

SHARE YOUR STORY: STUDENT LIFE AT MUNDELEIN

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Kathleen Liska's Oral History

Women and Leadership Archives

Loyola University Chicago

2021

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Kathy Liska conducted by Melissa Newman on November 17, 2021. 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]: Introductions, family background, how she ended up at Mundelein, and getting interested in going to college later.

[5:00 - 10:00]: Classes she took, professors she remembers, being a lab teaching assistant, and other family members who went to Mundelein.

[10:00 - 15:00]: Mother worked for Vice President of Mundelein, commuting to school, and places on campus she frequented.

[15:00 - 20:00]: What she did in between classes.

[20:00 - 25:00]: Being a lab teaching assistant, other jobs on campus, on-campus meals, and places around campus to eat.

[25:00 - 30:00]: Making friends, more classes she took, and experience at an all-women's college.

[30:00 - 35:00]: Boys and girls learning both gender's "jobs," dating, and Mundelein socials.

[35:00 - 40:00]: Socials continued, thinking she was going to be a nun, and activities on campus she did (sorority).

[40:00 - 45:00]: Biology major's sorority, class trips, and professors that had an impact on her.

[45:00 - 50:00]: Professors continued and finding what she wanted to do at Mundelein.

[50:00 - 55:00]: Changes to Mundelein while she was attending and after, lab partners, and Civil Rights marches.

[55:00 - 1:00:22]: John F. Kennedy assassination, sticking to biology as her major, and wrap up.

NARRATOR BIOGRAPHY

Kathleen "Kathy" Halloran Liska was born and raised in Chicago with five brothers and sisters. She and her family lived only two miles from Mundelein College, so Kathy had always been familiar with its iconic Skyscraper building. Growing up, her father encouraged her to be curious about the natural world, showing her plants, animals, and creatures and taking her and her siblings to Chicago's museums. It was natural for her to then major in biology and minored in chemistry at Mundelein when she enrolled in 1960.

Living so close-by, she commuted to school and lived at home after graduating, which was how she was able to encourage her mother to also attend Mundelein beginning in 1965. Kathy graduated in 1964, and her mother and youngest sister, Mary Anne, graduated from Mundelein

in 1969. Then her mother worked as a secretary for Mundelein after graduating. Kathy's older sister, Patricia, also went to Mundelein for two years from 1958-1960, took a break to get married, and then finished her schooling at Loyola.

A large positive takeaway Kathy has from attending an all-women's high school and college was the sense of encouragement and empowerment she felt in her capabilities.

INTERVIEWER BIOGRAPHY

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

Transcriptionist: Melissa Newman

Interviewee: Kathy Liska

Locations: Madison, WI and Palatine, IL via

Zoom

Interviewer: Melissa Newman

Date: November 17, 2021

[BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW]

[00:00]

Q: Okay, we are recording. For the record, my name is Melissa Newman. I'm a graduate assistant at the Women and Leadership Archives, interviewing Kathleen Halloran Liska, class of 1964, on November 17, 2021 for the Share Your Story: Student Life at Mundelein Project. I'm in Palatine, Illinois, and Kathy is in Madison, Wisconsin. So to start us off, Kathy, could you just tell me a little bit about yourself, like where you were born, where you were raised and your family?

Liska: Sure. I was raised in Chicago, just born there, of course, and less than two miles, I think, from Mundelein College. So when we would cross Devon Avenue, all I had to do was look East and there was that building that looked like it was in the middle of the street from where I was and, of course, the tallest building around and so when I would ask Mother what it was, she would say it was Mundelein College and that that's where I would be going. (laughs) And of course, I didn't even know what high school was at the time, let alone college so. But anyway, so it was kind of bred into me, I think. (laughs) And I was raised with six children—I'm in the middle—and we were part of St. Henry's parish, went to St. Henry's School, walked everywhere we had to go except when we took the bus or the streetcar at first—when I was little, there was a

streetcar. But, then I went to St. Scholastica High School and got a ride there in the morning from a friend and then came home foot express. Nancy always said that was foot express, we walked. (laughs) So about two miles to the high school and about that to the college.

Q: And why did your mother tell you when you were growing up that you're going to go to Mundelein? What was the impetus behind that?

Liska: I think, I think that Mother always wanted to go herself because—so she was an orphan and she was raised at Maryville [Academy] in Des Plaines and for her—and although she stayed at Maryville until she was in her 20s, she—I think it was not possible for her to go to the College [Mundelein]. Let's see, when Mother was in her 20s, the College would have been in its early years because it began, I think, in 1930 or so, '33 was that the first class? Yeah. So, anyway, so I think that Mother wanted what, what we, what she didn't have. She wanted that for her daughters, too. So there were three of us sisters and then three brothers.

