

SHARE YOUR STORY: STUDENT LIFE AT MUNDELEIN
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Kathryn Duskey-Gemperle's Oral History

Women and Leadership Archives
Loyola University Chicago
2022

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Kathryn Duskey Gemperle conducted by Nathan Ellstrand on August 9, 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

[0:00 - 5:00]: Gemperle's family and educational background, choosing Mundelein, beginning college, and her decision to join and leave the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM).

[5:00 - 10:00]: Gemperle's experience in the BVMs, her relationships, her training, her studies at Mundelein, her art major, courses she took, founding the Edgewater Historical Society, and the impact of art on her life.

[10:00 - 15:00]: Gemperle's experience with Mundelein faculty, her glee club experience, living on campus, and weekenders in campus residence halls.

[15:00 - 20:00]: Gemperle's roommates, living in Wright Hall, student teaching, teaching art, and interdisciplinary pedagogy.

[20:00 - 25:00]: Gemperle's experience living in Wright Hall, the 1968 Democratic Convention, social activities, her job at the Loyola library, and studying art history.

[25:00 - 30:00]: Gemperle's independent study, teaching Chinese art, her father's education, Mundelein's library and Piper Hall.

[30:00 - 35:00]: Gemperle's urban education class, racial demographics of teaching, teaching at St. Mary's, leading a field trip Miami, teaching pottery, and taking pottery classes.

[35:00 - 40:00]: Gemperle's teaching experience at St. Greg's, cooperative learning, teaching at Amundsen, and struggles she faced as a teacher.

[40:00 - 45:00]: Gemperle's senior thesis, BVMs at Selma, and BVM activism.

[45:00 - 50:00]: Gemperle's teaching experience, the Selma march, diversity in Chicago, diversity in the classroom and teaching diverse students.

[50:00 - 55:00]: Racial and ethnic demographics and relations in Gemperle's teaching experience, the racial makeup of Mundelein, and teaching.

[55:00 - 60:00]: National events during Gemperle's time as a student, the Edgewater Historical Society, civil rights, and activism.

[60:00 - 65:00]: Gemperle's time in the convent, social unrest, visiting art exhibits as an art student, adjusting to the city, and buying a house.

[65:00 - 70:00]: Gemperle's experience with the Archdiocese and gender dynamics in the Catholic education system, living on campus, activities outside of class, and the dress code at Mundelein.

[70:00 - 75:00]: Mundelein's dress code, Vatican II, Mundelein's institutional analysis, Gemperle's mother's education, and her sibling's educations.

[75:00 - 80:00]: Gemperle's experience teaching art, Sunday lunches on campus, going to Loyola for mass, living on the lakefront, changes on campus, and lasting impacts of her time at Mundelein.

[80:00 - 84:24]: Gemperle's campaign to save mansions in Berger Park, creating the Edgewater Historical Society, and final thoughts.

NARRATOR BIO

Kathryn "Kathy" Duskey-Gemperle was born in Indianapolis, Indiana and was the oldest of four children. She attended St. Mary's High School in Michigan City, Indiana before enrolling in Mundelein College in September 1962. Gemperle majored in Fine Arts and painting with minors in theology, English, and art history. After three years, Gemperle left Mundelein College to join the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVMs) in Dubuque, Iowa. In 1967, she returned to Mundelein College as a BVM to complete her degree, staying in the Scholasticate. Gemperle began her career with student teaching at Amundsen High School and, after graduating, worked at St. Mary's High School on the West side of Chicago. In 1969, she decided to leave the BVMs. She continued her studies at Columbia College, earning a Master's degree in interdisciplinary art. Gemperle continued to teach art and other subjects for over 40 years, with a focus on creating courses that were interdisciplinary and multicultural. In 1988, Gemperle founded the Edgewater Historical Society to involve the community in the research, documentation, collection and preservation of the history of the Edgewater neighborhood in Chicago.

INTERVIEWER BIO

Nathan Ellstrand holds a PhD in History from Loyola University Chicago. Ellstrand studies twentieth-century transnational political and religious history between the United States and Latin America. His recently finished dissertation is titled, "Reclaiming La Patria: Sinarquismo in the United States, 1936-1966," which he plans on converting into a book.

Transcriptionist: Chris Mattix

Interviewee: Kathy Gemperle

Interviewer: Nathan Ellstrand

Locations: Chicago, IL and San Francisco, IL via
Zoom

Date: August 9, 2022

[BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW]

[0:00]

Q: For the record, my name is Nathan Ellstrand for the Women and Leadership Archives as part of the Mundelein College Oral History Project on Tuesday, August 9, 2022. Interviewing Kathy Gemperle by Zoom. Kathy is currently in Chicago, Illinois, and I am in San Francisco, California. Kathy, could you please state your name and graduation year for the record?

Gemperle: My name is Kathryn Duskey Gemperle, and my graduation year was 1968.

Q: [Thank you] very much. So, to get us started, could you tell me a little bit about yourself. In particular, when you were born and where you were raised and your family?

