SHARE YOUR STORY: STUDENT LIFE AT MUNDELEIN

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Karen Szymanski's Oral History

Women and Leadership Archives

Loyola University Chicago

2021

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Karen Szymanski conducted by Melissa Newman on November 29, 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] Szymanski's childhood, family background, education background, and her decision to transfer to Mundelein College.

[5:00-10:00] Szymanski discusses her choice to go to Mundelein, the political climate of the 1960s, her experiences with staff and faculty at Mundelein, her major, classes she took, and religion at Mundelein.

[10:00-15:00] Faculty and critical thinking at Mundelein, Szymanski's experience graduating in three years.

[15:00-20:00] Szymanski's experience with a correspondence course and her time studying abroad in Germany.

[20:00-25:00] Szymanski's time in Germany, her work study with Sister Frances Shea, Szymanski's early feminism.

[25:00-30:00] Changes in the Catholic Church and Mundelein College, feminism and anti-war activism on campus.

[30:00-35:00] Szymanski's activism and protest experience and her time in Northland Hall.

[35:00-40:00] Szymanski's experience living off-campus, changes at Mundelein, and classes that had an impact on her time at Mundelein.

[40:00-45:00] Szymanski's relationship with faculty such as Jean Kellogg, student life off-campus, recreation, socialization, and the relationship between Mundelein College and Loyola University Chicago.

[45:00-50:00] Dating at Mundelein, Szymanski's decision to not attend graduation, Sister Ann Ida Gannon and Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt.

[50:00-56:35] Working at Mundelein, socializing after graduation, Szymanski's post-graduate career, her involvement as an alumni, working with the Gannon Center and Women and Leadership Archives

NARRATOR BIO

Karen Szymanski (née Appelt) was born on the south side of Chicago in 1958 before moving to Clarendon Hills with her parents when she was four years old. She originally went to Webster College in St. Louis, Missouri to study drama, but was put off of the program after a professor told her that women could not be directors. Karen decided to transfer to a college closer to home,

but still wanted to live on campus. Mundelein ended up offering the most in financial aid, which convinced her to attend.

Her time at Mundelein helped Karen grow her confidence on how to articulate and support her points of view. She demonstrated her advocacy by participating in demonstrations in downtown Chicago with her friends for the feminist movement and anti-Vietnam war protests. Along with her English major, Karen worked in the English Department helping with administrative tasks as part of her work study. Karen and her friends liked to frequent Hamilton's for burgers and a coke and fondly remembers the sign of the waving knight at Sir Whoopee's sandwich place. She finished her senior year studying abroad in Stuttgart, Germany.

After graduating, she began working for Mundelein which is when she developed stronger relationships with the nuns that used to teach her. Her life eventually took her out of Chicago, but in 1990 she returned to the city to do freelance communication work and got involved in the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership and helped develop its strategic plan.

INTERVIEWER BIO

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

Transcriptionist: Keeley Shoudel

Interviewee: Karen Szymanski	Locations: Palatine, IL and Lake Bluff, IL via Zoom
Interviewer: Melissa Newman	Date: November 29, 2021

[BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW]

[00:00]

Q: Alright, we are now recording. For the record, my name is Melissa Newman. I'm a graduate assistant at the Women and Leadership Archives, interviewing Karen Szymanski, class of 1971, on November 29, 2021, for the Share Your Story: Student Life At Mundelein Project. I'm in Palatine, Illinois, and Karen is in Lake Bluff, Illinois. So to start us off, Karen, could you please tell me a little bit about yourself? Like when you were born, where you were raised and your family?

Szymanski: Okay, so I was born in 1951, just turned seventy, and I was born on the South Side of Chicago. We moved to Clarendon Hills when I was four. So I grew up in Clarendon Hills, which when we first moved out there really was semi-rural, which is one of the reasons my dad loved it, because he grew up in Poland on a farm. And my mother didn't love it because she was a Southsider and very urban. And my dad got a job at Argonne National Laboratory, where he was the head chef for feeding all of the scientists and graduate students and visitors on campus. Over time, it became overseeing the preparation of fresh food for three thousand people a day. So in many ways, food was part of my upbringing. We also had a garden in our backyard.

