

SHARE YOUR STORY: STUDENT LIFE AT MUNDELEIN

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Chantal Mahler's Oral History

Women and Leadership Archives

Loyola University Chicago

2022

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Chantal Mahler conducted by Melissa Newman on March 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]: Background on family, why she chose Mundelein, and the strong Catholic upbringing she had.

[5:00 - 10:00]: Professors that influenced her, life skills she learned from them, and the importance of being a strong female presence in a male-dominated society.

[10:00 - 15:00]: Experience of being at an all-girls college, being the sports editor for both high school and Mundelein's newspaper, and the familial connection to sports.

[15:00 - 20:00]: Continuation of her love for sports and writing for the Mundelein Scholar.

[20:00 - 25:00]: Mundelein Scholar continued: who sponsored them, which Sister was in charge of them, how they worked, and the difference in being the sports editor versus the editor-in-chief.

[25:00 - 30:00]: Mundelein Scholar continued: missing writing while being the editor-in-chief, thinking about how being the sports editor with the current Sister Jean "stuff," having a hard time with Loyola taking over Mundelein, and the lack of scandalous news stories.

[30:00 - 35:00]: Mundelein Scholar members not being "rabble rousers," winning an Illinois Collegiate Journalism Award, being part of a commuter sorority, staying on campus with somebody after a night class, being involved in senior counsel, Dooley Brothers coming during St. Patrick's Day, and being involved even though she was a commuter.

[35:00 - 40:00]: Making friends through her mom's Filipino food, how the commute to Mundelein was, and expanding on the Dooley Brothers' performance on St. Patrick's Day.

[40:00 - 45:00]: Where she would go to eat and study on campus, loving being next to the lake, and being nominated and serving as senior class representative.

[45:00 - 50:00]: Continuation of being senior class representative, finding an open administration for students to go to with issues, and loving the intimate, close-knit feeling of Mundelein, and the life and academic skills she gained while there.

[50:00 - 55:00]: Life skills Mundelein gave her in terms of breaking out of stereotypes and being more empathetic and a great listener, graduation day, and reunions of her class.

[55:00 - 1:00:00]: Talking about the contagious, wonderful women from Mundelein and how it affected her and her class, wanting to do the oral history interview to share how great Mundelein

was, and how she feels nowadays about the lasting image and memories of Mundelein like the buildings and Sister Jean.

[1:00:00 - 1:02:37]: Experiences at Mundelein, the legacy Mundelein has and the impact it has had on the students that went attended, and how she wants to pass the legacy on like her alumnus before her.

NARRATOR BIO

Chantal Mahler was born and raised in Chicago on Southport Avenue near Wrigley Field. Her love of baseball and sports can be traced back to going to games with her grandpa and gathering with her family to watch the latest game. Her family moved out to the suburbs when she was nine, where she attended St. Mary's school in Buffalo Grove and then Stevenson high school in Lincolnshire. Looking into colleges, Chantal knew she wanted to get back into the city and attend a smaller school, so Mundelein was a great choice.

She commuted all four years and worked off campus to help pay for school. She used the commute to ground herself and appreciate the beauty of driving down Sheridan Road. Chantal majored in Spanish and Communications with a concentration in Journalism; she graduated in 1989. She combined her passion for the news and sports by becoming sports editor for the Mundelein Scholar, where she was able to apply what she was learning in classes in a practical way. She was nominated and served as the senior representative in the Mundelein Student Council where she was able to bring the voice and experience of the senior class to help improve student life for the underclassmen.

After Mundelein, she has worked as an editor and reviewer and notes that she still applies the lessons and skills Sister Mary Pat Haley, BVM, Sister Mary Alma Sullivan, BVM, and Betty Prevender everyday.

INTERVIEWER BIO

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

Transcriptionist: Chris Mattix

Narrator: Chantal Mahler

Locations: Mundelein, IL and Palatine, IL via

Zoom

Interviewer: Melissa Newman

Date: March 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 Chantal Mahler, Class of 1989, on March 17, 2022, for the Share Your Story: Student Life at Mundelein Project. I'm in Palatine, Illinois, and Chantal is in Mundelein, Illinois. So to start us off, Chantal, could you just tell me a little bit about yourself, like where you were born and raised and your family?