Q: And were you always excited to go to Mundelein? Was that something that you looked forward to even before starting?

Liska: No, I (laughs)—when I was a kid, I didn't think about college. I did start thinking about high school, maybe in 8th grade. And my older sister had gone to St. Scholastica, so then I knew that's where I was going. And I loved it at St. Scholastica. It was so much more exciting than—my elementary had been, kind of a sheltered existence, I think. All the way, kindergarten through

eighth grade. For example, there was no science. None. There were science books on the radiators, and they were about from—about levers. Mechanics, I didn't care about that. I wanted animals, and I wanted plants and living things and—so I got interested in that, I think, because of my dad. He was always pointing out things. Even though we lived in the city, there are all kinds of tiny creatures and there are birds, and then what do the birds eat? And so forth. And trees. And my dad was always helping us learn to identify things, and we would—we had to name things on our way to get ice cream if we wanted ice cream. (laughs) So I think I got started on my interest in living things with—at home as a kid.

So then I got interested in college once I was in high school, and I took high school seriously, and I decided that I was not taking sewing or cooking or singing or anything but serious things at high school because I could learn all the other things somewhere else. Somehow I figured that, and so I really liked science, chemistry, and biology, mostly biology. So I decided I'd major in biology.

[05:00]

Q: And could you tell me about your studies at Mundelein? The type of classes you had, any professors you remember?

Liska: Well, I had the first biology course, I think I had quite a young nun for a teacher, and she wanted us to learn everything. The whole book was something like 1,200 pages. And I only had

one year of beginning biology in high school, so I had a lot, a lot to learn. And so I found it difficult, but I would not be persuaded to choose a different major. I wanted to stick with that.

And then and then somewhere along the line, I decided I did not want to work in a laboratory, and so I wanted to be a teacher. And in college—so I did the student aid for two hours a day, about ten hours a week to help earn the tuition. And I—and then by I think third year, I was a lab teaching assistant in the laboratory, so that was better. And Sister Cecilia [Bodman, BVM] insisted I was a born teacher. (laughs) She thought I was so good at it. So that was encouraging, too. And just being in the teacher role was very comfortable to me. I had been a Girl Scout leader, and I had been a camp counselor every summer. I think I had a few summers by the time I went to Mundelein in camp counselor training, because I wasn't eighteen yet till late in freshman year of college.

So for me to go into biology was a natural choice. I didn't have a hard time making up my mind about a major. And then chemistry was my minor, because to teach biology you needed a teaching minor for teaching high school, because high schools in biolo— biology's in high school. So I had to have two science majors, and that was fine, too.

Q: Could you tell me a little bit about what being a lab teaching assistant was like and the types of students that you interacted with for that?

Liska: Well, I found the students were very good compared with what I learned about teaching high school (laughs) after graduating. (laughs) Yeah, the students at Mundelein were there because they wanted to be there. So that's a lot different than in high school when you have to go to class and you have to take certain classes and all this. At Mundelein, people got to choose. So that's a different ballgame in college. So, yes, they were very cooperative and bright and willing and comparatively easy to what I had to do later. (laughs)

Q: Nice preparation, perhaps. (laughs) And you also mentioned that your mother and sisters also went to Mundelein the 1960s. Could you walk me through the timeline of everyone's attendance at Mundelein?

Liska: Sure. So Pat entered in in 1958. Is that right? '58. Let's see I entered in '60. Yes, so she entered—started Mundelein in '58. But she just went the two years and then she got married. So then in—later on she finished through Loyola for her education degree. And then Mary Anne started—so I graduated in '64, Mary Anne started Mundelein in '65, 1965. And then Mother started around that time. Around that time also Mother started, I don't remember—I don't think she started in '64. I think Mother started in '65, and then she graduated same time as Mary Anne did in 1969. So Mother got a fair amount of life experience, credit, and then she was continuing ed[ucation] student. And also Mother worked at Mundelein, she was Mr. [Norbert] Hruby's secretary. So she got that job. And and then by—so I began by paying Mother's tuition and encouraging her to write the letter to be admitted and so forth in the beginning. But then Mother later got the job that she didn't even think she wanted.

[10:00]

But anyway, Mary Anne helped steer her to that, and it worked out fine. She loved it. And then she worked at Mundelein until she was seventy, Mother did. Which was until 1984. So then, so Mother always told us what was happening in case we didn't notice enough from our mailings from Mundelein. And so we went to various functions together, the three of us or maybe two of us and Mother.

Q: And could you clarify, who is Mr. [Norbert] Hruby that your mother worked for?