Let's see. So I grew up in Clarendon Hills. I went to Notre Dame Grade School in Clarendon Hills, Hinsdale South [High School], two years at Nazareth [Academy] in LaGrange, and then a year at Hinsdale South. And then I went off to college, initially at Webster College in St. Louis, thinking I would be a drama major, and then ended up coming back to Chicago after my first

year. Let's see if there's anything more. Went to Mundelein, worked for Mundelein for two years in the admissions office, and then went to graduate school at Syracuse University. Got a master's in English, a PhD in American Studies, had a postdoc, and then hit the job market at a bad time for people in the humanities and reinvented my career. So I have worked in communications and corporate settings. I've worked as a consultant in communications and change management, and then back in 2000, went back to school and went through an intensive year-long program to become an executive coach, which is what I've been doing ever since then.

Q: All right. And could you talk a little bit about why you transferred from Webster to Mundelein, why you chose Mundelein, and maybe what didn't work and made you want to transfer?

Szymanski: Okay, so there were a couple of things. One was that it became clear that really I wasn't suited to the drama program, even though I had been in plays at Hinsdale South and actually at St. Joseph's Seminary in Oakbrook, which no longer exists. And when I told the head of the program that I actually discovered I really wanted to be a director, he told me that women were not directors. So that was in the late 1960s, and it was also a very expensive school. And I had a scholarship, but not an extensive one. And I knew it would be easier if I came back to the Chicago area. So Mundelein was not my first choice. I really wanted to go to Northwestern and did get accepted, but had a very minimal scholarship from them. Whereas Mundelein had offered me a very, very nice scholarship and work study, and it was far enough away from home so I could live on campus so I didn't have to commute. That was important to me. I really wanted that independence.

[05:00]

Szymanski: And so at the beginning, I confess that I had real reservations about Mundelein because what I had heard about it referenced the term Mundle-Bundles, which apparently was very common at the time, and it reflected historically. So this is the late '60s. It's a time of great ferment with the Vietnam War, with the civil rights movement, with the feminist movement, and the Mundle-Bundle term, I think, came out of Mundelein's long history as having a strong home economics program. And women would come to the school, many of them, to train in home economics and often then to get married. So they would be prepared to be, I don't know, good wives and mothers. So the thing that was really wonderful, quickly, is I found out that there were some great people that I met, fellow students, mainly initially at the Northland dorm because we were on the same floor and got to know each other. And then the teachers, the professors who were quite extraordinary. So I ended up becoming a big fan of Mundelein, though I only stayed there two years. I graduated from college in three years. My graduating class is 1971. That really reflected graduating early. And also I finished up my schooling spending three months in Germany at a language school. So I was kind of out of there very quickly.

Q: Could you tell me a bit more about what you studied at Mundelein and what the courses were like?

Szymanski: Sure. I majored in English, so that was primarily what I did and had amazing teachers in people like Mary Griffin, Mike Fortune, Jean Kellogg, Myrtle Posmantur, Yohma

Gray. It was a really strong department. And in fact, just recently I was in a conversation with a client, and we were talking about conflict and how conflict really reflects differences of perspective and worldview. And I said to him, "I am thinking back to a course that I took in rhetoric and logic," which would have been with Yohma Gray, back in the late 60s, and one of the things she talked about was rights in conflict. That you can have two individuals or groups that have very different perspectives, and there may be a great deal of validity on both sides, and yet they come together, and they clash because they're not really looking to find the common ground. The way we look now at the deeper issues around conflict. So I mean, even today I'm pulling threads out from things I remember and that I learned that were really powerful.

Q: And what other sort of classes besides your English classes do you remember?