Gemperle: I'm the oldest of four children. I was born in Indianapolis, Indiana during the war. My father had a defense contract job. We moved back to Illinois, basically to be near my mother's mother, who lived in Chicago. We moved to Western Springs and then to LaGrange Park, and my father took a job in Indiana. And so we moved to the Michigan City area. And my father designed and built a house. And then I went to high school in Michigan City at St. Mary's High School, which has changed its name to Marquette High School. And they had no college counseling when I was in high school. So at the last minute, my mother was trying to figure out where I could go to college— my father had lost his job— And she called her friend Agnes Griffin [Mary (Ignatia) Griffin, BVM], who was the academic dean at Mundelein College. And so we were invited to come for an interview, and then I filled out an [admissions] application and an application for aid, and then I was accepted and started at Mundelein, September of 1962.

Q: That's great.

Gemperle: Is that enough?

Q: That's perfect. Well, that ties into my second question of why did you choose Mundelein, which you already answered.

Gemperle: Now you know.

Q: Now I know. So is essentially kind of like a family connection.

Gemperle: Yeah.

Q: Okay, great.

Gemperle: My mother grew up in uptown, so nearby.

Q: So, family as well as regional connection, too. So kind of tied to Mundelein, too. I see when you initially filled out the questionnaire about this interview that you left Mundelein to join the BVMs, so the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. So what made you make that decision, and then what was your experience with the BVMs like?

Gemperle: Well, I made that decision based on a lot of the discussions we had in religion classes and social studies classes about social justice. And I had gone tutoring on the South Side and was appalled at the kind of education opportunity that wasn't being offered to young Black children. And I thought maybe if I was in the BVMs, I could do some kind of teaching. So I decided to try it out, and I lasted three years. I was able to finish my degree coming back to Mundelein in fall 1967. Then I graduated in June of '68. And then my parents, when I decided to leave the BVMs a few years later, they felt they had to pay the BVMs back for my education. So they donated some

money because now they had some money. When my father lost his job, it was months before I was to start college.

Q: So what was the reason for you choosing to leave the BVMs?

Gemperle: I got a sense of myself and what I could do. I did some art teaching in 'Buque [Dubuque, Iowa] at the Cathedral School, and I had met a friend who was a first grade teacher before she joined. And the two of us created all these lessons and things that kids could do. And I don't know, I just decided that maybe I didn't need to be a nun to do this kind of work, that there were plenty of other opportunities.

Q: Do you happen to have any takeaways from being in the BVMs? Was there anything kind of lasting from that time?

[05:00]

Gemperle: Well, I have some lasting friendships. It was very bizarre. It was like living in the 19th century. We wore long dresses and had to go to bed at nine o'clock at night and get up at five. So we had a lot of rules and regulations, which I thought were nonsense. I remember thinking, this is really silly, this has nothing to do with what I thought this mission was. And I've seen some movies that talk about novices and being in religious orders, and they're not too far off. They really had not changed. The educated nuns at Mundelein, were talking one thing, and the people doing the training of nuns in Dubuque were somewhere else. So, didn't fit.

Q: So you feel like there's some contradictions between—?

Gemperle: Yeah, there were big contradictions. There was just, fresh air was needed. Then the BVMs were one of the first groups to get rid of the habit and go to normal clothes. So when I came back to Mundelein, even though I was still in the convent, I did my student teaching at a Chicago Public High School, Amundsen, and I wore regular clothes, so nobody could—and that was part of the changes that were coming.

Q: So going back to some questions directly relating to your time at Mundelein, so could you tell me a little more about what you studied at Mundelein, and what classes you took while you were there?

Gemperle: Well, I was in the fine arts department. Specifically, I have a Bachelor of Fine Arts and Painting. I had gone to a high school that had no art, but everybody always considered me artistic. I had no portfolio when we went to apply for me to get into Mundelein. The head of the department said she thought I was determined and that would be my quality, (laughs) that I would stick to it no matter what. So I majored in art, and then I have minors in theology, English, art history. I have a full load of education.

Q: You took a range of courses then?

Gemperle: Yes.

Q: But art was the base.

Gemperle: Yes, art was the base. And I have a tremendous visual memory. So when I founded the Edgewater Historical Society in 1988 it was really based on my love of photography and historic photographs.

Q: That applied to your time in Mundelein as well, right? Thinking about that.

Gemperle: Yes. Right.

Q: That's great. That's wonderful to know.

Gemperle: Well, you know, when you go to high school and there's no art, there's no way to find that out about yourself. It's just not there.

Q: So there was no art at all in high school for you. So really it wasn't until your time at Mundelein.

Gemperle: There was no girls sports, there was no art.

Q: Fascinating.

Gemperle: It was a little small town high school.

Q: Remind me of which high school you went to. You said that was in that was in Indiana?

Gemperle: St. Mary's. It was a parish high school in Michigan City.

Q: Okay. In terms of the various classes that you took, right. So art was your major. Would you mind telling me a little more about the classes, or is there anything in particular that you remember from the classes that you took?

Gemperle: Well, it was kind of ironic. I took design first. I think they call it art structure, and then design. And some of it was pretty intellectual and maybe a little too hard for me to grasp. Then I took classes that were based on various media. So I took watercolor, print making, oil painting and ceramics. I really did not like ceramics, which is also ironic because now I am still teaching ceramics. And then I had this— when I started, I didn't think I would be a teacher, but eventually it seemed like that was the only possible career because I wasn't going to be a famous exhibiting artist.

Q: It's good that you realized which career path you were going down. Thinking a little more about Mundelein. So moving a little way from the classes, but thinking more just kind of holistically. So what faculty or staff at Mundelein had the biggest impact on you?