Mahler: Sure. I was born and raised in Chicago on the North Side, about eight blocks from Wrigley Field, so that explains my allegiance to the Cubs. We lived with my grandparents up until I was nine years old on Southport Avenue. And then my parents decided when my brothers came along that we needed a bigger place. So we moved out to Prairie View, Illinois, which was as remote as it sounds. Back in the day it was all cornfields, and for a city kid, it was complete and total culture shock. And that area is actually around the Buffalo Grove/Deerfield area. So there were some established communities around Prairie View, but we were in a little subdivision that was just kind of its own little oasis. So that, as I said, was a culture shock. But I

grew to love it yet still managed to get back to the city after going to high school at Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire. And then I accepted a scholarship from Mundelein to go back to what I considered my roots and had a wonderful, wonderful time, growing experience. Everything I could have hoped for in a college experience, for going to a small school, was definitely met by Mundelein. And those were some of the best years of my life.

Q: And could you tell me how you ended up choosing Mundelein as your college?

Mahler: Sure. I really had no idea about the college process. Both of my parents did not go to college. And my dad was in ROTC, so he went into the service right after high school. And my mom went right into the workforce. So at Stevenson, it was kind of expected that you would go to college. So all of my classmates kind of already had a path and knew what they were doing, and I kind of had to navigate it by myself. But I knew I wanted a small school, and I applied to a lot of the Catholic universities in the area, and I got scholarship offers from DePaul and Mundelein. But I really liked what Mundelein offered, and so that's what I did. I accepted that and best decision I ever made.

Q: Did you guys grow up Catholic and that is why you kind of drifted more towards that sort of institution?

Mahler: Yeah. That and because Stevenson at the time, I thought, was really big. We had 367 kids in our class. And coming from a Catholic school, which I did K through eighth grade, I kind

of had that tightness and that bond, and I'm still very close with a lot of my grade school and middle school classmates. I'm close to some of my high school classmates, too, but there's just that special bond with the group from St. Mary's and Buffalo Grove. And I just wanted to be small. I also needed to be able to have flexibility, because I was basically putting myself through college. And so I needed to work and somehow figure out how to balance work and going to school full-time. And I commuted. So that was the one thing that I did miss out on was being able to live in a dorm. But again, because I had to work, I usually work three to four nights a week after my classes. And then I worked on the weekends, both as a secretary for Coldwell Banker, and also I did tons of babysitting. So that was what I was used to. And my family did have a very strong Catholic background, especially my grandparents. And it fit. Mundelein really fit. And they had the communications program that I wanted, and that turned out to be—I wasn't sure how that was going to work at a small school, but those are the best teachers I had in my entire academic career.

[05:00]

And I use everything they taught me, along with one of my high school journalism teachers. I use it every day, even now in my career, so I'm very grateful for that.

Q: Yeah, I would love to hear more about that. What teachers did you have that really influenced you and what kind of skills did they teach you?

Mahler: Sister Mary Pat Haley [BVM] was my advisor, and she was also the journalism professor at the time. And I majored in communication with concentration in journalism. And then I also had a Spanish minor. Sister Mary Pat Haley [BVM], Sister Mary Alma Sullivan [BVM], and Betty Prevender were the three professors in the communications department. Mary Alma covered media like film. Betty covered PR and marketing. And Mary Pat was the journalism professor. And through their guidance, through their leadership, I wound up becoming the sports editor for the Mundelein paper at the time, which was the Mundelein Scholar. And then my last two years, I was actually the editor-in-chief of the paper.

And again, I got to apply everything I learned from all of them. Journalism was always my passion. I always loved reading when I was a kid, and I always loved reading the newspaper. And my parents always got the Tribune and the Sun Times. And then when I got old enough, I paid to get the Daily Herald for local news. So I was a real news junkie. And the journalism classes—I even think today with things going on in the world, there isn't a time that goes by when something significant doesn't happen in the world where I think, "Oh, I wonder what Mary Alma and Mary Pat and Betty would say about this." And actually, the friends that I made in those classes, we all have that same conversation. We always bring them up. So this far removed for them to still have that kind of impact, and to have us wondering, oh, man, we would love their feedback on this and their perspective, I think, just goes to show what an impact they had on our lives.

Q: Yeah. What sort of life skills did they teach you that you carry with you today?