Szymanski: Okay, I remember taking some philosophy classes. I was very interested in psychology, which is actually one of the things I also was exploring at Webster. Yet at the time it was not a strong psychology department. So I didn't really—I don't even remember if I took a class with that. So I'm not sure. But I know I did take a couple of philosophy classes, and then also being introduced to a—I don't know if it was called world religions or something like that. So it was my first introduction and exposure to Buddhism, Hinduism, global religions beyond Catholicism and even beyond Christianity. So that was a really powerful eye-opener.

Q: And Mundelein being a Catholic institution, how was that embedded in the coursework or in any traditions or activities at the school?

Szymanski: So I believe Mundelein was both Catholic with a big "C" and Catholic with the little "C" in that the perspective in general was very expansive, which if it hadn't been, I probably wouldn't have lasted there very long because my own perspective is very expansive.

[10:00]

Szymanski: So there was just always I mean, even in the literature classes that I took, I had a course in the European novel with Jean Kellogg and then the Russian novel, just a broad range of things, not just narrowly American or British or something like that. And we were challenged. So one of my professors haven't mentioned now who became a friend after I started working there was Bill Hill Senior, and he taught, I think, theology very, very Catholic with a small "C." And he and others truly were challenging us to begin to develop our critical thinking skills and to open our minds. And so what we have now—you know what? You're going to have to stop for a moment. My phone, I need to get.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Q: I've just resumed recording now.

Szymanski: Okay. I need to launch again. Somehow, I'm trying to get back into the video, Melissa. I don't know.

Q: On your start screen, is there an icon for Zoom that you can click?

Szymanski: There we go. I'm saying allow, but it's not getting me back.

Q: Our conversation hasn't been interrupted, which is good.

Szymanski: Okay, good. Well, how about if I get off and come back in? Do you think that—

Q: Let me pause our recording again.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Q: Alright, so we are recording once again. I believe we left off you were talking about Bill Hill Senior and how he helped you develop your critical thinking skills.

Szymanski: Well, he and others. So the class that Yohma Gray taught on logic and rhetoric was all about developing critical thinking skills and understanding what that meant and then learning the basic tools. But in things like Bill's classes, or any of the other people I mentioned, they asked challenging questions. And if I were going to use terminology that I use now in my work, I would say they were fostering what we call a growth mindset. So it's about challenging

ourselves, participating with others in really engaging and learning. And for that, I will be forever grateful.

Q: And how did you manage to get through all your courses in only three years?

Szymanski: Well, okay, so a little bit of a backup. I graduated from high school in three years, so I was kind of on a roll. And I realized—I've only realized fairly recently, doing some reflective work with a therapist I work with every now and then, that I had a severe concussion in high school and was out of school for three months. And it would have been my freshman year of high school. And what happened—and that was when I was at Nazareth Academy, which is a very rigorous girls high school at the time. And I made up all of the work in like three weeks. And I think that I had in the back of my mind this notion that I better grab life as much as I could, as quickly as I could, because the concussion—I was in the hospital for a time, and it was a fairly young exposure to something very existential.

[15:00]

Szymanski: So that just had me on a roll. And I know I went-- so I took maximum course loads. I know at least one summer course that was a correspondence course because we didn't have the internet then. So literally I would get packages in the mail with the assignments and having to do them. And it was in labor economics, which for some reason I was interested in. I did—one summer, I did—spring into summer, I think, an independent study that related to—and I have been wrestling with this all weekend. I can't remember specifically, but it had to do with women

who got involved with progressive issues in Chicago in the late 19th century. And I so spent a lot of time down at the Historical Society. And I even remember one time when it was really verging into spring. I actually walked all the way from Mundelein down to the Historical Society, which is a very long walk.

Szymanski: And then my finishing up in Germany—back in those days, I don't know if they still exist, there were grants that we could get, Pell Grants and the like. And there was a program—actually, there are a couple of us from Mundelein who went. And I had really wanted to go either to the Sorbonne or to Cambridge. Yet I was looking at graduate schools that some of them had requirements for two languages besides English. And I had studied French for a number of years in high school and part of college. And I thought, well, I better start getting myself exposed to something else. And so that program provided a lot of credits, which is really what pushed me over the finish line. I was kind of geeky and nerdy.