Liska: Hruby? Wasn't he the president at one time?

Q: Okay.

Liska: Former college president. [Note: Dr. Norbert Hruby was the first Vice President of Mundelein College from 1961-1969]

Q: (typing sounds) Thank you. And so you guys lived very close to Mundelein for all that time. Could you talk about what it was like commuting to school and how that affected your time at Mundelein?

Liska: Talk about what did you say? Talk about how what affected—? Oh the—

Q: Commuting. Commuting to school, walking, taking the bus—

Liska: Oh commuting. Oh yeah yeah. So my daily routine, my friend was Herta Kaiser and she—her dad drove—she lived one block away, so that's nothing. And so I walked over to her apartment, and her dad would drive her mom and Herta and me and drop us off along the way, and then to Mundelein. And I went every day at eight in the morning and I—because I had plenty of studying to do and I had plenty of everything to do at Mundelein. Anyway I—and I didn't take just twelve credits. I don't get this business that people are taking twelve credits now in college. It was more like sixteen and sometimes eighteen or nineteen. Yeah, it was plenty. It was a full load. It was considered a full load. (laughs) It wasn't even considered overload (laughs) at that time. But anyway, so I stayed all day and then—and I brought two sack lunches, one for lunch and one for supper. And then I went to the—either the Mundelein library or the Loyola library. Sometimes I needed a change of scenery. So I went over to the Loyola library. And then I went home every day about nine at night. I usually took the bus from the Loyola station. I think I got the bus there and I think it went on—turned and went on Devon.

Q: And in terms of the studying on campus or at Loyola, was Loyola's campus very free and open to Mundelein students then?

Liska: Yes. Yes, it seemed to be. I didn't know any student who took a class there, but I think there were some, but I can't remember any in particular, but I think that probably some did. But

as far as going—oh, so and also I went to the church at Madonna della Strada [Loyola University Chicago's main chapel on campus]. They had a four thirty mass, and they were one of the first to have the guitars in the church, (laughs) so that was different and I liked that. And then I ate and went to the library there [at Loyola] or the library at [Mundelein], but I didn't go to mass every single day, but I often did.

Another thing I did at Mundelein is I took a gym course every term because I wanted to get some fun and physical movement and learn something in the gym. So I did that also. I first took swimming because I wanted my water safety instructor, and so we had those courses, life-saving and water safety instructor, at Mundelein. I did those. Then I did the dance and the fencing. And fencing, in fencing another friend wanted to go to the city tournament and she insisted that I should just please go with her because it was a bad neighborhood, and she couldn't possibly do that on the bus herself. So I agreed to go with her and I said, "Well, as long as I'm going, I'll play in the tournament too." So, because I had had the fencing classes by then, and I was probably still enrolled in fencing. And so I did and I got the third place in the city women's (laughs) tournament, and I didn't even have the initial (laughs) I didn't even initiate the whole event there, this other friend did.

[15:00]

But I knew that I only knew a certain amount of technique in fencing, so I knew that I had to be fast, and I knew that that was my—that would be my only chance. Because once the oth—my opponent gets any advantage, I would be finished. So I managed to just go right on the button when it was time, and I got points right away, so that helped. (laughs)

Q: Pays to be bold!

Liska: Kind of a funny experience.

Q: And so when you were on campus all day, obviously you were in classes, but then what other sorts of things were you doing on campus in between classes?

Liska: Well, for one thing, I worked at—I had a lot of studying to do. I had to study. I'm not the kind of student who could read the biology chapter and remember it. I had to memorize it. There are too many parts to the cell, too many chemical interactions going on in all living things. So studying and then working at school. And I did not hang out in the Smoker. So my best friend from high school and I parted ways because she became a smoker and hung out in the Smoker. And she actually had time to play bridge (laughs) downstairs in the Smoker. So I didn't like it in the Smoker. It smelled too much. And I didn't have free time like that for playing games.

And what else did I do? I would take a walk by the lake [Lake Michigan]. I would—once in a while—no, I was working and studying and going to class. I was not, I did not do anything like—I know people went to a bar sometimes in the late afternoons. I didn't do that. You could do that because I turned eighteen in late fall. And then I think that you could be eighteen for a couple of years there. Maybe it was, maybe it was '62 or so when they changed the law to twenty-one. I don't know. It didn't matter to me. I didn't—I never liked alcohol. I still, I can't sit

around and drink. I don't do that yet. (laughs) I'll have one glass of wine maybe once every six or twenty-five weeks. I don't know. (laughs) When we have wine here—so sometimes family members bring wine here, and it sits around for a period of time. Then I realize that it's no good after a certain period of time. So I just pour it into whatever I'm cooking. It doesn't matter because wines go into things like that. (laughs) So I do that 'cause I cook various stews and any stew can handle some wine.