Mahler: Well, I'll tell you the one thing that I can remember Betty preventer saying, and that was to not be a Girl Friday. She said, "If you go into a career where you love it, great, but don't let anybody push you around. Don't let anybody give you orders. Make sure you stand up for yourself. We are training you and trying to lead you to be strong women who can survive in male-dominated fields and in a male-dominated world," basically. And I have always thought of that. And there's one instance in particular, I went to go get a new car with my dad, and it was right after I graduated from Mundelein. And I didn't have any problem going getting my first car, and I was paying for it. But we went back to the dealership and the salesman who I had worked with previously was no longer there. And we walked in and the salesman I got immediately started addressing my dad. And my dad kept saying, "It's going to be her car, she's paying for it. You need to talk to her." And he just kept ignoring that advice and kept addressing my dad. And it got to the point where I said, "Are you going to talk to me?" Thinking, don't let anybody push you around? And he just kind of dismissed it. And I looked at my dad, and we got up and walked out. And there's no way I would have had the courage to do that without that power being instilled in me through Mundelein and the strong women that were at Mundelein. I'm normally pretty laid back and slow to anger, but that really irritated me. And I really drew strength from what Betty in particular said. And we went across the street, and I got a nice new car. And the salesman addressed me and talked to me and negotiated with me. And I thought, okay, this will work. This will work. It felt like waving to the other company as we drove by in my shiny new car.

[10:00]

Mahler: So just things like that. I think I've really taken to heart that female empowerment. And not in an obnoxious way or the way some people may be put off by how we come off. And that's one of the things that we've had to overcome this negative connotation. If women express their feelings, if they express their logic, if they express whatever they express and then being dismissed. And I know that the women I know from Mundelein, we don't take to that, too well. We're all very strong. Opinionated, but we know how to back up our arguments with facts and figures and just the power of our own life experiences.

Q: Was St. Mary's also an all-girls school, or was Mundelein your first experience with that?

Mahler: Mundelein was my first experience with that, and that really didn't play a part in my decision. If I'm completely honest. They offered me a larger scholarship, but it turned out to be very valuable for all the reasons I've just stated. That you build this community of strong women, and you can't help but emulate them. And they share so much of their life experiences with you, whether it was the professors, whether it was the other students. Since we were from all different backgrounds and different ages and different upbringings. And everybody brought something to the table and all of it was worth listening to, all of it was worth exploring. And I don't think I would have gotten that at any other college. I think things were a little more serious. We had a focus, and I had never thought it was a matter of because of how repressed or how little credence female students were being given at any level. But I can look back at high school and say, "Oh, yeah, that was not right." Or I experienced my own form of that, because I became a sports editor for the Stevenson paper, and a bunch of senior guys were passed over. And they did not like that at all because I was a year behind them, and I was a female. And they just couldn't—I had a

really hard time with that. But that also gave me the strength to realize that we can do everything that you can do and some of us can do it better. And Mundelein reinforced that. It reinforced that and just, again, just built up what I think I already had inside but had never been willing to express.

Q: That's wonderful. So you said that you were the sports editor for both high school and college newspapers.

Mahler: Yes.

Q: Has sports always been a big impact on your life? You're very interested in that?

Mahler: Yes. In fact, I'll be going to my senior nephews—plural, their twins—baseball game later this afternoon. But yeah, growing up by Wrigley Field, everybody in my family, including the women who are always interested in sports: baseball, football, basketball. My grandmother loved boxing, and my grandfather or my great uncle would just say during the summer while I still lived in the city, "Let's go to the ball game." And we could just pick up and walk to the park and sit in our four dollar seats and wait for the singing peanut man to come around. So that definitely grew my love of baseball.

And then basically, if I wanted to be with the rest of the family during sporting events, I had to participate. Yeah, we are a very big sports family, and I've had the pleasure of watching my brothers play sports. I have two younger brothers.

[15:00]

And my one brother has an older daughter who goes to the University of Louisville right now. She's a junior. And then the twins, who are seniors who will be going to Concordia College to play baseball next year. I've had the pleasure of watching them grow up, and I was thinking their first game was last Tuesday, and it really hit me that they're seniors. This is it. I've spent almost twelve years between them and their sisters at the Vernon Hills Athletic Complex, and this is going to be it. We're starting a countdown. I thought, "Oh, please don't cry during the first game. That's going to be bad. They're going to make fun of you, and your tears are going to freeze to your face because it's so cold out."

But yeah, and I had the great pleasure of covering, we had a really good basketball team when I was there and the volleyball team, softball. These women competed just as hard as anybody else at any other collegiate division level. And seeing their camaraderie I know they still get together on occasion and support each other. Sports has always been a big part of my life, so it was fun. I had always thought that I needed, my original goal was to be a sports writer. But the one disadvantage is if you don't go to a big school for that, you don't have the connections like to be able to internship with say, the Cubs or whoever, and then move on to like—we didn't have like

a sports marketing department. But I got my fill and now I get my fill out. I'll write game descriptions for Facebook to the amusement of all my followers who want to know what's happening with the boys. Or even if they don't want to know what's happening with the boys, they're going to find out. So yeah, that's it. Sports and yeah, sports. That's my big thing. That's my big hobby, passion, whatever you want to call it.