Q: Did that program involve a minor in German in addition to your major in English?

Szymanski: No.

Q: Okay. How did you hear about that program specifically? Did professors help, or did you discover it on your own?

Szymanski: I think that at the time—this is again, back in the main building, there would be bulletin boards with things posted on it. And so there were always programs about studying abroad. So it was a matter, again—I mean, we couldn't Google things. We had different kinds of access and in some ways very limited access because of where technology was at the time. And so it must have been just finding something on a bulletin board and talking to a few other people. Two of the other young women who went to Germany in the same program I did, one already spoke German, and she was doing kind of advanced work there. And the other woman was starting out new, just like me.

Q: And did you—and the other Mundelein students that went, were you friendly beforehand? Did you become good friends because of this experience?

Szymanski: We had been roommates for a time when we had an apartment, and so then we all ended up going. During the days, we're all in different classes. And at the end of the program, we had two weeks to travel, and my friends went to Greece to hang out on the beach. And I went to London because I'd always wanted to go to London.

Q: Where in Germany were you?

Szymanski: Outside of Stuttgart. There was a language school at the time called Schiller College, and we got to stay in a schloss, which is a kind of country—it wasn't really a castle, but it was

big. It was really big. And we didn't have showers. We had to use bathtubs and up and down marble staircases.

[20:00]

Szymanski: And one of the women who, Frau Wegeley adopted a group of us girls. And I gathered, when the new groups would come in—and she ran the fabric and sewing store in this little village called Bönnigheim, which literally was a medieval village that had not been bombed during the war. And she adopted a whole group of us and then a couple of the boys and she and her husband, they had, like a little cottage up in the hills, which is actually where their farm property was. And there were several times they invited us up on a Friday or Saturday night to have dinner and hang out and talk and whatever. And one of the ways I knew that I was learning something was that even though my speaking was very slow and fractured, I could follow conversations better. So, it was a great experience.

Q: Yeah, it sounds like it. And you also mentioned that you were part of the work study program for a scholarship.

Szymanski: Yes.

Q: So where did you work on campus and what—.

Szymanski: English department. Frances Shea [Mary Frances O'Shea, BVM] did all of the administrative work there at the time. Wonderful, wonderful woman, nun. And we had a very nice relationship. And then after I graduated, and I was working there had a chance to become closer. Many of these people actually became friends once I got to be an employee of the college.

Q: And so did you help Frances Shea with the administration work or administrative work?

Szymanski: Yes, it was things like mimeographing things. And I'm not even sure there was a copy machine, that was—I mean, it was pretty early days for a copy machine. It would have probably been a central place. I don't remember exactly all the things that I did, but she kept me busy.

Q: And how often—what were your working hours? Do you remember how many hours you devoted there a week?

Szymanski: I think it was about fifteen hours a week. So she was very flexible. And in terms of looking at what my schedule was in a given semester and then just mapping out my hours around that.

Q: Okay. And in terms of the kind of global or national events taking place at this time, could you talk a bit about the feminist movement and your thoughts on it, your involvement with it, what happened around Mundelein's campus regarding that?

Szymanski: Well, my commitment to feminism started at an early age. When I was in grade school, in seventh grade, we actually were required to write a formal term paper. Which was very interesting because none of us knew how to type, you didn't learn that until you went to high school. So it had to be handwritten. But we were given instruction on how to do research, how to do citations, how to cite quotations, segments from books. The bibliography was written out by hand. Everything was written by hand. My mother kept this for many years, and I was very interested in Ancient Greece at the time. And so I wrote about the life of a girl during the age of Pericles in Ancient Greece. And the first sentence said, "If I could go back to the age of Pericles, and if I were a girl at that time, I would start a feminist revolution." So that was when I was twelve, thirteen years old. And so one of the things, actually, that then did have impact in terms of Mundelein being a woman's college and understanding ways in which women really, I believe still to this day, need some time to engage with, bond with, whatever, learn how to argue with other students.