[10:00]

Gemperle: Well, probably the head of the arts department. There's also a history professor whose name is flashing out of my mind. I loved history, and she wanted me to be a history major. And then I was in the glee club, and they asked me if I wanted to do a double major in art and music, but I was overwhelmed at the thought of doing a double major, so I said, "no. I'll just sing in the Glee club." And then in my adult life later, I was in a singing group for twenty years. Still there, I love to sing.

Q: That stems from your time in a glee club?

Gemperle: Yeah, well, my mother sent me for piano lessons when I was five. So when I got to high school glee club, I could read music, and that's a significant thing. Some people are musical, but they haven't been taught to read music, so then they're going by ear. But I could read music.

Q: You had the formal training ahead of time, which made it easier.

Gemperle: Yeah.

Q: Who was the adviser to the Glee Club. I don't know if I caught that. If you just said that.

Gemperle: I think his name was [Adalbert] Huguelet because I met his cousin or brother later in Edgewater and found out that they live just down the street from the college. But I can't remember his first name.

Q: Was he a professor or staff member?

Gemperle: I don't know.

Q: Okay.

Gemperle: You have to go look that up somewhere in the stack.

Q: Yes.

Gemperle: Excuse me. Okay.

Q: So, you remember the head of the arts department, and then you said there was a history professor as well that had an impact on you. And then the glee club—

Q: They were both nuns, the head of the arts department was Sister Blanche Marie [Gallagher, BVM].

Q: Okay.

Gemperle: And I can't remember the history person.

Q: Both part of the BVMs then?

Gemperle: (Agrees)

Q: In terms of another aspect of your Mundelein experience, you lived in Coffey Hall on the weekends. So how do you feel that affected your time at Mundelein College?

Gemperle: Well, I was part of the first group of seven that got to stay on the weekend. So the dorm was filled with people from all over, but the first group of seven were people who were from further away and couldn't go home on the weekend. So I met people from Wisconsin and Ohio and various other places. And that little group of seven was a pretty close-knit group. We still keep in touch with each other. And then it expanded, and they let more people stay over. We were there in that dorm when the Loyola won the '63 NCAA [National Collegiate Athletic Association] Championship.

Q: What was that like?

Gemperle: Well, they came they blocked Sheridan Road, and they came by the dorm. So we went out, yelled with them in the street. Because we had only watched it— it wasn't in town, we watched it on TV.

Q: And there was just like a kind of a victory parade or? Right on Sheridan Road—

Gemperle: Spontaneous. Blocked the traffic and everything.

Q: Really? Right where the curve is?

Gemperle: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, that's definitely a special moment.

Gemperle: Yeah, it was kind of fun.

Q: Yeah. The people that stay there on the weekends— just to help me clarify, you stayed—

Gemperle: We were all on the first floor.

Q: Okay, you were on the first floor, but then during the weekdays where were you living?

Gemperle: Same place.

Q: Oh, same place. What was the distinction between staying there on the weekends? Maybe I misunderstood.

Gemperle: The distinction was they had to feed us. Okay. So people would come back on Sunday night and stay all week and leave on Friday, but we would stay for the weekend, and we would always get fried chicken on Sunday dinner. But it was just a group of seven of us. It wasn't 200 people, but we all were just in our same rooms. I'm not sure if we all had roommates that were weekenders. Seems like we couldn't have all had. But some of us had roommates that were weekenders, too.

Q: Yeah, I was going to ask about your roommates next as well. So what were your roommates like?

[15:00]

Gemperle: Well, my first roommate was kind of a sad young woman. Her parents had died in a plane crash when she was eight years old, and she came with a big picture of them and talked about her loss. She's over eighteen, so it's more than ten years later she's struggling with this. And she was kind of dowdy in her dress style because she had a grandmother. Her grandmother was raising her instead of a younger mother. My second year, I met this woman, Lynn, who had been at Alfred University in New York because her grandparents donated to that university, and she hated it. So here she comes to this Catholic liberal arts women's college, which is Q: uite a

contrast. And she was always asking me all about being a Catholic, and what was this, and why do those priests wear dresses? And it was a comedy scene. And she's since moved to California, but I used to see her a few years ago before the pandemic [COVID-19]. She moved to Oak Park [Illinois]. I went to her wedding when she finally got married. She lived with a guy for twenty years and then got married to him (laughs). Then my third year I can't— maybe Lynn and I were still roommates the third year.

Gemperle: And then when I entered the BVMs, there was a day when we were allowed to have visitors, and a whole bunch of them from Mundelein drove all the way to Dubuque—five hours—to visit me, see how I was doing. It was interesting. They all graduated, and then I came back to Mundelein, so I really didn't know anybody when we came back.

Q: You never lived in the Scholasticate you never lived in Wright Hall at Mundelein, then?

Gemperle: Yeah, I did.