Q: So when exactly did you get involved with writing for the Mundelein Scholar?

Mahler: My freshman year, actually. I was lucky enough to have Sister Mary Pat as my advisor and also in the journalism class. And she recommended that I go talk to the then editor, who I'm still in touch with. And she would give me stories to write and then I just kind of moved up the ranks. And, as I said, my last two years, I was fortunate enough to be editor-in-chief and had a great staff. I'm still very close to almost all those women who worked with me. We would be in our little teeny office down in what used to be the Learning Resource Center, which I think is the science library now. And we had our little office set up and come print day, they knew to bring me Krunchers potato chips and Dr. Pepper. Get me through the day. And then we actually had a partnership with Loyola University because we couldn't print on campus. So we would take our layout over to Loyola, and they would do the layout, or finalize the layout and then send it to the reader to print for us. And so we'd have to drop it off the Loyola, then go pick it up at the reader—I'm sorry, at Northwestern, go pick it up at the reader and then bring it back and distribute it. It was a small operation. Again, nothing like the bigger schools had. I think we came out, I want to say once a month. Yeah, I think once a month sounds right. But it gave all of us a chance to have our hand in that. If we were interested in journalism or in writing. We had a

features writer, and we had a really good news reporter and had good sports reporters to cover Mundelein and all of its goings on. I think we served as our purpose, and we sure had fun along the way doing it, so that was a great pleasure as well.

Q: Do you know when The Scholar first started at Mundelein?

Mahler: I know that it had only recently restarted when I joined. I couldn't give you the exact year.

[20:00]

I think there was a pretty long layoff in-between—before I came on and when they ceased operation the first time. I believe I'm not entirely sure, but we kind of had carte blanche to do what we wanted in terms of setting it up. And we pretty much had autonomy, complete autonomy, in the stories that we covered. And we wanted to do what was relevant to the student body as well as the faculty. So if we heard about something going on, we would go dig into it. We had good advertising people. They worked magic out of what little opportunities we had. Because not a lot of places wanted to spend money on a once a month kind of a thing. But there used to be a store called The Mustard Seed. They advertise with us all the time. That's someone that really sticks out in mind because we had a really good relationship with them. But the marketing and advertising people worked very hard to try to bring in some revenue so that we

could do different things and expand. And like I said, for such a little operation, I think we did a nice job.

Q: Did you have a supervising Sister that you had to report to in any way for The Scholar?

Mahler: Initially, Mary Pat Haley [BVM] was our sponsor. And then we had a couple of lay people who are sponsors after that. The only problem we ran into was they had conflicting obligations as well. So initially when we were first getting to know each other, it was fine, but then it was kind of hands off. But we didn't do anything to get ourselves in trouble. We realized the opportunity that we had. She did offer guidance when if we really needed something and really needed—you know if things were up in the air, we certainly looked to her for resolution or guidance. Fortunately, we weren't usually in that position, I have to say. So everything ran pretty smoothly. I would think that our biggest issue was that hitting deadlines, because even though you think you have all this time, three weeks is a long time. Well, no, it really isn't when you're juggling everything else. And those last two days before we would take it to print, were always crunch time. And everybody was jammed into the office doing their thing, and we made it work, and we couldn't have done it without each other. It was a very close collaboration.

Q: Yeah. So it sounds like those cram sessions really bonded you all through the years.

Mahler: Exactly. Yeah. We know we could work on deadline really well.

Q: So how did your experience change on the Scholar from when you were a sports editor to when you were the editor-in-chief?

Mahler: I didn't do as much writing, obviously. And the editor-in-chief is more of an administrative role in terms of I would be the one delegating assignments, checking up on what the advertising people were doing, scouring the calendar to see what assignments there could be, leading brainstorming sessions if somebody on the staff had heard something. So I didn't get to do as much writing, but it was more of a directorial position, making sure the sports editor was getting her stuff done, or the features editor was getting her stuff done, or the news editor. Did she need any help? Did she need to verify something? And then kind of read everything over, review everything, vet it, and then send it off to print. So it was not as much writing, but very hands-on in every other aspect of the paper.

Q: How did you like that in comparison? Were you sad that you couldn't write as much?