[25:00]

Szymanski: And often it's women where you begin to develop your voice, you begin to take a stand around things. You know, all of that stuff that you do in a class. And that was very important. And that was encouraged, again. So we're at a time when the BVMs [Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary] had—this was after the ecumecnical council. And at that

time, they were, if not the first among the first of the convent orders to tell the Pope they were no longer wearing their black habits. So when I came onto campus, a few of the nuns still did. The older nuns wore their habits, but the majority of them did not. So that in and of itself was very impressive in terms-- because there was a point at which, I believe it was the Cardinals, they were not happy at the rebelliousness of the nuns. And here we have nuns who have—some of them had already taught around the country, some of them overseas. They had Masters and PhDs, and then they weren't wearing habits. So to me, at least, that was very inspiring. They were good role models.

And in class, we were really encouraged to develop our own voice, to develop a capacity to articulate a point of view and support it. And that for me, given that I then went to graduate school, and after that, I worked in the corporate world for ten years—in two very male industries. I believe that I've learned a lot there and developed a deeper confidence in my ability to put together an argument, a perspective, to advocate a point of view, and basically where I would be the only woman in a meeting. So all of that fed into the person I became. So there was that going on, and we didn't have a lot of-- I mean, it wasn't like we were doing marches on campus, but that was the time there were marches down in the city, both early—the feminist marches of that period, anti-Vietnam War protest, which I attended, among other things. I mean, once I remember going down with a couple that I babysat for, and they were going and said, "Well, come down to our house, and we'll all go down together." And this was after the '68 [Democratic National] Convention, when heads got cracked, was not a good time. I was in St. Louis at that point, so I was not there. So people were, they were fearful because we didn't know what would happen. And these were peaceful marches. And over time, as the anti-war sentiment grew, there

would be more and more and more people coming. From my perspective, I think that obviously on any campus there are different groups who are drawn to different people and different issues and interests. And so I found friends and companions among those who were more politically and socially active in the movements of the day.

Q: And would you say that the nuns were active participants in these events as well?

Szymanski: I don't really know. Probably, but I'm not directly aware.

Q

Do you remember any sort of delineation between, or did the feminist movement and the Vietnam War protests, were those happening at the same time?

Szymanski: They wove in and out. It was a time of total ferment, truly the late '60s.

[30:00]

Q: You mentioned that people would be fearful of what might happen at the protest. Did you personally witness anything that was scary or that you were afraid to maybe continue protesting?

Szymanski: No, I was lucky. I was always—somehow ended up in demonstrations that were very large groups. They were very well organized. I remember a group of us went downtown for one

of the feminist marches. And when it was over, there were three or four of us, and we were walking back probably to public transportation, and some guys came up and was like, "Oh, are you one of those bra burners?" It was just kind of silly. They weren't threatening. They were just, whatever. [laughs]

Q: So it was mostly getting a group of friends from Mundelein and then going downtown for these events?

Szymanski: Yes.

Q: And how did you find these friends that were socially and politically active, like yourself.

Szymanski: Started out with, we all lived on the same floor in Northland. And then friendships began developing, and then they'd say, "Well, I have this other friend," and the group grows.

Q: Could you talk a bit more about Northland? You were only there for a year, is that correct?

Szymanski: I believe so, yeah. I can't remember. I was in an apartment. I was in two different apartments, and I'm having a hard time remembering because one of the apartments was after I'd already graduated, and one was at least part of the time while I still hadn't graduated yet. So it's a little bit of a blur.

Q: That's okay. But do you remember the vibe or the culture in Northland and your floor of classmates and your roommates?

Szymanski: Northland was a very funky place. I don't know if you've seen any old pictures of it, but it was old. It was pretty run down. People were pretty just casual friends, open. I think most of the rooms there were two of us in a room.