Q: Oh, you did it. Okay, so then you were in Dubuque. So what was the timeline? Because the first few years you were at Coffey—

Gemperle: Well, I was in Dubuque until '67, and then I came to Wright Hall and lived there basically one year. A little bit less. And then I applied to teach at a BVM high school that was getting a new curriculum. It was St. Mary's High School on the west side of Chicago. And they hired, believe it or not, five art teachers. But all five of us had, like, a second gig we could do (laughs). So I taught some cultural classes. Multiculture, American Indian, Chinese culture, they're kind of history combined with art. We did a big mural project, and we had a lot of activities related to our community. It was a very diverse student body. Initially, it was all girls, and then it switched to accept boys. That was really fun. That was an unusual way to start teaching instead of being in a very strict hierarchical teaching system. We did a lot of interdisciplinary stuff. And apparently in some areas, interdisciplinary is still a dirty word. And I think it's because of a power struggle in universities where every university has its English professor, and they don't want to mix with the history department or the art department. And

create something new. So anytime you try to break their structure they're not happy, they're not like, "oh, that's a great idea!" No.

Q: And that was—

Gemperle: [Inaudible] teaching Shakespeare, you know.

Q: (Laughs) And that was a big thing at the time, too right? You're explicitly interdisciplinary.

Gemperle: Yes. And then what's funny is, years later, I went to Columbia College and got a degree in interdisciplinary art and came back to St. Gregory High School and created an interdisciplinary art program there. And the archdiocese just didn't know what to do with that label because they still had never accommodated to the fact that all these things intertwined and work together. It's too silly. I worked with a couple of young men at St. Greg's who got it. We had one guy who was willing to teach U.S. History and U.S. Literature in combination. So he had, like, a double class all year long. And he would call me in to bring in other U.S. Pictures and stories and so on. But yeah, no, that the universities are just so defended against their accreditation qualifications that you just can't break it.

[20:00]

Q: Really quick, to go back to the timeline of where you were staying. So you were saying that you were teaching while you were at Wright Hall?

Gemperle: Yeah, I was student teacher.

Q: A student teacher while at Wright Hall. Okay. So after Wright Hall, did you ever move back to Coffey Hall, or were you at--.

Gemperle: No, after I graduated, I moved to St. Mary's.

Q: Got it. Okay.

Gemperle: There was a convent there, and I moved in there, and then I was there when I decided not to continue in the BVMs, but they let me stay there five extra months. I was there during the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968, and I was there during the riots on the West Side, and we basically were in lock down in our building. And then after that, I moved out and got an apartment on the north side.

Q: That timeline makes sense for me now, too. Kind of thinking about where you lived over time, that definitely makes sense. The next thing, too, thinking about, so we've been talking about Mundelein, different aspects, right? We talked about what you studied and who you interacted with and your time staying at Mundelein. You told me earlier about being part of the Glee Club. Were you part of any other social activities on campus?

Gemperle: I racked my brain. I can't think of any. I had a friend who was— she was called upon, Jean was her name, to work with a magazine, to do illustrations. And so she asked me to help her, and I said, "Oh, sure." And then she said, "you have to read this story and then think of pictures to go with it." Well, I could not do that. It was just out of my range. Remember, I have not had a long history in the arts, so I don't think that I can just draw anything I can think of. And so I kind of dropped out of that, I would support her. She was working and wanted me to look at something I could do that. I could say, oh, "That— make that more detailed" or something. But no, I could not do that. The only other thing--A whole bunch of us went to church every afternoon at 4:30 over at Loyola. And then I got a job at Loyola's Library, working there after school. They took me because I was a very slow but perfect typist. And they had to type— you had to type these library cards in—I think it was five copies.

Gemperle: So there was carbon paper, so if you made a mistake, you couldn't correct it because it was five deep. So they wanted someone who went slow enough and perfect enough. So I had that job. And then I sometimes did a few book entry projects, putting the cards in the books, all that old fashioned stuff. And then they hired me for the summer to be the periodical librarian, which

meant that I spent almost the entire summer in the basement of the Loyola Library, which was not pretty. But it was a job, and I needed a job.

Q: Were there any other Mundelein students that worked at Loyola? I think that's an interesting kind of inter-campus interaction.

Gemperle: Not in the library. I was the only one in the library, so I don't know. All the Mundelein students didn't work, so I'm not sure where they were. I think some were working at Mundelein's library. Vastly more convenient. However, as an employee of Loyola's Library, I could get books out of Loyola's Library, so I had this vast array of books, many more than Mundelein had. And if we were studying something in art history, I would bring home five books and then we'd sit around on the floor and go through working on our visual memory as to who is this artist and their story, and so on. So I made my son take an art history class when he was in college because he was going to take a music class. And I said, "No, that's too easy for you. You need to take one art history class in your life and see what your mother went through." So he did, and he came back, and he said "It was pretty hard." He's a lawyer.

[25:00]

Q: So he realized what you went through (laughs).

Gemperle: Right.

Q: Got a taste of the experience.

Gemperle: Yeah, just a little taste of it. Because when you study art, you probably take four to six art history classes. I did an independent study in Chinese art history. After taking the Oriental History, I decided to do an independent study on the development of the figure in Chinese art. And even today, I work up at Robert Crown [Community Center] in Evanston, and I teach

Chinese brush painting because I had two little Chinese girls in my first teaching job who taught me how to paint Chinese. All the brushwork motions.

Q: Did you learn any of the language as part of that as well?

Gemperle: No, not much.

Q: It was more like the technique.

Gemperle: I did with my high school class at St. Greg's. The kids, they like the Chinese characters because it's related to gangs. So I was on to something that they were interested in, and then--

Q: Interesting.