[25:00]

Mahler: I was. One of the things I got to do every once in a while was do a feature column. And I love writing, and I have a bit of a sarcastic bent to my writing, so that was always a lot of fun doing that. I think about what it would be like now to be the sports editor with all the Sister Jean [Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt, BVM] stuff. I read every article about her, and she's another one who is a huge influence. She's such a strong woman. She's such a smart woman. She is such a

role model. And I've had friends who have sent their kids to Loyola who are not Catholic, and they're just blown away by her. But one of the things I always remind them is that Mundelein had her first. Like, Loyola may have her now, but she was ours long before she was the chaplain. In fact, my best friend worked in her office all four years, so we usually try to sneak in and get to sit with her at various alumni events. Unfortunately, with my best friend, we have that little in. We can at least get to her table, if not next to her. But it would be so much fun to cover them now.

Mahler: I will admit that I had a really hard time when Loyola took over Mundelein when we merged, partly because I felt like we didn't have any notice that this was going to happen. So I think quite a few of us felt blindsided by it. But slowly but surely, Sister Jean's continued presence and continued joy with everything she's doing roped us back in, and we're so grateful that Loyola gave her the position it gave her. And now she gets to show the world how wonderful she is, and it could not happen to a better person. And I think that as much as she is associated with Loyola, I think she represents Mundelein just as much and just as well, because we had her first.

Q: Yeah. For those that knew her from Mundelein, continuing to see her so active and supporting everything that Loyola is doing. Definitely lends itself—

Mahler: Right. And we're such fan girls. My group, my class, we always make sure to take a picture with her at reunions or any kind of gatherings. I know some people have brought their

little Sister Jean bobbleheads in to get autographed. And it's so funny to me to think of her as this national, if not international, celebrity when we were just worried that we're standing straight and behaving in line at graduation. Otherwise, she might say something to us. But I could not think of a better representative for Mundelein than she is. She's just astounding at 102, she remembers names from classes forty years ago, and my friends and I are like, "Do you remember this person from our class? I don't remember this person," and she just remembers everything. She's just remarkable. Just what a woman.

Q: One other question I wanted to ask about The Scholar is, were there any scandalous stories that had to be covered that you remember?

Mahler: Not really scandalous. I think probably one of the stories that created the most response was when it was announced that they were going to knock down the Riviera Theatre. Everybody kind of, "No, you can't do that." And then just watching the gentrification in the neighborhood around Loyola and Mundelein has been astounding. Things were pretty quiet.

[30:00]

We were not a bunch of rabble rousers and didn't really have a lot of conflict or juicy stuff to cover. And exciting as that probably would have been, I think it's okay. Although I will tell you this, our news editor, Susan Terrace, would have been like a little bulldog in there if there had been some kind of story like that. Because she was relentless in getting facts, and she was not

afraid to ask hard questions. So had that ever arisen, we would have been ready for it. But like I said, things are pretty quiet on my watch, so I can't complain too much.

We did win an Illinois high school—collegiate journalism award. We came in second place. I think that was my sophomore year, so it was before I was editor-in-chief, and that's probably displayed at Mundelein in Piper Hall, I think. So we do have something to show for our work. I'm very proud of that, very proud of all the people I worked with. And we just tried to carry on the spirit of Mundelein and do what we were being taught to do, applying our educational lessons. And this gave us a chance to do it in real life, so to speak.

Q: Were there any other Mundelein social activity that you participated in?

Mahler: Being off-campus so much it was hard. I was part of what we called the commuter sorority. And basically it was a group of us who were commuters, and we just had a little place in the main building downstairs where there were lockers, and we could sit and decompress and talk to each other. Fortunately, even though I did usually commute, I did get to stay on campus on occasion when I would have film classes because they usually ran at night. And of course they would end at like nine thirty. And then I would always have like an eight or eight thirty class the next morning. So I was able to find somebody on campus to stay with on those nights. Otherwise, I would go to my grandparent's house because they still lived on the north side. But if it was really late or if it was bad weather, I got to hang out with friends and kind of experience dorm life vicariously through them.

I was involved with senior counsel my senior year. I was a senior class representative, so that got me more involved. Like I said, I'm sure I missed a lot not living in the dorms, but it suited my needs for having to work and be at home just as much as I was at school. And I had the flexibility in my schedule to go in early and I could study before a class or before a test. But mainly we would have the parades, our little parade, homecoming parade and parades for the sports teams, kick-offs or congratulations, whichever it may be. St. Patrick's Day in the cafeteria with the Dooley Brothers. Always a great memory. That was a highlight. Everybody looks forward to that every year. So I was thinking about them today, of course, with it being St. Patrick's Day. That was always fun.

Going to the games in the old gym, which was quite an adventure and just different things. I got to pick up enough here and there and make sure I put myself out there and participated in certain things so that I wouldn't feel left out. And everybody was always very welcoming. And they knew me from classes and made myself known to the various leaders on campus in terms of senior class, the ministry, whatever it may be.