Q: Was there any sort of communal or a common room area where people could gather?

Szymanski: No. I think the Northland at some point must have been an old apartment building. So it had more of that feeling than, say, Coffey Hall, which was built as a dorm, and so it had amenities in terms of the space.

Q: Got you. And did you ever visit Coffey Hall? Did you know what it looked like in there?

Szymanski: Yeah.

Q: Could you tell a difference of maybe what it would have been like living in or how living in Northland might have affected how you experienced Mundelein versus maybe people that lived in Coffey?

Szymanski: Can I put this off the record?

Q: Sure. Let me just close the recording.

[break in recording]

Q: Okay, so we're back recording again. Was there a difference in—or did you remember a discernible difference moving out of Northland into an apartment with friends afterwards?

Szymanski: Yes. We all felt more grown up [laughs]. And one of the apartments was up on Columbia, and it was a big apartment. There were five of us, and I think there were four bedrooms. So it was one of these big old apartments that was fun. And it was like the first block off the beach, so we could go down there and, you know, they have parties. Somebody always had a guitar. And when the weather was nice, we'd hang out.

[35:00]

Szymanski: The other apartment was above a bar on Devon a couple of blocks over. Yeah, that was interesting [laughs]. I think that must have been the first apartment because we're so excited about having the apartment. It was small, and I think there was one bedroom, and then we had a hide a bed in the living room. And on weekend nights, sometimes it was really hard getting to

sleep because the bar was very noisy downstairs, but it definitely gave us all the flavor of the urban experience.

Q: Okay. Could you talk about any changes you might have seen on Mundelein campus from when you first started to when you graduated, whether it be physical changes or rules or culture traditions?

Szymanski: So physically—I can't remember when, what was then called the Learning Resource Center, was opened. I can't remember if it was opened already before I arrived or during the time I was there. And I know that I spent a lot of time there because the library was there, because the dorm could often be noisy. If you had something to do, you'd go over to the library. And also a couple of seminars that I took, took place in the library as well. And it had these great windows that looked out on the water. So that to me, was just stunning. And in terms of the vibe, I think all of us were affected by the war, in particular. One woman, Alice Johnson, who became a friend, and actually, I think she lived in Coffey. She was engaged to a guy who was in Vietnam. So that brought things closer to home for all of us. Another friend of mine, Joanne Fleisch, who was in Northland, her brother was in Vietnam, and he actually got exposed to Agent Orange. He was a helicopter pilot. So those things really hit deep. They hit deep.

Q: And could you maybe talk about any particularly meaningful experiences that you had at Mundelein, anything that really resonates with you or speaks to you?

Szymanski: I think it was, in part, the experience overall, that it created a very unique environment. And it was almost as if you are a fish in a fish tank. You don't even know what you're taking in and taking out, but it's absorbed. So that was one thing. Another thing is Myrtle Posmantur had a senior level seminar on, I guess, the Romantic poets. And I did this big project on William Blake, and then she asked me to present part of it in front of the seminar group. And that was really—that was tough and scary, and it all worked out really well. I'm glad I did it. And then later when I went to England, that's one of the reasons I went to England. I wanted to see some of Blake's art, which I believe was at the Tate. And so I wanted to see it in real life.

[40:00]

Szymanski: And another thing that I remember is Jean Kellogg, who taught the European novel and Russian literature, and she would invite—again, this was with the seminar group, so it would have been my second year there. She fairly regularly would invite us—and they weren't big classes. So that was another thing, these classes weren't big, so it's very intimate. And she would invite us to come up to her office, up on, I think it was all on the tenth floor, if I remember. And on Friday afternoon, and she had a chaise lounge that she would sit on and study. And then we would all be in our chairs around her. And on occasion, she would serve us sherry, which was really exciting and exotic at the time. And it was really about furthering the conversations around what we were reading in class, and that was powerful. And then as we got to know more people, we knew people who were off campus, so we'd have parties that were fun. I remember we would head down to Hamilton's every now and again for burgers. And yeah, that was fun. And they let us into a back room because most of us were underage. But as long as we were drinking like

Coke along with the burgers, then it was okay. So I don't know if Hamilton's is still there, but it was pretty much of an icon back in the late '60s and '70s.