Q: And you mentioned your friend would go to the Smoker. What was that and where was that located?

Liska: So in the basement of the Skyscraper [Mundelein College's main academic building]—because everything was in the one building—in the basement was the locker room and a bookstore, where we got all our books. And so the locker—the locker area, everybody had a locker. So there were a thousand lockers down there in the basement. Little ones, not full height. You just stuffed everything into the little half-height locker. And then and there was a lounge at the east end of the basement. No windows. I don't even know how much ventilation it had. It always smelled like serious ashtrays with a million cigarettes that ought to be put out. (laughs) But anyway, yeah, people hang out down there. So I don't know the percent of college women who smoked, but considering there were roughly 1,000 in the building, there sure were not that many in there. There were maybe fifty in there or sixty at a time.

But also I had to do—see in biology, I had to study my cat. So you have to know everything about the dead cat. You have to be able to dissect the nerves, the veins, the arteries, every muscle. Okay, so that was just one semester I had that. But other semesters I had other things that I had to study and poke around with in the lab. So I did that. I would go back to the lab with a friend. Sometimes there would be other people there.

[20:00]

The teacher would usually tell us when we could use the lab. So I did that also. I did that in chemistry, too. Some of the chemistry—well, there was one class in particular in chemistry, it was called quantitative analysis. And you had to measure these teensy-weensy little specks of dust and know how much iron was in it and how much copper was in it and all that. And we had to do that. And that was in a private room, a private lab. And we each had a little scale that—with tiny little parts, and you had to measure everything. So there were different classes, different semesters, that required a lot of extra time to complete the assignments and memorize everything and so forth. So once I was a lab assistant, that was good, because then I had to, you know you have—you learn things real well when you're teaching (laughs) teaching somebody else.

Q: And did you have another job besides the lab assistant on campus?

Liska: Well, sometimes I did the phone, the switchboard. Sometimes I did the elevator, but generally I did—generally, my hours were in the lab. One lab or another there with—Sister Cecilia was the department chairman and she would tell me— assign me various jobs.

Q: And what was it like being an elevator operator?

Liska: Well, the (laughs) the elevator, well, that was kind of fun because you had a crank handle. You didn't have—it didn't go automatically. It only went with a driver. So the crank handle, you would turn it to the right and it would start to go. And then you had to stop it exactly at the floor. The door would not open unless the elevator was positioned properly, exactly where the floor meets the, you know, the elevator meets the floor of the level. So—but I was not generally an elevator operator. I was generally in the lab, but I did other things sometimes. I might get an assignment in an office collating papers or something like that, copying.

Q: You mentioned that you normally took two sack lunches 'cause you were there on campus all day. But did you ever take a meal on campus or go off campus for meals?

Liska: I did, I did. So I signed up for dinner at the—what was the lunch room called—anyway at where the overnight students stayed, and they had dinner. So I did that. But I didn't really do that much. For one thing, I didn't have a buddy, you know, I didn't really know the students because something like eighty or ninety percent were commuters. So nobody else who was a daytime student stayed for dinner that I could figure out. So I did it for a couple weeks, but it wasn't a

good fit for me so— 'cause I didn't—I wasn't really getting to know anyone very well there. So what I did, I branched out another way. Nancy, my smoking friend and I would go, (laughs) she would stay about once a week at school, and we would go over to Grill, right near the "L" [Chicago's elevated public transit system] stop on Sheridan road, and we decided we really liked grilled cheese sandwich, and we asked the cook to put tomato slices in it. So we thought we were really adventurous going there. And that was really the first time I ever went to any restaurant on my own. Before that, Nancy and I would go to Walgreens and get one sundae and split it between the two of us. Walgreens used to have a counter when we were teenagers, but really I did not go to restaurants. Didn't go—our dad brought us for ice cream once in a while. Mother would get us something once in a while.

[25:00]

But to sit down with the whole family or with other people at a restaurant was just not part of my experience except in dating, 'cause after a school dance we would always go, a few couples, to a restaurant. But anyway, I had very limited experience with restaurants, but I branched out a little bit there. And that was all. That was as far as I got.

Then I had a new good buddy at Mundelein. Alice. And Alice always brought a sack lunch also. That's how Alice and I met. She was sitting on the floor in the locker room eating her sack lunch. I said, "Alice, I notice you're eating here. How about we go outside and eat?" Because I always found someplace better than the locker room to eat (laughs)—to eat my lunches.

