a fixture in Chicago for many years, and she's in the Catholic Worker movement. She's also a pacifist, and she has not paid federal income taxes to this day because she does not want any of her tax dollars going to war. So I think one of my favorite memories of Mundelein was a student trip to Russia with one of my favorite instructors, both of them, and that was Sister Frances Crowley [BVM] and Dan Vaillancourt. They did a course together that was phenomenal. It was called Marxism and Communism. There was like a series of six lectures. It was terrific. So anyway, they wanted to take the students to Russia and we went and a group of maybe twenty-five Mundelein nineteen year-olds, along with their chaperones, visited Moscow and visited Leningrad, because at the time it was called Leningrad—it's now St. Petersburg. That was the most memorable. However, during that time, there was a huge exodus of Soviet Jews that were fleeing Russia because they were being persecuted and discriminated against. And they were not receiving many of the things that they needed.

[15:00]

Raila: Unbeknownst to probably—I'm certain, all of the instructors that came there with us and the students—our group somehow smuggled in transistor radios, Jewish religious texts, medical supplies like little antibiotics and bandaids. One woman said she cut out of her book all the pages

to put this transistor radios in. You have to think of this. We're going to be going to the airport and as we exit, they can open your baggage if they feel that way. But at that time in 1980—or '81, I don't think they had the surveillance that one gets when you run your materials and baggage. I don't think they had those type of cameras. They had the wands to detect metal. But we got through. We got through with all of those things. And I had no idea that they were being brought through. But had we not, we would have been marched right back out or who knows what they would have done with us there in Russia. But one person brought an extra suitcase that had like twenty pairs of blue jeans. And of course, blue jeans were a no-no back then because it was a sign of the evil decadent Americans. But that was an unintended, but very interesting experience for me. And I don't think anyone got in trouble with that. But my takeaway with Sister Frances Crowley is my love to travel now to edgy places. And I've been to five European countries before I turned thirty, one of them was Germany. And made sure that when I got to Germany, I went to Berlin and I went to the east side of Berlin, which was the communist side. And I saw that east side of Berlin and the incredible difference from the west and the east and how that wall was up there. It was interesting that wall actually was ultimately, as you know, torn down in 1989. And Leningrad, that I was with Sister Frances Crowley, changed its name to St. Petersburg back in 1991. So it was kind of interesting that those two things happened. But I changed my major from fine arts to economics because of a chance meeting with one of my favorite nuns. And that was Sister Mary Paul Francis Bailey [BVM]. And on a whim, I took a class from her. She was the chair of the economics department, and I took micro and macroeconomics, and I was hooked.

Raila: And I basically said, "I want to change my degree to economics with social economics and welfare." She would always recommend these extracurricular books for us. And she gave us a book from a fellow named Stein [Stern], and it was a book called "The Rape of the Taxpayer." And it talked about the American wealthy loopholes that are given to various wealthy corporations and individuals. And then I went on to read Stein's [Stern's] book called "Lawyers on Trial." What people think of lawyers and what do lawyers think of their own professions? She introduced me to Studs Terkel and that famous book that he wrote, I think in 1975 or 79, "Working," about working and interviewing people who work the average [inaudible]. The best thing that she introduced me to was our school textbook, and it was called "Human Capital." And it was written by a University of Chicago Professor, Gary Becker. Gary Becker ended up winning the Nobel Prize in economics, and he ultimately won the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He was an economics and sociology teacher at the University of Chicago, and he was one of the first economists to look at social issues that you'd see in sociology: race discrimination, crime, family organization, and put an economic analysis over it. It was very interesting. Sister Paul had a public revenue course that changed my life. Public revenue, great. She introduced us to a speaker. He was a young attorney, his name was Pat Quinn, and he talked about property tax reform and how important it was. And it was a riveting lecture. He was actually organizer of a group called the Coalition for Political Honesty, which I ultimately became a member of and circulated different petitions for, like the Citizens Utility Board and other things like that.