Gemperle: But then the words that we would look up would be the things that we could paint pictures of: bamboo, grass, clouds. And then we worked on haikus and the words that we could put in a haiku. So it was a limited beginning, but I think all of us benefit from learning about another culture, not just witnessing it, but trying it out. So I was really into that.

Q: Absolutely. I'm curious, too. Just to go back briefly to your time working at Loyola, and you said that not everyone at Mundelein worked. Did you happen to have a rough idea of the other students you interacted with, your colleagues? Like, what percentage happened to work?

Gemperle: I have no idea.

Q: Okay. I was just curious. But that's a really interesting experience, too, that you have that privilege being associated with Loyola and thus having more access. Was the Mundelein library—?

Gemperle: My father, by the way, has gone to Loyola High School when it was on that campus.

Q: Okay, got it.

Gemperle: Before it moved to Wilmette.

Q: Got it before it moved to the northwest suburbs.

Gemperle: My father grew up two blocks west of Broadway on Glenwood Avenue, near St. Ignatius Church. And he went to St. Ignatius Grade School and then Loyola for high school. And then they thought he lost his soul because he went to Northwestern for college. Because he was going to be an engineer. They wanted to keep him at Loyola.

Q: Yeah. So he went to Loyola for high school. He didn't go to Loyola for college?

Gemperle: No, no, no, no, no, he went to Northwestern.

Q: Northwestern. Got it. Interesting.

Gemperle: Yes. I think if he hadn't lost his job, he probably would have sent me to Northwestern.

Q: Sure.

Gemperle: But the whole set up to move, to send me to Northwestern and pay for the dorm and all that stuff up there was way more expensive than Mundelein.

Q: Yeah, that's interesting to hear, too.

Gemperle: Yeah, [it] didn't happen.

Q: Did Mundelein— Because we were talking about the libraries. Where was Mundelein's library at the time? Was it in what is—?

Gemperle: Piper Hall

Q: Piper Hall, yeah, okay.

Gemperle: Yeah. And they had massacred the second floor. I don't know. I don't think I spent much time there at all. I'd go over to Loyola

Q: Sure. Because I know that the library used to be in the Skyscraper. Then they moved it eventually into Piper Hall, and it was there for a long time. But you're saying they got rid of the second floor. They just essentially gutted it.

Gemperle: Yeah, it had the ugly tile on the floor, and the walls were removed. Because those are bedrooms up there in that house. It's a landmark house.

Q: Yeah, absolutely.

Gemperle: Yeah. And they've done a pretty good job of taking care of it. But that was the time when they tore down a house that was in between the Skyscraper and Piper Hall, and I found some pictures of that.

Q: Yeah. Philomena Hall.

Gemperle: Yeah. But I never saw it, I just saw it in photographs.

[30:00]

Gemperle: Yeah. So I don't have many memories of activities on campus. I was racking my brain.

Q: Yeah.

Gemperle: I told my husband, this is really funny. What I do remember is when I came back, I was doing student teaching, and I had to take a class in urban education. And the urban education required me to go to a neighborhood and do a study of the neighborhood and go to a— technically, it would be like a settlement house. But it would be some place— community center— and help out there. So I would go there once a week. So the place that I went was on Diversey, just near the 'L' [Chicago's elevated public transit system]. So I could take the 'L' and get off and go there and work with kids. That was eye-opening, because, as I said, my previous experience had been tutoring African American kids, and I was just appalled at how they were. This little kid wanted me to read a book to him, and the book was Little Black Sambo. And I was like, no, this is not right. This is not working out for us. This is not good. We need these people to be educated. But then when I was at the Diversey place, it was much more diverse. There were white people, Black people, Mexicans. It was just a different mix.

Q: I was going to ask about the demographics of who you were teaching, so it was much more diverse than where you were teaching before.

Gemperle: Yeah, and then when I got the job at St. Mary's, it was diverse, but there was an old guard kind of Italian culture, but girls. And so it was too bizarre to me, they all teased their hair way up, and they never did any sports. They hung out on street corners and smoked, and they were just different kind of girls than me. And I couldn't relate to what they thought was cool and neat, but they liked me, and so they would do almost anything I suggest.

Q: That's great. Well, you had a range of teaching experiences then. Each of these neighborhoods are very different from the other. So that's probably eye-opening—

Gemperle: Actually, we went on a field trip. This is a bizarre field trip to Miami. And since I was such good friends with several of the African American girls, they gave me the all African American group to be the chaperone of. Which was really funny when they went into the ocean and got stung by jellyfish. And I spent whole day at an emergency room.

Q: Oh, no.

Gemperle: With four girls. Just had these horrible things on their legs and arms. It was terrible.

Q: Where was that again? Where was the field trip?

Gemperle: In Miami.

Q: In Miami. Oh, wow.

Gemperle: Yeah. I was like, in my third year of teaching. I didn't know anything. (laughs) Okay. What we did do was they all had their parents' insurance cards, so we could get treated at the hospital and not be charged.

Q: At least there was a safety net. Yes, that's good.

Gemperle: Yeah. When you agree to chaperone. I had another friend years later, wanted me to go with a group of kids to Italy, and I said, "Oh, no, I'm done with that job."

Q: You did it before. You already had that experience.