[35:00]

So that I was known. I wasn't just popping in and out as classes warranted, so I was very fortunate in that. But I had that kind of experience despite the fact that I didn't live in dorms.

Q: Yeah. Sounds like you had even—maybe not even, but like a nice balance, at least between the two.

Mahler: Exactly. Yeah. I'm very thankful for that. I could stay as late as I wanted if I didn't have to work or leave as early as I needed to, but still participated in things like the international fair. And my mom made poncet because she's part Filipino, brought that in, made new friends that way. All like the dish, the way she made it. Yeah. You know, just stuff like that. You have to put yourself out there in order to get anything back.

Q: Yeah. Well said. Could you tell me what the commute was like? How far exactly were you coming from? And did you take a train or a car?

Mahler: I drove every day. Yeah. It was every day. [coughs] Excuse me. So from at the time it was Prairie View to the lake shore campus was about, I think, twenty-five to thirty miles. But I always used to go down Sheridan Road because as opposed to being on the Expressway, going down Sheridan Road is such a beautiful ride with all the trees and the old homes and what have you. It gave me time to think. And I also had this weird habit of the night before a test or the day of a test, I would try to study to a certain soundtrack or song to try to remember. You know, associate a lyric with an answer. So that's what I would do on my drives in on test day is I would put on that music, and I would go over everything in my head. And that really helped. I have a great love of music as well, not just sports. I would say music is also something that I'm

passionate about. But that usually gave me the time to think through if I had a presentation. It kind of grounded me. The drive in.

The drive home was a little busier. By that time you just want to get home. And of course, this was probably the start of a reverse commute in both ways. It wasn't just all everybody coming back into the city. And again, I used to just drive Sheridan Road. Unless it was an emergency and I needed to get some place really quickly, then I would hop on the expressway. But that just was a unique aspect of my college experience was I would just have my music on and think through things, kind of mentally make notes. And then I would always make sure I would get there early, at least half hour, hour early. Which I think was the last time in my life I was early for anything, if you ask my friends. And I would have time to either jot down my notes or go back over something. So that was really helpful for me. A train wasn't feasible at that time, and the expressway just didn't appeal to me. That is not a way to ground yourself and calm yourself in the morning. So that was not an option. So the drive was really nice. Winter obviously, was iffy. But I will say that Sheridan Road was usually plowed very well. It wasn't until you got out to where I was, where it was kind of iffy. But at that point, I'm almost home. It's okay. I can make it.

Q: And yes, it's being St. Patrick's Day today. Tell me a little bit more about this performance by the Dooley Brothers.

Mahler: They would come every year, and they would set up in the Mundelein cafeteria or Tea Room. And they would put on a show during lunchtime, like end of breakfast through lunchtime, just singing Irish songs and doing jigs and getting everybody in the cafeteria involved.

[40:00]

And those days it would be packed. People would specifically come in to see the Dooley Brothers. And I think that was one of the highlights every year for everybody. It was having them come in. And we did have a large number of students who were of Irish descent, so it had that extra added meaning for them. And it was just great fun. Just great fun being able to laugh and sing and participate with everybody else faculty, staff, whoever wandered down at the time. So that was great fun. Yeah, that was the highlight. That really was the highlight. Besides graduation, obviously. But, yeah, the Dooley Brothers were big men on campus for us.

Q: So where did you go to study or eat or just hang out when you could stay on campus for a little longer?

Mahler: Usually I would grab something at the cafeteria. And my favorite place to study was again in the Learning Center, the former Learning Center Resource Center. I would just find a cube facing the water park myself there, and if I needed to decompress, that's where I would do it. The water soothes me, same way music does. And I would just kind of space out for a little while, get myself grounded, and then start tackling whatever I needed to tackle. I thought that

was the most serene place on campus. And I remember sometimes it was very difficult to get a window seat. I didn't want to be on the interior. That kind of defeated the purpose. But just watching the seasons change, watching the color of the lake change, the ice flows, the wind, hearing the wind. It was just, again, I think, a unique experience. Having gone to Mundelein.

I recently went up to Carthage College with a friend, and they're right on a lake. And I thought this reminded me so much of Mundelein. I thought, this is right here, this spot is where I would be, I would park myself if this is where I came. But that seems to be kind of a universal feeling for anybody who goes to school by water—by a body of water, where if that's your thing, I think you can get a lot out of it just for your peace of mind and mental restoration before you really start digging in. Or after you dig in, if you need to decompress, after you've done your homework or studied or whatever the case may be. It just always had a very calming presence, at least for me.