[20:00]

Raila: Ultimately, as I started graduating out, I had an internship program because he had actually ran for the Cook County Board of Review and he became a tax commissioner. And I had no idea, but he sent to Sister Frances Bailey an internship position. So I wrote my thesis about the property tax system in Cook County, and I did an internship with the Cook County Board of Review, and it was terrific. I, ultimately, after Mundelein, was given a job at the Cook County Board of Review, and I became the second woman to ever become a commercial tax analyst and was a decision maker. So that was a great opportunity there. And then after my tour of duty with the Cook County government, I opened up my own company, and it was Andrea Raila and Associates. And for thirty years, we've been doing public policy, tax consulting, helping people reduce their property taxes, and literally changing legislation and making laws better for people who are property owners. We became, like the recipient of the BBB [Better Business Bureau] Torch award for marketplace ethics. That's always been important to me about having ethics in business. And the firm has—it's women owned, and it has 65% of the employees that are women, and seven languages are spoken. And that's all been a conscious choice in leading this company. But more importantly is that we offer internship programs to Gannon Scholars, paid internship programs. And that's very important because it's always related to social justice issues or public policy reforms. I served ten years as an appointed Cook County Women's Commissioner under President Toni Preckwinkle on the Cook County Commission on women's issues.

Raila: So we offer the Gannon Scholars, not only the internship with the firm, but to serve, if they would like, on our subcommittee, our women's subcommittee, so that we can tackle issues

like financial literacy, human rights, gender equality. I've never had a Gannon Scholar say, "No, I don't want to serve on that subcommittee." So it's like they have two tiny internships going. We also have a think tank. It's called Training, Research, Advocacy, and Education Network. It's called TRAEN. And it does studies on, for instance, higher rates of foreclosures in minority neighborhoods and the disparities of property tax exemptions between low and middle income homeowners and the wealthy homeowners. And the Gannon Scholars are so great in their research capabilities, they're just right on target. That when we get them, they're downloading tons of data, crunching so many numbers. But coming up with an end solution, and we have that online, some of the studies that they've worked on. So our internship really values public service. I think it brings out the natural leadership qualities that I see in Mundelein students in the past and the Gannon Scholars, they have the natural instinct to lead. You just have to shape it right and move it in the right direction. So in 1993, because obviously when you're a Mundelein student prior to 1983, you're not aware sometimes of the fact that in 1993, Ann Ida Gannon Center for Women and Leadership was created and it was founded by another incredible BVM. Her name is Sister Carol Farrell [Sister Carolyn Farrell, BVM]. She, Farrell, was the former Mundelein College President. But more interesting than that is that she was the first councilman on the Dubuque Iowa Council and ultimately ran and became mayor of Dubuque. Now, how many Catholic nuns become elected politicians? That impresses me.

[25:00]

Raila: And then ultimately, I did run for office. I ran. I was the first female Democrat to run in 2010 and in 2018 for the Cook County Assessor's office. There's never been a female tax assessor. Might get at that one day. I'm not too sure. But really, Mundelein's foundation really shaped, I believe, really shaped who I am. But mostly what I do, what I did as a student, and what I continued to do in my life, that's important. The Catholic Workers Movement is important to me. I worked with the St. Frances Catholic Worker House in Uptown. They were paying property taxes. We ultimately got them off the tax roads because they were a religious organization, didn't know it for twenty years, and now they don't pay their taxes as all churches and religious groups don't pay their taxes. And I also had the opportunity to work and reduce the taxes on, guess who? Gary Becker, who has passed, but he has his High Park home and his widows there. And I've always worked on his taxes. As brilliant as he was, he didn't want to touch property taxes. And then I ultimately worked for many years for Studs Terkel. I admire him greatly, and he lived in Uptown, and I worked with him. But I also got connected with a woman named Granny D. Haddock from out east. She walked across America for campaign finance reform when she was eighty-nine years old. Fourteen months, she literally walked, turning ninety on her way. She was introduced to me by someone here in Chicago. When she got to Chicago, I took her to the North Side Catholic Academy, not far from Loyola. And she spoke about her work and how we need to change politics. And she talked about her book "Walking Across America In My Ninetieth Year: You're Never Too Old to Raise a Little Bit of Hell." And she was well received. And she was very fond of saying this, "Democracy is not something that you have, but it's something that you do." [Saint] Ignatius of Loyola said something that was like the same thing, and you see on the buildings at Loyola. And he said, "Love is shown more in deeds than in words."