Gemperle: That was enough of that. As much as I love the kids, I think it would be very hard to just jump in with a bunch of kids you don't know and be a chaperone, because you would never be able to keep track of them. They could scam you every which way. So, yeah, I had a lot of diversity experience. St. Mary's got more diverse. And then I was married, and I had my first baby, and I stopped teaching there. But I got a job in Evanston teaching pottery, which was ironic because I was so bad at it. But I had taken an additional class at the Bernard Horwich Jewish Community Center with my husband and a friend of his. And it turns out I was pretty good at it. I think it was the way I was being taught. So then I took more classes at Northeastern and the School of the Art Institute and became a pottery teacher, which I still am in Evanston forty-seven years later.

[35:00]

Q: Wow.

Gemperle: I just I just love it. It's fun.

Q: It's a range of experiences. You develop different skills over time. So thinking about the social activities, you did quite a bit then, if you factor in student teaching.

Gemperle: Yeah, but what I developed was a mission that was not really so much about social justice and racial equality, but a mission to draw people together to work as community. And so I did a lot of cooperative learning things with my students where it wasn't just me and the teacher proving that I know what I'm talking about. It was much more working together kind of project. When they started using the term cooperative learning, my son was first very annoyed because he was very bright, and he felt like these other people were hanging on him to do more of the work. And I said, "Dave, you have to learn to teach them. I know you don't intend to be a teacher, but in this situation, if you are the one with the most skills, you have to figure out how to

get them to do it." So that was a good learning experience for him, having his mother coaching him on getting along with all types.

Gemperle: I learned when I was at St. Greg's, there was a huge— not huge, but, you know, a proportion of the population that needed accommodations. And so I learned how to accommodate when people couldn't read very well, give them an oral test, just a whole variety of things. They— at St. Greg's they coached the staff and gave us workshops on how to make the learning process work for everybody. And that was just really significant because I feel like I can almost teach anybody. I have run into a couple that I couldn't teach. One was a lawyer, who I learned only after frustrating with her that she only learned by reading. So it didn't matter what I said. I finally sent her to read a book about pottery. Oh, she came back. She got it all (laughs). Why didn't I think of that sooner? But most people, I have an idea of how to engage them in what we're learning. So it's fun.

Q: When were you teaching at St. Greg's? When was that?

Gemperle: From 1994 until they closed, which is about 2013. And that last year I got to be the universal sub, so I got to teach everything. I got to teach math, I got to teach sophomore English. It was just really a hoot. And then I got to see what these other teachers were doing, and some of them, I didn't really think they had a grasp of what was going on here, especially that sophomore English it was too esoteric.

Q: But it sounds like you were teaching at Catholic schools the whole time.

Gemperle: Yes

Q: Okay. You never taught at any public schools or—

Gemperle: I did for my student teaching.

Q: Okay.

Gemperle: And I was frankly, appalled. So even if I hadn't been a nun, I don't think I would have gone.

Q: Sure.

Gemperle: At Amundsen, I offered to go to the counseling department and help them interview kids who were failing. And that was eye-opening, because apparently you get plugged into a class regardless if you fail the previous class. And so there's no attempt to figure out why you failed, what could have worked better, et cetera, et cetera. So this one young man, he was just touching, he said, "I failed freshman English, and then they put me in Spanish, and I thought, oh my God, I can't do English, now I got to do Spanish." And he wasn't Spanish speaking, and he said, "But you know what? In the Spanish class, I finally learned what a noun is."

Q: Wow. (laughs)

Gemperle: You're like, oh my God.

Q: They didn't learn that in English.

Gemperle: Yeah. This is not synchronized. These people do not they're all— it's that same thing where we're all in our own little bubble. And I'm going to teach you about Shakespeare even though you don't know when it's an adjective and when it's a noun. And you really need to know that in Shakespeare (laughs). They sort of, "oh, you were supposed to learn that in eighth grade or sixth grade" or something. So anyway, I was very frustrated with Amundsen, and the social thing in the public school I learned, at least at that school, was the teachers were very isolated from any of the administration. They didn't have group things where you might have some exchange of ideas. The teachers were just off in their own little— at St. Greg's, everybody shared

the same faculty room. You know, the administration and the teachers so there were conversations at lunch and so on, so forth. But not at Amundsen.

[40:00]

Q: So you really got the distinction in your mind then, between public school at Amundsen and then your range of experience at various Catholic schools.

Gemperle: Right. Yeah.

Q: Curious too. This is super helpful. Thank you for this background about your student teaching experience, which I love hearing about. I'm curious to kind of thinking about Mundelein again, because you're talking about you doing student teaching while you're at Mundelein. In particular at Mundelein, did you see any changes while you were there? Right? So this can be physical changes on the campus or changes in how the college was run over time.

Gemperle: That's really hard for me to remember from that one year. I was, however, allowed to have my own art studio while I was doing my senior thesis. And the senior thesis at Mundelein was very much like a Masters. So you had to write a paper and then produce artwork that somehow related to what you uncovered in the paper. And so my theme was abstract painting and the machine. I was a daughter of an engineer and had worked in a factory, so I actually did one painting at my father's punch press. I went all over, looking for designs and things related, but they had a building, it was called the Northland, and they had apartments in it. It was a courtyard building, but the front facing the street had little storefronts. So they had, our print making classes over there and a sculpture classes over there. And then they had one that the senior thesis people could share. So we had a whole storefront working and doing. So that was not happening when I was there before.