Q: I think I remember another respondent mentioning Hamilton's, and I looked into it and I couldn't find it, so I don't think it's there anymore.

Szymanski: Okay. It's on Broadway, and it was just a hole in the wall place. And then at the corner of Broadway and Devon on the Northwest side, I don't know what's there now, but there was a place called Sir Whoopee's, and it was a sandwich place, and it had this big, like a knight, very fat looking knight on a horse that would go back and forth and the sign would say, "Sir who? Sir Whoopees." That was weird. That was strange.

Q: So, yeah, you're kind of giving me a sense of the student life on and off campus.

Szymanski: Yeah, and I imagine that there were clubs that people belong to. There weren't the kinds of clubs and groups that are currently more present on campuses. And of the ones that were there, I wasn't really focused on them. It was a lot of hanging out and talking and playing the guitar and singing, going to Hamilton's.

Q: Okay, let me see. So you weren't necessarily a member of any clubs or activities then?

Szymanski: No. Bad joiner.

Q: Everyone has their own experience. What would you say the relationship is—what it was between Mundelein and Loyola? I know you mentioned when we spoke last week that there was some philosophical differences between the two colleges.

Szymanski: Yes. At the time, Loyola was a very different place, academically, than it is now. Actually, I'm very impressed at the way Loyola has grown and evolved. Actually, my husband went to Loyola, and we knew each other before then and then went our separate ways, and were married to different people and got reconnected, like after twenty years. But it was kind of a party school. And academically, it wasn't very rigorous. But then you also had the Jesuits, and it was a very—in light of—so this is my impression, in light of the ecumenical council, they were far more focused on tradition back then than I believe they are now. And relative to that, in my mind, Mundelein seems like radical, because we had these nuns who didn't wear habits, who took a stand, and we're very strong, amazing women. So, later, in the '90s, when the college was acquired by Loyola, many of us felt that philosophically, there would have been a better connection with DePaul, though obviously, given the location of the campuses, that would not have made sense.

[45:00]

Q: Okay, yeah. I was curious about what people thought with Loyola being right there, how much interaction there was between Mundelein and Loyola.

Szymanski: Yeah. I think there were a lot of people dating back and forth, and I had friends there. I had guy friends there. But also we were part of groups where there was some pairing off, but it wasn't like traditional dating of the time. But again, maybe that's just because I lived in Northland [laughs]. It's a very narrow view.

Q: Kind of going back a little bit to Vietnam War stuff. I now remember last time you also mentioned to me that you didn't attend graduation in protest. Could you talk about that a little bit and explain your motives for doing that?

Szymanski: Yeah. Well, at that point, things were really ramping up in '71 and things were getting worse and worse, and there were student protests all over the country. And so I was not unusual in that. And then I was heading to Germany, so I didn't care anyway. And my parents were very upset because having anybody and especially a daughter go to college was a big thing. And so I made up for it when I got my PhD.

Q: And what was it like graduating before the rest of your cohort and your other friends? How did that affect you or them or your experience?

Szymanski: So the thing—that's interesting. So this is actually where the apartment with the five bedrooms up on Columbia is more in the picture. So I have several friends who were still finishing up school, and I was an admissions counselor working after I came back from

Germany. And I was actually on the road a lot. And so I lived at the apartment with my friends, and they were going to school, and I was going to work.

Q: So it didn't affect you too much because you guys were all still together a bit.

Szymanski: We were all enmeshed, yeah.

Q: And I have to ask, did you have any interactions with Sister Jean [Dolores Schmidt, BVM] or Ann Ida Gannon [BVM]?

Szymanski: Sister Jean, yes. And I can't remember the specific circumstances. I don't know if she was—would she have been academic dean at the time? I don't recall.