Raila: So it was a great impact on me, especially when I learned what I learned about through Mundelein lectures on the Maryknoll American nuns that were brutally murdered and how Bishop Romero lost his life and how other Catholic missionaries have gone down to Central America, have worked in Guatemala during their civil unrest and made a difference. Some of them lost their lives doing it, and that made a tremendous impact on me. And I married late in life, I got married at thirty-three. I really didn't need a traditional honeymoon or anything else. So what we decided to do is that anyone who came to our wedding, if they would contribute to a fund that we created at St. Ita's, and it was a fund for Habitat for Humanity. And if they gave to that fund, we would take that money, and we would travel to Guatemala, and we would build homes for the Guatemalan farmers. We raised $7,000. We used our own fare to fly out there. We laid the foundations for seven homes. We had money left over and gave it to the Habitat managers down there that they bought land for the farmers, so they could not only own their home, they could own the land underneath their new houses. My mother died in 2000, and I remained in contact with Sister Paul Frances for thirty years. We emailed each other. We sent each other cards. She came to Chicago. She always saw me. I went to Dubuque, I saw her. We had a really special bond. And when she passed in 2018, I just felt like, "Oh, my second mother just died." And it was very heartbreaking for me. I started, for whatever reasons, researching about my mother and her time at Immaculata [High School], and I knew that she had been there from 1942 to 1945, but they only had the 1942 year book online. And as I go through the yearbook, I'm looking for my mother, looking for my mother. Her name is not in there.

[30:00]

Raila: But who's in there? Blanche Bailey. Before she took her vows, her name was Blanche Bailey, and she took on the name after she took her vows. And her name was Sister Mary Paul Frances Bailey. Those are the same names that my mother picked for her first two children. And in that same order, Paul—Paula was named after St. Paul. Frank was named after St. Frances. It's kind of serendipitous, but I believe in giving back. I'm thirty-five years out of Mundelein. I serve on the Mundelein College Alum and Gannon Scholar Board with pride and zealous. We just celebrated our ninetieth anniversary at Mundelein College, and I think the Women and Leadership Archives and these interviews are terrific to memorialize what impact Mundelein and the instructors and the BVMs had on us.

Q: Yeah, I completely agree. And thank you for going through your experiences, your history with me like this. I did have some follow up questions that I kind of wanted to just go in order of when you first started. So you said you had so many siblings and seven siblings and all of your family went to Loyola for college. Does that mean—what did your other siblings do? Did they also all go to college? Did they go to Mundelein, Loyola?

Raila: Actually, my parents divorced, and my mother moved to Louisiana. So there was a period when all the children were in Louisiana. She got a job as a social worker in a large mental health institute, and she actually followed a priest down there that had a connection for the job. And he wanted to go to central Louisiana from Chicago to start the first Black Catholic Church called

Martin de Porres. I left Louisiana and came back. So did my sister. My sister ended up going to the University of Chicago, and she graduated from the University of Chicago and ultimately became— she actually was a nurse, but she took her nursing—she didn't take her nursing—she may have taken her nursing, I think it was at the Strojure nursing program, but she left nursing, went into the legal industry. All the other children stayed in other parts of the United States. One is in New Zealand and Australia. So I actually encouraged all three of my children to go to Loyola. I said, "Pick Loyola, this is great!" And there was a—one wanted to, and then ultimately, she was accepted to University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, so didn't carry on. But, I have many cousins who have gone. The Abderholdens sent their kids to Loyola. So it's a tradition, but it was very important. Nowadays you have so much debt. And when you got the grants that we got, the Pell Grant, maybe, but certainly BEOG. We didn't come out with a lot of debt. We had hardly any debt at all.

Q: And so if your mother and siblings were mostly down in Louisiana when you were in college, does that mean you were living with your dad and commuting to Mundelein at that time?

Raila: No. My father was in the Panama Canal, and my mother had the other kids. My sister was up here, but she had gone to Boston University to get her law degree. I lived with my grandmother, who supported me. My grandmother then moved to Missouri after retiring, being forty-five years as a waitress. So in high school, I was on my own. My last year at St. Gregory's High School, I had my own small apartment, and it was an unusual time. But the teachers at St. Gregory watched over me and helped me in my decision-making and filling out all the

paperwork that was necessary to get the BEOG grant. I was self-sufficient, and I had to work a lot of hours in order to keep my rents and keep myself clothed and fed.

[35:00]

Q: And how did the teachers at St. Gregory compare to the teachers at Mundelein? With being both Catholic institutions and nuns also at St. Gregory, I assume?

Raila: Yes, there were nuns at St. Gregory's. They weren't wearing their habits, though that was not-- even at my time, they were out of their habits. But actually there was a student who graduated from Mundelein College in the fine arts. I didn't know her. Her name was Cathy Grimly, and she came to St. Gregory's, and she taught art there for ten years. But the instructors there were great—were terrific.