Q: Okay.

Gemperle: That was new when I came back.

Q: So that was added later on.

Gemperle: Yeah.

Q: And those were working art galleries or were we just kind of working art studios?

Gemperle: It was an art studio. It wasn't a gallery.

Q: Okay, got it.

Gemperle: No, the gallery was up on the eighth floor, and then I think they expanded to have a second gallery on the fourth floor. So one of the things you did for your senior thesis was put on a show with one other artist. Two of us work together to put a show together. And I can't think of what other changes I noticed. Yeah, it would be really hard for me to get my head into that. I was so focused on my thesis.

Q: Sure.

Gemperle: I wasn't looking around for what was changing. I'm sure lots of stuff were changing between. You know a group from Mundelein went down to Selma and marched over the [William] Pettus Bridge. And if you see the movie "Selma" at the end of the movie, there's outtakes of film of the actual march, and you can see some BVMs in them. And I really considered going, but I decided I was too afraid of being beaten up. I just couldn't get myself to do it. And I thought my mission really is to improve education for minorities, not to be out on the street marching. So I didn't go.

Q: Was there a call out? How did they determine who was going to go on the march?

Gemperle: Oh, I think you just signed up. They had a bus.

Q: Wow.

Gemperle: They sent a bus down to Selma.

Q: Who was initiating that? Was that the BVMs themselves or was that students?

Gemperle: I think it was my mother's friend, Agnes [Mary (Ignatia) Griffin, BVM]. Oh, her name was Sister Mary, I don't know, because she went to Agnes Griffin, which was her given name Ignatius. No, Ignatia, there's an 'a' in that. She led a whole group of people. And now I'm not sure if she was actually teaching. But maybe she did with the dean of students, with another friend of mine, Mary Kramer. When I worked in Edgewater and started the Edgewater Historical Society, Mary Kramer at Mundelein came on our board and helped us. So I kept my little Mundelein connection with a couple of my friends.

[45:00]

Q: Sustaining it throughout the years.

Gemperle: What?

Q: Sustaining your connection throughout the years.

Gemperle: Right. Yes.

Q: That's really interesting about the Selma march, too.

Gemperle: Oh, yeah. Have you seen the movie?

Q: I've seen the movie.

Gemperle: It's a great movie. You probably didn't know to look at the outtakes. You need to watch the outtakes.

Q: I need to

Gemperle: At the end.

Q: And luckily—

Gemperle: Maybe you can get it on Netflix or someplace and just scroll to the end and see.

Q: I'm not sure, but it's worth looking into. And I know that the Women and Leadership Archives does have some of the photos from the Selma march too.

Gemperle: Oh, they do?

Q: There's like a handful of photos that you can find that have been digitized, which is great.

Gemperle: Yeah. So that was a big thing, to do that. So my campaign basically began to be education and really expanding horizons for kids. So many kids, like when I taught on the West Side, had never seen downtown. I had one group I took in a van, and we drove around downtown during rush hour just to see all the people getting off the train and then marching to the Loop on

Jackson Boulevard. They were just shocked. They had no idea what went on while they were sitting in a classroom in school. So we did a lot of wandering around.

Q: You took them out of their own bubble in the city, too?

Gemperle: Yes, yes.

Q: It's huge.

Gemperle: Yeah. Yeah. It's a wonderful city.

Q: It's so dynamic and so diverse as we've been talking about. But so big as well.

Gemperle: Right, right. When I was doing a multicultural class, I made the curriculum be based on the ethnic origin of everybody in the class. So we didn't study anything that we didn't have a representative of. And I had this one girl who lived on Roosevelt Road in a second floor apartment that was about a block and a half walk from the school. And her mother wanted us to all come over there, and she would fix tacos for us. So I walked with my whole class over there. And the kids were all in the living room and I went back in the kitchen because she was working away, and she said "Now don't tell the kids, but there are brains in these tacos." it looks like it has brains. I said, "No, I'm not going to tell them that because they're not gonna eat them then (laughs)." But we did. We did all kinds of things. That's how I ended up with the Chinese girls teaching me Chinese painting because I was letting the kids teach me stuff. It's more fun that way. I'm not sure I got that from any education class I took.

Q: Sure.

Gemperle: You know I think it might have been related to my inexperience with a lot of stuff that I was willing to have anybody be my teacher. Lots of people can teach you stuff.

Q: But that— bringing back to what you were mentioning earlier. That's still tied to social justice in a sense as well.

Gemperle: Yes it is.

Q: Yeah.

Gemperle: When I worked at St. Greg's the school was about split Black, white and Mexican. There were a few Asian kids, very few. And developing a curriculum and getting them all to work together was really wonderful. And the dean told us once that when they had visitors to the school the visitors would go in the cafeteria, and they would expect people to be sitting by their racial group and in fact they never were. And we were trying to figure out exactly what was going on. Why the Black kids weren't sitting with all the Black kids. They were friends with the Black kids, but they had other friends. And one day the dean was looking at this hodgepodge mix at this one table, and he was talking to this group, I think it was all boys, and he said "It suddenly dawned on me, they were all kids with single mothers."

[50:00]

Q: Interesting.