So—but anyway, I got very good in biology, and pretty soon the smarter students were asking me for help, and I was amused with that and always ready to help. But you know, some people do—are stronger scholars in high school. I was strong enough, but not—I didn't come to seeing closer to my capacity for learning until I was into Mundelein about third year, and then by third year I even got to arguing with the teacher. (laughs) But that took a lot of nerve. But once in a while, I remember bringing problems to Sister Cecilia and saying, "What is this man doing trying to shove this down our throats when we haven't even learned the first chapters?" Anyway, stuff like that. Yep. (laughs)

I also took French, and that was fun. I didn't enjoy English literature as much as I enjoyed French. Of course, I didn't always understand the French, (laughs) but working on it was fun. So that was a couple years of French and a couple year—and then all the biology and then the chemistry. I took one music course. I needed a couple more education hours, so I took a teaching of music course just for fun. And that was fun. That was the easiest course I ever took at Mundelein. (laughs)

Q: Did you have to know about music to teach—?

Liska: Well, I knew enough because I had some piano in my background. When I was a kid, sixth and seventh and eighth grade, I had piano at home with a piano teacher that Mother had found for us.

Q: And can we back up a little bit, to— you mentioned dating briefly. What was that like at a women's college?

Liska: Oh that was—well for or one thing, I loved going to an all women's high school and college because there were no men around. And I didn't realize—I did not know until much later that some of my friends who went to co-ed schools for high school or college, they felt somewhat intimidated because they didn't want to show the boys how smart they were. They didn't want to be too smart, that the boys had to be the smart ones. The boys had to be the class president or whatever it was. Anyway, going to both the high school and the college just for women was—it was great because whatever had to be done, women could do it. Whatever had to be learned, whatever scholarship had to be achieved, anyone—a woman could be anything. And that was not what you heard in society in 1960 or in the late '50s when I went to high school. But we learned that the high school was a college prep high school [St. Scholastica High School]. But I didn't know that at the time. I didn't care. Didn't matter. I was just going to high school. But, you know, figuring it out later, that was probably one of the most college prep high schools. Well, in addition to Immaculata [High School]. Immaculata had to be because BVMs [Sisters of the Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary] (laughs) at Mundelein and at Immaculata.

[30:00]

So, but I didn't understand all that till later. But anyway, later when I (clears throat) talking to women friends after I got married and grew up and all that, so many women felt like they could not blossom in their school in their school years, same school years as I had. But then I was in a city, and then I moved from there to a smaller city, Madison [Wisconsin]. So it's—there's that

urban emphasis, too, in a larger city that I grew up with. But the way that —once in a while at home, Dad would—when Mom asked one of the boys to do something in the kitchen Dad would say, "Nope, doesn't need to." And Mother would say, "They need to learn everything just like the girls do." So Dad was more of a traditionalist, but Mom insisted that we all needed to know everything that we needed to know. We couldn't just be dependent on others all the time. So I didn't feel that business, that girls don't do such and such. I never grew up with that because of the high school and then Mundelein, for sure, because Mundelein was run by women. And there were, in the biology, there were some students who were pre-medical students, pre-med. And they went on to be medical doctors, and some were going on to grad school.

So we were—okay, so you asked about dating and I started talking about school. Well, just (laughs) just the—yeah, I didn't worry about—see I always dated. My best friend, Nancy, did not in high school. So Nancy was my best friend all through high school. We could do anything together, swimming in the lake when it was cold, anything. Riding—we took our bicycles from farther than Mundelein all the way downtown to the [Chicago] Loop. Our one speed, balloon-tired bicycles. Now, we never told our mothers where we were going. We just took a sack lunch and left. We also didn't carry money, nor did we have a phone. Nothing. We had no plan B. If you got a flat tire, you walked your bicycle back. But we never got flat tires out when we were far from home. It was a magical thing like that. So anyway, yeah, so I always did tons of things with Nancy. But with all the school dances, the high school dances, we girls invited a boy. They invited us to their dances. Oh, my Internet connection is unstable it says. I don't know what that means. I think it just—because we have TDS Internet, it's not that great. But anyway, so I always went out to movies and things, dating. Oh, that started in teen club in high school. That's how I

got to meet some some young men. Anyway, I went to all the dances, and I didn't mind if I wore the same dress. It didn't matter to me. My sister and I traded dresses. We made dresses, we bought dresses. I babysat. That was another job. I babysat, but only on—usually on a Saturday night, because social things were more on Friday nights, both in high school and again in college.