Q: And let's see, you briefly mentioned that you were a senior class representative in the student government. What did that involve, and how did you get into that?

Mahler: I was nominated for it, which was a surprise. But it was basically just making sure that the senior class had a say in certain rule-making, certain policies, certain discussions where we could bring our voice and our experience to try to help improve things for the underclassmen, especially—obviously, the juniors. And then it also tied into graduation and making sure we kind of knew what the event planning was for graduation. And really, again, just having that say, having spent the three years there. I think some people might discount it because we're leaving,

but I thought it was very important because we've already been through it. This is what we can see as needing improvements and make those suggestions and make it easier, or whatever the case may be for the up and comers so that they don't run into the obstacles that we are into, whatever they were.

[45:00]

And again, there weren't any really big things that—nothing ever—there was really not a lot of conflict, but just a lot of suggestions, a lot of back and forth, a lot of open discussion. And we had great moderators, and they listened, which was very important. You want to feel heard, not just present. And again, I think that gave us a bridge to what things would be like in the working world in terms of being able to collaborate. Being able to voice your opinions and your suggestions and making the case for them. It gave you some ownership of your time there. At least that's how I looked at it. I can say, "Okay, these were my experiences. This is what I wish I had done differently. Maybe this is something that you could have maybe improved upon, met me halfway on whatever the case may be." But I think that things worked out pretty well for commuters. I mean, it's such a large commuter school. People tend to forget that. Especially with the Weekend College and having those folks come in. And they would come in—I know we had a number of weekend college students in some of our regular classes if that was the only time class is going to be offered. Especially like for the journalism or the film courses. I think the commuter needs were met pretty much the same way the onsite residents needs were met. So I can't complain about that. And I feel that if something did need to be addressed, that we would have been able to go to the administration and say, "Hey, this is what we're finding. Can we talk

about this?" And I always found the door to be open to the president's office, the vice president, they were willing to engage, and that was always helpful. It's nice to know you're heard, because I think in a bigger school, sometimes that can get lost. And I think that's one of the advantages of going to a smaller school, by and large, not just a smaller class size where you get more participation, I think, than you would in a lecture hall of 200 kids.

Being at Mundelein was a very intimate experience. Whether it was with extracurricular activities, whether it was with your classes, your meetings with your advisors, you always felt heard. I feel that they always looked out for the best for us while not forcing it on us. They taught us we are our own person, and we can make our decisions. And that we needed to be thoughtful, logical, emotional. You can express your emotion, but make sure you have the facts to back it up if you're going to present an opinion. And I think that all of that went a long way toward building a well-rounded person, not just a well-rounded student, but building someone who is prepared to take the next step outside of college and live in the real world.

Q: Yeah, I definitely see the connection of the life skills, not just the academic skills.

Mahler: Yes, I've been very fortunate. I still use my journalism education now because I'm an editor and a reviewer and I still do some writing and I can apply everything that I learned there. I can apply everything I learned there, whether it's the journalism aspect, the being an advocate for yourself aspect, being a strong woman.

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Which I think, as I would imagine, has been discussed before, you get this stereotype of an opinionated woman being aggressive or, you know, whatever derogatory term you want to use. And that's not what it is. It's that we have been taught how to express ourselves. And if it's something that we believe in and if it's something we're passionate about, that is how we are going to express ourselves. And if we can back it up, that's not hysterics. That is us fighting for what we believe in. And again, I don't think I would have been able to do that without having attended Mundelein. At least certainly not to this degree. And it's something that I try to also convey to my niece and nephews, that don't fall into stereotypes.

And I think that it's just a matter of environment. It's not because their parents are doing something wrong. It's more a result of their outside environment than their inside environment. Because they have a very strong mom, very strong women around them, and I will not hesitate to make them aware of how they can be better listeners, be better advocates, be empathetic. And listening, I think, is the most important part. Don't fall into those traps where you have a preconceived notion, and you're not going to listen to anything else because you don't agree with it. You need to understand both sides. And I just keep coming back to this. This is something that I would not have done had I not gone to Mundelein and had the education and the support and the guidance that I had from everyone who was there, everybody I came in contact with.

Q: And so as we're winding down a bit, how about you tell me about your graduation ceremony, and what do you remember from that experience?