Q: And what made you originally choose fine arts as your major?

Raila: I loved the arts. I still sometimes wonder, why didn't I do more art? But I do take art still. I go to the palette and chisel, and I do some painting. I have a studio in my house. I taught all my kids painting and [I'm] a lifelong Art Institute member. I just loved it. But as I proceeded through it, I thought, what am I going to do with [a] fine arts degree? I didn't want to become a graphics

designer. I didn't want to do art advertisement. I didn't think I was the best. My father and my mother were artists, and they both got scholarships to the Art Institute after applying and rendering their drawings. My mother won first place for her Madonna and Child portrait. But they chose not to go to the Art Institute. Instead, they went to Loyola to aspire to become doctors. So I guess I wasn't too much different than that. I thought, okay, what am I going to do with the fine arts? And then when I just took that one micro-macro class it just—and I took sociology classes, and it just worked for me. As I say, I still do art. My office walls are covered with my art, but I'm just an amateur.

Q: The passion is still there for it.

Raila: Yes, it is. It is there, it is.

Q: And then when you were commuting to Mundelein, how did that affect your time at Mundelein? Did you spend much time on campus studying in between classes, or was it—?

Raila: I did. I lived on Kenmore and Winthrop and Bryn Mawr. It was very close, so I always walked to school, but I pretty much lived at school. I got to school at seven or eight, and I did not leave until the lights went out in the library sometimes at eight, and I could eat on campus, and I felt safe there. I was alone, living on my own. And so it was my home. It was my second home. I don't know how I would have—I couldn't afford living at the dorms, but I think I would have made closer friendships. But remember, we also had the weekend college. So if I could get there

on the weekend, I would meet people that were sometimes three or four years older than myself. And I really kind of clicked with them, an older group. But it was Mundelein and its mission and its emphasis on women's issues just was such a factor that made me whole. And it just resonated with me. So I just always felt safe at Mundelein, even late at night. But I had to hold down a lot of jobs, too. And I worked the weekends, and I waited tables and I cleaned hotel rooms, and I was a bartender, but I got through those five years. I was a union bartender, and I was also a union organizer. And that was right, I was very impressed with Chavez, who was the union organizer for the farmers. So I just see that it had a terrific impact on me.

[40:00]

Q: Yeah, sorry. I thought I clicked the unmute button, but I didn't, I guess. Could you talk a little bit about your relationship with the other students, the friendships or the difficulties, maybe, since you were so busy and balancing work life and student life and all that?

Raila: I formed some good relationships with students. I took a government class. Now, when I did take this government class, and I can't think of the instructor there, we had some big debates with women in the classroom about political views. And I remember having strong political views about—it might have been about ballot initiative and referendums and how we need to be able to have that initiative power so that we can circulate petitions and limit the number of fifty councilmen in the city of Chicago, the largest number of councilmen on the face of the Earth. Or pass petitions and initiatives for term limits for maybe the Chicago mayor or even the term limits for legislators. So there was a heated debate in one of the classes, and I remember a debate with

one other person who was very staunch, and her name was Melbo Rodriguez. And she was fiery, and she was arguing about not necessarily embracing initiative. You can vote for your representatives, they will vote and get the laws through. And I think I was in disagreement. You would think that we were sworn enemies after that conversation. Okay. And everybody backing up saying, but the instructor let us do it. And to this day, Melbo Rodriguez and I are on Facebook constantly sending little things back and forth. She became a teacher in Indiana, so she teaches in Hammond, Indiana, which is only an hour from here. I'm trying to get her to come to our fiftieth anniversary. And I had other ties with women. I can't think of her name, but she's again on Facebook with me. I really wish that—I think you were able to make better and closer connections with you if you had a dorm lifestyle. But I always reach out and try to find those connections and try to find Mundelein people who went to my school. I actually had a girlfriend that I met in the work industry that graduated from Mundelein like me. Her name is Mary Carrigas, and she had the same issues that I had. She didn't live on campus. It took her five years to get her degree. She couldn't do the weekend college like me. And we met working as bartenders and found out that we went to Mundelein together. And she and I, both of us, missed our graduation. Okay, so we are not on that class 1983. And I was just talking to her on Facebook saying, "Oh, I wish I had done that. But I forgot. Everything was going on in that last year, and it didn't happen." But it's interesting. It's a small world out there. It's amazing how you can meet people that you've gone to school with and not even known.