In college, we did have socials. We had socials at Mundelein. Males, men were invited from various (laughs)—from various colleges, and they came. I guess they wanted to meet us, too. And we went (laughs) to their socials. So Mundelein always had—somehow or other, there was always a chartered bus for us to hop onto and go to IIT [Illinois Institute of Technology] to University of Chicago. Well, Loyola we could just walk to. But then there were college weekends. We went to [the University of] Notre Dame [in Indiana]. So the bus would take us from Mundelein to Notre Dame, stay overnight at St. Mary's College in Notre Dame and go to the football game.

[35:00]

Meet up with the men, go to the dance. We did that at St. Joseph's [College] in [Rensselaer,] Indiana also. We did that at St. Mary's [the College of] Saint Teresa's in Winona, Minnesota. So there were the—so we mixed around. And then all of us knew friends, and we fixed up our friends with our other friends' friends, friends of friends. So there was plenty of action with men. And at that time, fortunately, dating was very easy. There was a good night kiss, and that was it. Nothing more was ever expected, and that was fine. So anyway that was, yeah, that was all easy. And I felt like I had to send the men away because one young man wanted me to make a plan to

marry him. I said, "I just want to finish college. I just want to finish college now, I don't-" "Well, how about after College?" I said, "Well, we can talk about that after college." (laughs) Anyway, I just was not interested in any serious relationship while I was at Mundelein.

Oh! That's not all. I was going to be a nun! There was that. And freshman year of college, I remember I had a sweater I was knitting. It took me a couple of years to finish it. All black because I was going to be a nun. But anyway, that whole thing went by the wayside after a while. So, but meanwhile I was doing plenty of dating. I had no shortage of—think I was a little better-looking when I was young. (laughs) More attractive. (laughs)

Q: Why did you think you were going to be a nun? And how did that fall by the wayside?

Liska: Yeah, so all the women who were working that I knew were nuns. I mean, there were women working in the store, but those were other women and odd women. (laughs) (background noise) I didn't have any lay teachers. Oh, I did have one in elementary. We had a drama coach, and she also taught us tap dancing. That was one of the most fun things in school. Tap dancing. And so, yeah, I did have one lay teacher, but she was a single woman, and she seemed to have a very odd life. All the women I knew were mostly mothers. That was another thing, though. I also wanted to be a mother, so I didn't quite have the whole thing figured out. Somewhere (laughs), somewhere along the line, I figured it out.

Q: Okay. And let's see, what else do we have on here? Did you participate in any particular Mundelein social activities on campus?

Liska: Mundelein-only social activities? No, just the—we got to be social in the lab time because we always had a little bit of waiting time. So we got to know each other pretty well just in the lab and then at lunchtime and hanging around late. There were only very few who stayed late in the library or in the building. I did not do any of the clubs. Well, there was Tri-Beta. There was a sorority for the biology. Biology sorority, but that was—no, the social, I did all the social things that the school offered in terms of of going to the other colleges on the weekends. I did most of those. I think that I did most of those. I also joined up with the Outing Club when they went skiing, because that was another thing I wanted to do. I had wanted to go skiing. Somehow I got that into my head as a teenager that I wanted to go skiing, snow skiing.

[40:00]

And of course, there wasn't even enough snow, and it didn't last long enough. And in Chicago it would melt and then freeze to ice so you could go sledding, but you couldn't really go skiing anywhere there. But I learned about, then when Mundelein offered this outing trip to go skiing, my younger sister, Mary Anne, and I asked if she could sign up, too, and she could. So apparently there wasn't too full a bus. And a whole bunch of us went up to a place on Lake Geneva, Majestic Hills near—in the Lake Geneva area. And we just—and so my sister and I were quite adventurous, and we tried every slope on that hill on our first time on skis. And we kept (laughs) running into the bales of hay that are put there to protect you from hitting a tree. (laughs) But after a while we realized that no one was using the hay except us. We had no idea

how they did it. And at the bottom of one of the hills was the parking lot. So they had all kinds of hay lined up there. I guess they knew about some of us from Chicago who would come and not know what we were doing. But yep, I tried that, but that was it. I didn't get to go skiing anymore until after I started teaching and earned money, and then I could go and I rented a few times, and then I bought my own equipment, and I did that. But that was after college.

Q: And the Tri-Beta sorority for biology, were you participating in that or—

Liska: Oh yes.

Q: Was that just something you knew—? Okay.