Mahler: I remember it was a beautiful day, and that Judge Ilana Diamond Rovner, from the 7th Circuit was our keynote speaker and that Colleen Riley gave the student speech. And she referenced The Wizard of Oz and talked about having a heart, having a brain, having the strength, and that resonated so much with every single one of us. I mean, we still talk about that. We still talk about that. I know I have a scrapbook. I kept a scrapbook of my time at Mundelein, and next to the graduation ceremony article, I have a picture of Dorothy and the Tin Man and the Lion and the Scarecrow to represent that. Because it was perfect. That was what we were leaving Mundelein with. And I get chills just thinking about it even now. It was just wonderful. And the best thing about it is that friendships didn't end there. I know our class of '89 has a very large presence at reunions, and we're really proud of that. I'm always blown away by how many of the golden anniversary students come back for that reunion. I find it outstanding. And they're so lovely, and they're so eager to share their stories, and they're so excited to be with each other.

[55:00]

Mahler: And it's contagious. It is absolutely contagious. They're just wonderful women who embody everything that Mundelein stood for, and they're willing to share it. They're proud of it. And I think that's how my class feels. We look forward to getting together, and a lot of us gather on our own. But people make an effort to come in from out of town, just as with these other reunion groups. And I think it's fantastic. I think it's fantastic. I think it's a testament to Mundelein in bringing us together and creating these bonds that have been unbreakable and that we are all advocates for women. We still advocate for Mundelein-type experiences. And we're all

successful. We're all in good careers. We have applied what we've learned at every level, bar none from Mundelein. I think that Sister Ann Ida [Gannon, BVM], Mary Breslin [Sister Mary Brennan Breslin, BVM], and Carolyn Farrell [Sister Carolyn Farrell, BVM], they should be very proud of the legacy that they created and that they left for us. And we try to perpetuate it as much as possible and as joyfully as possible because we were very blessed to have the experiences we had. And I know I'm being very generous, speaking for everyone, but it was just a special experience and really set the stage for the rest of our lives. And you can't discount that at all.

And that's why I was eager to do this, to share my experience, because it really was just wonderful. And I tell people I went to an all women's college, and they're like, "You did what?" Like, best thing that I ever did. And it wasn't so much that it was a woman's college. It was the people who were there. It was incidental that it was a woman's college. I got everything out of it that I wanted to get out of it. I have the friendship. I have the education that I can apply. I have fantastic memories of all of the people I encountered and still am in touch with. And seeing what others, the few who came after us before the merger, I hope they found it. I think that they probably had a different experience, what with the merger being imminent, and they didn't have their own—I think it kind of crimped on the independence a little bit, having a bigger school insert itself like that. Not that I have anything against Loyola. It's a great institution. I have a lot of friends whose kids go there. I know a lot of people who went there. My cousins went there. And I know it's a great school. It still feels a little weird when I take my nephews by the buildings, by the campus. I'm like, that was a Mundelein building, and that was Mundelein building, and that was a Mundelein building. So they know where I came from. And it was obviously a life-changing experience for me.

Q: Yeah. Understandably it would still sting a little bit. I'm sure.

Mahler: It does. But Sister Jean pulls us all together.

Q: There we go. Perfect. Is there anything that we haven't touched on that I haven't asked that you want to share, or do you have any other final reflections or thoughts about Mundelein?

Mahler: I'm just really happy that I got to share this experience with so many people, and not just from my class, but from all of the women who have gone to Mundelein.

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I'm sure we all had different experiences, but I think by and large, from everybody I've ever talked to, it's been a positive experience, a very positive experience and a very unique experience. And I think that most of us would not trade it for anything. Otherwise, we wouldn't keep coming back and participating in things like this. So I think that, too, is a testament to the legacy that Mundelein is leaving. The impact that it still has on everybody's lives, and we were just very fortunate, and I'll speak for myself now. I was incredibly fortunate to have gone down this path and to have had this opportunity to have made the most of it. As far as I'm concerned I still apply what I learned. I try to pass on that same encouragement and values and enthusiasm

that I get from the alumni, my sisters who have come before us. And it's just something that I hope we can continue long after any of us are here.

Q: Thank you so much for all that you shared with me today. I definitely gained just a larger appreciation of Mundelein, as I have throughout this entire process. Because as you mentioned, everyone that I've talked to has had so many wonderful things to say. And the sense of independence they've gotten or the strength that they've gotten from their fellow students and from the professors.

Mahler: Yeah.

Q: I can tell it's just been the best time. So I'm so happy that I've gotten your stories to add to this collection now that we're going to be posting.

Mahler: Well, thank you for doing this. Without people like you, we wouldn't be able to preserve these memories and make sure that they're available to those who come after us. So I think I can speak for everybody and say thank you for all the work that you've put in on this. It's very necessary and very much appreciated.

Q: Well, thank you so much. That's my pleasure. Truly. So I'm going to stop our recording now, but I want to talk to you for a couple of minutes afterwards.

Mahler: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]