Q: Yeah, that's pretty wild, actually. Love that. Do you remember the talks, the lectures from Mother Teresa and Cesar Chavez? Could you talk any more specifics about what they talked about, what impact that had on you?

Raila: Cesar Chavez was a very powerful speaker. I think the students were so in awe with what he was tackling. And it was so evident that Mundelein would no longer buy any of its fruit, its lettuce or anything, unless it was from a unionized company.

[45:00]

Raila: I know that. I know that they went to that. They said, "Okay, we're having all unionized produce." And then he was very active. For the last thirty years, he's been very active. Mother Teresa. I can't remember actually hearing her, but I remember that she was there, and I don't know what it was that prevented me from any lectures she might have—I think she was given an award, but that was her second time actually at Mundelein because they told me she had visited before. And it was wonderful to see that she came in the fiftieth anniversary. She established orphanages in Calcutta and so did Sister Dulce. She established orphanages in Brazil. And my father went to Brazil in 1963 and helped Sister Dulce create these orphanages. And he was one of only two American doctors that went out there to inoculate the thousands and thousands of kids. That made a big impact on me. And so I went and visited China and ultimately adopted two daughters from China. And I'm very involved in international students. I have sponsored them. I sponsored four exchange students. Either they lived with me or they had work in my office. So that international flavor that I got from Mundelein and what my father did just resonated with me, and it became part of my life.

Q:

Yeah. That international travel reminds me of that Russian trip that you took. So did you find out only or—when exactly did you find out that the chaperones had smuggled some things in?

Raila: Upon our return and when we were debriefing and talking, and that's how we found out. I had no idea if even Sister Frances Crowley knew about it because I've listened to her interviews, and she never says anything about that Russian trip. But it was the last one that was taken. And it was pretty remarkable because it was a very daring thing to do. I don't think those parents knew that if they were caught, who knows what would have happened? And it was just amazing because we all stayed at the same hotel and those blue jeans were given out when the students were allowed to go to a discotheque. That's what they told me. They brought those blue jeans and just gave them. And the times that we traveled through Moscow, I remember going at night and a couple of the Mundelein students, we were walking down the streets and there were these huge buildings. And we looked in the courtyards, and we saw this one bonfire going out, and it looked like there were Jewish people that were around because they had these long beards, and they had these particular robes on. And I know that they were praying. And so we kind of walked in a little closer, and they looked at us, but young, nineteen year-olds. But I think they were holding their religious ceremonies around that bonfire because religion, especially Jewish religion, they were persecuted. And it was a very hard time for the Jewish people during that seventies and early eighties. I look back on that. I'm glad that the transistor radios did get to them and the supplies and anything else that was brought over. The religious text in particular because they would have their text also confiscated. The Russians would come in unannounced, break into

their homes, take all the religious texts. So that was something that I don't know if ever it's been written in any of the Sister Ann Harrington, she was a co-author of "Voices of Mundelein," and it's not written there. But I wonder who holds that little knowledge about that. Maybe you'll be interviewing someone who will say, "Oh, yes, I remember that trip."

[50:00]

Q: And was that—you said Sister Joan Frances Crowley and the Dan Vaillancourt, did they teach a class during that trip, or what exactly did you guys do academically for that?

Raila: Really, we were kind of standard tourists and very regimented. The tours were regimented because we were Americans, and I think they watched us carefully. One of the fun things that I remember doing—and now listen, I couldn't speak Russian, but I tried. I gave myself a 101 course and tried to—even the characters, I had to memorize. But I went out, and I'm only twenty years-old, I think, at the time. And I went out, and I found tickets to the circus, to the Russian circus. And I went back to one of the chaperones, and she said, "Oh, yeah, buy these tickets." And somehow I got through getting tickets for all the chaperones, all of the students, and got them back. And they were just thrilled that I was able to manage to get tickets to see that. So I was kind of emboldened by that. And I thought, okay, well, now I'm kind of Russian, right? So I get on the bus thinking that I was going to travel to go and see—I forgot what it was. I think it was like a national library. And they allowed us to go out. We didn't all have to go to these

places, but we mostly stuck together. But I went out, got on the bus, and the bus didn't stop at that library. It took me almost, I think, fifty miles away. And so I was trying to scramble trying to talk Russian to these young men, and they could understand my English better than—they probably wanted to say, "Stop speaking Russian, you're slaughtering it. We don't understand you." But they ultimately got me back all the way back. And I got into the room at ten o'clock at night, and they said, "Where were you?" And I said, "Oh, I took a trip that shouldn't have gone on." But it challenged me, and that's why it was good, but it was pretty regimented. When we went to Leningrad, we went in groups, and we went on this military boat that they're very proud of that's on the St. Peter's river, St. Petersburg's river. And it was snowing. It was cold. It was cold at that time. It was snow everywhere. But, you know, I would love to go back again. I'd love to go back to Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Q: And when were you in Germany?