Liska: Yes, yeah I did. But all the biology majors did. And I don't remember getting together with any other colleges, but I suppose we did. I know that Sister Cecilia had us quite well organized, the biology majors, and we did go on field trips. We went to the Dunes—Indiana Dunes. We went to study a succession of the plants, plantings, and trees. And then we went to the University of Chicago. We went to various conservatories in Chicago. We went to—she brought us to different science libraries. Sister Cecilia wanted us to know all about the area and how it fits into biology. So there were some of those on Saturdays or on—take an afternoon away from school. So we did—I went to various things like that, but it must have been—yeah it must have—she must have seen it as a necessity, Sister Cecilia, because she organized these trips, whereas later on with us and our kids, we always brought our kids to everything that you

could bring a kid to in the area and in the nearby states. But she must have known that we didn't have that advantage, us Chicago kids. Our dad brought us to every museum, Mother brought us downtown, too, but Dad made sure to bring us to [the Museum of] Science and Industry and Natural History Museum, [Shedd] Aquarium, [Adler] Planetarium. Yep, so.

Q: And what faculty or job supervisors or other Mundelein staff would you say had the biggest impact on you and what were your—what was your personal relationship with them like?

Liska: Well, I finally—so I didn't like literature, English literature. And I had a teacher who was very good, but she was from England and she had a very strong accent. So anyway, I wound up liking the course in the end, and I kept the books. I still have them even. But (clears throat) but I wound up liking literature more. I think it was Sister Rose Sharon, or is it Sharon Rose [Mary Sharon Rose, BVM]? (laughs) Anyway, she taught an education course with literature, I think, and she really made sure that we chose our own reading materials and that we chose things we wanted to read and liked.

[45:00]

So then, so that was much more about the students' enthusiasm for what they were reading.

Whereas with the British writer's course, that teacher was more, far more interested in giving us the information. Was more—became—it all became more meaningful to me later on when I was able to choose things that I wanted to read.

Let's see, teachers who had a big influence. Well, Sister Marina [Kennelly, BVM], certainly, she was chemistry department, chair of the chemistry department. She taught the chemistry, the organic chemistry. Well, that was a good thing to know, organic chemistry, for—even for teaching, because everything to do with biology is all organic chemistry. So, yeah, that was good I did fine in there.

And so you're kind of asking me if I liked my other courses. I did not like economics, although I always did fine with math. But we were learning about the economic situation in every different continent, in many different countries on the planet. And I had an idea that didn't work real well in that class. That it's not all—it's not only gross national product that matters, it's are the people healthy? Do they have what they need? So—but anyway, no, I couldn't convince anyone of that (laughs) in that class. So I had to go along with the whole thrust of the economics at the time.

Q: And you'd think you would—

Liska: Then later on I did go back. Huh? I didn't hear all that.

Q: No, please go ahead. What were you going to say?

Liska: Oh, please go ahead. Oh, I was going to say that later on I went to Ireland. So after I had a few years teaching and saved my money—oh because I still lived at home. I still lived in the family apartment, which was—my younger sister tell—used to tell me to move out, she needs

more space, but it didn't matter, I stayed. Anyway, so I saved my money, and I went to Ireland with another Irish cousin. And I got to see how the people lived there, which they were very very poor, but they were healthy, and they had what they needed. But yeah, they were poor from our standards. So but yeah, anyway, I enjoyed traveling in Europe. That was great. That was my first flight. I flew to New York City and then to Ireland, England, Europe, went camping with my good friend Alice from college and others. Camping, hostels, youth hostels, economic—economical accommodations.

Q: Were there any experiences you had, looking back at your time at Mundelein that you felt were very meaningful to you?

Liska: The whole thing was very meaningful. I still had—yeah I still, I was, I somehow was some kind of a serious student. And I just I learned at Mundelein that I wanted to be a teacher. I learned while I was there that I wasn't going to be a nun. (laughs) So the whole thing was meaningful. I did a lot of growing up at Mundelein. I had a more sheltered life before then. But during Mundelein, I don't think I even went to Indiana when I lived in Chicago as a teenager.

[50:00]

See our family did not have a car, so we went where the buses would take us and the "L" and the subway and our bicycles. We would take our bicycles well into the northern suburbs, all along the lake [Lake Michigan] and go swimming. Even though they have regulations, we knew how

we could go swimming. Nancy and I did all that exploring. And but yeah, I did all kinds of new things: skiing, going out-of-state, visiting other colleges, lots of things.

Q: And were there any changes on campus that you noticed when you first started at Mundelein versus when you graduated? Any physical changes to campus or rules?

Liska: Well, I think that I think that the nuns started dressing differently. But see I first entered Mundelein in 1960, so I don't think that the change in dress came until maybe '63 or '64. But then but then all they were doing were little changes like shorter skirts and shorter veils. But then later on, all the big changes, they the nuns gave up their habits altogether after a while.

Q: But that was after you had graduated?