Q: I remember she joined in '61, I think, as a professor. I can't remember when she transitioned into a dean of the school.

Szymanski: Okay, and same with Ann Ida. They were certainly there, but they were more remote figures. If they were teaching, which I can't recall, I didn't have classes with them.

Q: Yeah, to my knowledge, Sister Ann Ida Gannon was the president at the time, so she wouldn't have been teaching.

Szymanski: Right.

Q: But I know that she liked to be involved around campus.

Szymanski: And I actually got to know her better when I started working for Mundelein.

Q: Okay. Could you talk a little bit about that?

[50:00]

Szymanski: Well, back at that time, the Skyscraper had a cafeteria that was pretty horrible, the food was horrible. It also had, back in those times, I don't know if they still do, a faculty like lunchroom food room. So since I was working there, I got to eat in the lunchroom. And that's how I got to know many people who had been my teachers in a different context. And Ann Ida would be there, and there were these wonderful big round tables, so people would sit down, and you just got to know people better that way.

Q: Yeah, how did the relationship change between you and faculty when you were a student versus when you were working there as well?

Szymanski: Well, I mean, there were real friendships that developed, and I would invite people over to whichever apartment I was in at the time for dinner when I cooked something, not very well. But I would make dinner and have a dinner party. So that was different. It was like putting on my grownup hat. And now that I'm graduated, and I'm a professional, I can do that. I can have dinner parties. And all of them were so gracious. People would come and yeah, they're just wonderful. Just wonderful.

Q: I've reached the end of my question list, but is there anything else that maybe has come to mind for you that maybe I didn't ask about?

Szymanski: Not off the top of my head. And the thing that's been coming up for me more, and in fact, I do want to say this, is that the impact of Mundelein has been long-lasting. So even if I operated in a fog or whatever at the time, you know, the deeper lessons, impressions, perspectives really left a lifetime's imprint on me. And I was really glad when the Gannon Center was established, focusing specifically on women and leadership. And it's through the Gannon Center that I got re-involved with Mundelein.

Q: How do you mean re-involved?

Szymanski: Well, I had moved back to Chicago in 1990 and was beginning to do some freelance communications work and other things and trying to find my way because I knew after ten years

in the corporate world that I really didn't want to be a corporate person anymore. And yet I didn't know who or what I wanted to be. So I've always been a great believer that one of the best things you can do is be of service. And so at that time—and for a long time, I stopped making donations to Mundelein. This is when the whole thing was going on with Loyola and the absorption of the college, and then the Gannon Center emerged as a focal point. And since I always have been and continue to be interested in women and leadership, I thought, well I'm still really new back in the Chicago area. I might as well go contact Carolyn Farrell and see what's up. And it was through getting to know her that I began—I helped her and the woman who was actually the head of the archives at the time, and I cannot remember her name. Lovely, lovely person to develop a first, kind of informal strategic plan around getting the center on its feet. And then a couple of years later this would have been '04, going into '05. I worked with Carolyn—I facilitated, they had an ad hoc group to work on the first formal strategic plan for the Gannon Center. And Father [Michael J.] Garanzini actually was impressed with it enough so that he posted it online at the time. And it was a lovely way also to meet other people who were connected with Mundelein that I had—it was after my time. So I got reacquainted with many people. So yeah, that's how it all got reactivated.

[55:00]

Q: Yeah, so it sounds like Mundelein has had a very lasting impact on you.

Szymanski: Yes.

Q: Wonderful. Well, that is all I have. Thank you so much for sharing your stories with me today. It's been really great hearing about Mundelein in the past and involvement in social movements and just the progressiveness of Mundelein itself. Actually, did you want to say any final words before I stop recording?

Szymanski: I just hope that more people who still feel a connection reach out to you over time and that you get a lot of stories.

Q: That's the goal.

Szymanski: It's a very rich history.

Q: Thank you so much.

Szymanski: You're welcome.

Q: I'm going to stop recording and then we can stay on and talk about next steps.