Raila: Probably in nineteen—just maybe four years after I graduated Mundelein. So I might have been twenty-six years-old. And it was really a remarkable experience. And to see the dramatic difference between the east and the west side, it's just like when you walked over to the east side, the Communist side, it just looked dark. And there were hardly any lights on there in the evening. And you walked on the other side. And it was like Chicago. I mean, it was so stark. And I thought it was kind of serendipitous that the wall would eventually come down in 1989 and Leningrad would be turned to St. Petersburg in 1991. And that's what made me most, I think about Sister Frances Crowley and how she emphasized how history changes, that the fact that you're in a communistic country and you think there's not going to be any room for change is not

true. Because when you think about—and she wasn't, I don't think she lived to see the day where ultimately these states, the Baltic States, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania moved and became independent countries away from Russia. And Russia also, the kids are in blue jeans all the time, and they have music. So things do change. And it's been a wonderful life for me to see those things change. And how Sister Frances Crowley and Dan Vallaincourt said, "You just wait. You wait for the change and change does happen."

[55:00]

Q: Was it difficult to get back and forth from East Berlin—or West Berlin to East Berlin?

Raila: It was extremely intimidating. You're in your car, you drive up in an attempt to go to the East Side. You have to have your passports. We were with two German people who were friends at the time of-- my boyfriend. And as we drove up, as soon as they looked at the German passports and as soon as they looked at our American passports, they made the guys get out. They opened up the lid of the trunk. They looked through my bags. They looked through my coat pockets. Very intimidating. And then we were finally let in. But I also remember something that was very scary when we went to Guatemala to build those houses for Habitat for Humanity homes. It was a lot of civil unrest at the time. We were driving up this mountain, and we were on a bus that had all of these chickens and pigs at the top and baskets of fruit and things. And we were with the Indigenous people that maybe we represented maybe 25% of the bus. And they

were all on the bus moving up this mountainside to get to Huehuetenango, and the bus driver stopped as we saw military men running down the hill. And they ran, and they all had guns, and they stopped the bus. And some of them weren't in military clothes.

Raila: They might have a pair of pants that was military, but maybe not a shirt. Some of them did have military uniforms, but they were probably civilians that they often caught—ten-year-old boys, fifteen-year-old boys, and got into these civilian militant groups. They stopped the bus, and they made everybody get out, and they lined everybody up against the bus and had these guns. And they climbed up on the bus, and they took the pigs, and they just dropped them from in their baskets onto the ground. They were checking all of the Indigenous people. All the Americans were lined up on the opposite side. And I just remember looking up at the sky and thinking, okay, this will be my last day on Earth. We're going to all be-- I'm thinking of the Maryknoll nuns and missionaries and all of this stuff. Not that I was a missionary. I was just doing the house building, but I really felt like this was going to be my last day. And I just breathe deep, and I thought, but I've lived a pretty good life. You know, I've done a lot. So if I do go, you know, I've done a lot. They took two people away from that bus into the mountains and left with those two people. And then everybody else got back on the bus, and we got on the bus, and we got to Huehuetenango. Didn't know whatever happened to—and they were young men. They were like maybe fifteen or seventeen years-old, and they were crying. It was awful.

Q: Yeah, that sounds terrifying. Well—

Raila: We want to leave on a brighter note, but I'm a survivor, and I believe strongly that with my Catholic upbringing, you don't leave this life if you haven't either been arrested or made an enemy or two. And I tell my kids that. I say, "You need to get arrested for a good cause. A good cause." And they go, "oh, Mom." I said, "it's true." And I said, "Spin your life, because we're here for a fleeting moment," and they always laugh at that. But in 1983, we had our first Black mayor of Chicago, and I worked on his campaign, and it was right out of Mundelein College. He may have even spoken at Mundelein College. They assign me the northwest suburb, but like the northwest side of the city, all kind of a white area. And my campaign coordinator was from Mundelein College, and her name was Katie Hogan, and she graduated in 1972, and she's a political powerhouse, activist, bar none. She started her own restaurant with Michael James, and they ran the Heartland Café. She's a host on the Loyola radio station called "The Heartland" and brings in a lot of progressive voices. I've been on her radio show a couple of times, so she oversaw me. And I told her, I said, "Please don't assign me out to this area. It's just too hostile." They did not want a Black mayor. And she goes, "Nope, you're going to do it, and you're going to learn how to drive a car." I didn't know how to drive a car, so I had to have a car. So at twenty-eight years-old, I get my first license.