Liska: That was after after I after graduated. But every time I would go back for a visit or something. And then too, Sister Cecilia [Bodman] always kept her habit. Some of them did. They always kept their habit. The last time I saw Sister Cecilia was five years after I graduated. No, that's more than five years, fifteen years later. Yeah. I brought her our last baby to see. I don't think I had brought her any of the other ones, (laughs) but my mother was so involved at the college, and she wanted me to come see come see see Bodman, (laughs) so I did. And yeah, so some of them kept their habits till the end, it seemed. But when I would go back you know then I wouldn't recognize the nuns because they had regular clothes on.

There were—when I was at Mundelein, there were many many students who were nuns. They lived across the street in the Scholasticate [built for living accommodations for BVMs and Sister students at Mundelein], and so they were in all the classes. They were in all the classes and in the halls and lots of lots of novices in the novitiate with the white veil rather than the black veil. As well as all of us students, lots of people, plenty crowded, busy time.

So at— did I already tell you at Mundelein the morning classes ended at— so the morning class would end at 11:50, and then the first class in the afternoon started at 12:10. So everybody had that twenty minute break. So there was a lot of of meeting up with with this one or that one for whatever reason at that time, and a lot of eating a quick lunch at that time. If you know if you— for those who had a class before and after, not not everybody did, of course. But if you wanted to meet somebody, you could always meet—I'm talking about other students—you could always meet them at that time and then make a plan for the next. Because because in biology and in chemistry, I always had a lab partner, and it would be a different partner for each thing that you're doing, each class, each experiment, each— so we would get together so that we could have the same information in our results, in our experiment.

Q: And were there any specific world events or national events that you recall more than others and how that might have affected campus life?

Liska: Well, in—yes. So there were there were the people— I did not go down South for any of the Civil Rights marches, but there were some of those and some went, and I didn't go. My good

friends didn't go either. Nobody that I was— what I was regularly with went. But I know that I know that some did.

[55:00]

And at that time there were a few Black students in sch— at Mundelein, not a lot, but there were some. There were some in high school. In my experience, I would see Black people when I went downtown or on any public transportation, on the buses or the or the "L's" or the subway. But I didn't, I wasn't I was not aware of any of the shops a Black person couldn't go in or sitting at a counter. I didn't think that was part of—I did not think that was a problem in Chicago. If it was, I sure didn't know. And but another major thing that, of course, affected everyone was when John [F.] Kennedy was shot.

Q: Do you remember where you were when that happened and how you heard the news?

Liska: I was in school, and I think, at Mundelein, and I think that they may have canceled classes the rest of the day. I don't know exactly, but I remember I walked home and I watched what there was on the TV. So I think that they canceled classes the rest of that day. And I don't remember what day of the week it was or what about the next day? I don't remember.

Q: Do you remember your reactions from hearing that the President of the United States has been assassinated?

Liska: Yes. I was completely shocked and and very tearful. I just couldn't believe it.

Bewildering, yeah. I had never heard of anybody I knew in any way or anyone I knew about who was shot. I had heard gunshot once, by then when I was out with my boyfriend, Davy Jones. We went to a movie and we were walking—for some reason we were walking toward the theater. Maybe we had taken a walk at ten o'clock at night. I don't know. Or at eight o'clock. Anyway, it was dark and one car came by and shot at another car. I heard that shot and I—so that was the first time I heard a shot. And then I never heard any more shots or I didn't hear about any shots till Kennedy was shot. But anyway when that happened, when I was a teenager, Dave Jones and I just ducked in a—in an apartment alcove or something like that and waited, and they left. They kept driving, whoever they were. But I was surprised about that because that was not far from Mundelein. It was just off Sheridan road, just a little bit north of Mundelein. But hearing a hearing a shot and knowing that someone was shot was not part of my experience. Other than that.

Q: Yes, but that's good. Definitely.

Liska: Yeah.

Q: And has there been anything maybe that I haven't asked you about that you—that's come to mind that you'd like to share?

Liska: Let's see, let's see, let's see. Well, I think that the main thing at at Mundelein was that I learned to be a real student. I had to be or I couldn't major in biology. I think that I had a C the first semester in biology or maybe the first quarter, but maybe the first semester. And whoever I had as an advisor tried to dissuade me from majoring in biology, and I just said, "I'm majoring in biology" (laughs), and so I knew I had to work really hard, so I did.

Q: Well, it looks like we've reached the end of the questions that I have for you today. I wanted to say thank you again so much for sharing these stories with me. It's been really wonderful hearing about your experiences at Mundelein, so I really appreciate your time. I know that we're just at about an hour, so I'm going to stop recording now, but I'm going to stay on so that we can talk about next steps.

Liska: Oh, okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]