[01:00:00]

Raila: So I work out there, and guess what happens? I get arrested because when I was working out there, you have to stay 150 yards away from the polling place, not have your signs anytime closer. When I went into the polling place, there was a man that was a precinct captain. He was

standing in the polling place where the hallway was, and he was holding Vrdolyak signs. He was in the polling place. You walked past him down the stairs and into the gym, and you got your ballot to vote. And so I just said, "This is ridiculous." I went down, and I complained to the election judge, the key judge. I said, "They're complaining about me being too close. I'm 150 yards, and he's in here with Vrdolyak signs." And she looked at me and she says, "I don't care. I'm processed. I have called the police, and I'm submitting a complaint against you." They did not want to have a Black mayor, I can assure you. And do you know that she prosecuted me all the way to court, and I had to go to court. I was arrested for electioneering, and I was put in jail for, like an hour or two until somebody from the campaign let me out. And they fingerprinted you and everything. And so I went to the jury. I went to court, and I had a lawyer that represented me. His name was Tom Johnson.

Raila: And he happened to be Mayor Harold Washington's election lawyer, very well known. And we went to trial, and the election judge was there. And we showed that she had signed petitions for the opposing candidate. And we saw that, and it was part of the evidence that she was biased. And then she said something to me that was very disgusting. And Tom Johnson, may his soul rest, he died about two years ago in Oak Park. But he helped me out when I ran for assessor in 2010. But in any case, he asked me, "Well, what was it that the election judge said to you when she said she was going to file this complaint against you?"

Raila: And I said, "You know what she said to me. I told you what she said." And Tom Johnson wanted to make the point. He goes, "Tell me what she said to you." And I did not want to say it. So I turned to the judge, and I looked at the judge and I said, "I don't want to repeat what she said

out loud." And the judge happened to be a Black guy. I can't remember the judge's name. And I said, I could tell you, Judge, if you want, I'd rather just tell you quietly. The judge says, "Okay." And Tom Johnson is like, "What are you doing?" And I go up to the judge, and I just whispered quietly in his ear, very quietly. And I said when I asked her why she was going to file the complaint against me, she said, "Because you are an 'n' lover." And the judge just looked like that. And he looked at me, and he said, "Okay, let's call recess." And then he took Tom, my attorney, Tom Johnson, to the side, and he talked to Tom Johnson. Ultimately, I was found not guilty of electioneering, and they found a lot of bias with her. And there you go. I tell my kids that get arrested for a good cause. I know Kathy Kelly's gotten a lot of times arrested for a good cause. We all sometimes have. But my daughter also marched with me in Washington, D.C. on January 21, 2018, when it was the big Women's March. Right, 2019? The Women's March. And that was wonderful. She's now living in D.C. and working there. But those were crazy times in the eighties when we had our first Black mayor, and now we have our first Black female mayor.

[01:05:00]

Q: Well, thank you so much for your time today. Do you have any last thoughts, reflections on Mundelein, the people there, their influence on you?

Raila: Actually, I am very grateful to have met such great thinkers and compassionate people at Mundelein that took care of me. I believed my instructors—I believe the nuns there that taught

me, I believe they loved me and cared for me. And showed it in so many ways. I remember Sister Frances Crowley telling Bill Hill, "That Andrea, she has your soul" [laughs]. I took that as a great compliment, but Mundelein is not going anywhere. Mundelein College, with the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership, they carry on the mission. So Mundelein's not ever going to go anywhere. As long as we have the Gannon Scholars and the Women and Leadership Center, it will always be alive and well, and I'm very grateful to have been a part of that experience.

Q: Here, here.

Raila: Thank you for interviewing me.

Q: Yes, thank you so much. I'm going to stop our recording, but I just want to talk quickly after that.

Raila: Okay, good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]