Gemperle: That was their common element. So it didn't matter what color you were. And then the other thing we saw was kids who had learning problems were in a special learning program— just one class, the rest of them they were mixed in with the classes. And I went to chaperone the prom one year and there was one Black girl came in a limousine with six white boys, and they were all in the learning program. And they decided to go to the prom together, and then they had their picture taken. I was like, oh, my God. Nobody would understand this. You know, It was just too funny. Wasn't like they were after her at all. She was their best buddy.

Q: That's really interesting.

Gemperle: Yeah. So it's possible to break down ethnic and racial groupings, but it works much better in a small setting. It's really hard to do if you have 5000 students.

Q: Sure.

Gemperle: You'll see all the suburban high schools and even the city high schools. They're pretty much divided by ethnic group. It's just harder to do.

Q: Well, this brings a question thinking back about Mundelein again. So you're talking about your different teaching experiences and how they were diverse. Was the student body of Mundelein diverse at all? Was it predominantly white students or was ther—

Gemperle: No, it was predominantly white.

Q: Okay.

Gemperle: There were a few African American girls. And then after I was teaching on the West Side, we had got a whole program going on getting some of those kids up to Mundelein to go to school. But that took years to kind of develop because the cost of education kept going up.

Q: Yeah, that makes sense.

Gemperle: Hard. [It was] harder to do.

Gemperle: It's a funny thing about white people. They see diversity everywhere because so-and-so is Polish and somebody else is Italian, and that's diversity to them (laughs). Oh, no, it gets

more diverse than that. And then we had— at St. Greg's, we had, World Relief brought us I think it was twenty refugee kids. And they came from the Congo, Iraq, Nepal, Thailand, Myanmar, it was just amazing. And then I have— because Andersonville is Swedish, it was Swedish anyway, and there's a beautiful Swedish museum. And the head of the museum called me, and she said, "We have these lyric singers from Sweden are here, and I wonder if they could come over to your classroom." And I said, "Oh, sure." And so they came over and talked with the kids and watched what the kids were doing and walked all around the room and everything, and then they left. And these little very short people from Nepal said, "They were so tall." It was like the biggest shock to them. They were all normal people, but they were tall. So you just have no idea how people are reading the situation.

Q: Yeah

Gemperle: It's always a surprise. "The tall girls!" Yeah, we'd like to stretch our wings a little bit. I can't think of many minority people, even in the arts, you know, probably the arts would have been the last place because it'd be so esoteric whether you could get a job in the arts.

Q: Sure.

Gemperle: More likely if you're an English major to get a job in an office.

Q: Did you see Mundelein get more diverse? Did it become more diverse?

Gemperle: Yes

Q: It did.

Gemperle: It got much more diverse.

Q: So it did change in that sense by the time that you left. Okay.

Gemperle: Yeah. It took a while, though.

Q: Sure. Thinking about diversity, we touched on this a little bit already. You talked about the Selma March and how Mundelein students as well as faculty participated in that. What other national events or world events that you recall during your time at Mundelein? Is there anything else that kind of shaped your moment? And you also mentioned, like, the NCAA basketball game.

[55:00]

Gemperle: Oh yeah (laughs).

Q: Right, so there's that. That's different, of course, than Selma. Was there anything else on a national or global level that you remember during your time at Mundelein?

Gemperle: I don't know. I don't really think I have any grasp or remembrance of that. No, I just-- it was quite--I mean, we were all together when [President John F.] Kennedy was shot. My last day of student teaching, Bobby Kennedy was shot. And we spent a lot of time talking about the political upheaval in our world, and talking about the civil rights activities, other than Selma, the open housing law that was passed. And I learned more about that watching PBS than actual experience. But to find out how [President Lyndon B.] Johnson was persuaded to do this, and Dr. Martin Luther King's broad role in social change, it's all pretty interesting. I'm frequently at night watching something on CNN about my past, trying to figure out how did I miss that? But I'm very much of-- what's in front of me is what I work on. So I didn't get into an analysis of a lot of what was going on. My husband came in '68, but I didn't see him. We weren't married yet. I was still in the convent. And then I learned when his sister got married, she married a guy who was right there in the middle of the demonstrations in '68. So what a surprise that was.

Gemperle: And his wife, my husband's sister, never wanted him to talk about it. I was like, what? I want to interview him.

Q: Yeah.

Gemperle: Some people have an interest in civil change, and others do not have the same interest. I put together an exhibit at our historical society, one of our board members, her mother was on the jury that tried the Chicago Seven, and she kept a notebook, which is going to come to the Mundelein [Women and Leadership] Archives eventually. Right now, part of the display is down at the Federal Building because they were so excited to get this intimate look at what happened in that exciting time period after the '68 convention. So we did this whole exhibit, and I found another photographer who was at the demonstration. So he loaned us a few pictures. I think he was just so happy someone asked. They're just sitting in a portfolio, nobody's looking at 'em. And he was there, and he had quite a little collection, so we put some of them in our exhibit, and then the whole term-- the whole world is watching. We had the good fortune right before this exhibit to have an exhibit about things that were made in Chicago.

Gemperle: And so we had this old TV, and it was the right vintage for the way we watched. And it's hard to remember how-- you have visual images, but to remember that little dumpy screen that we watched (laughs). So we had this TV in the exhibit, and then we had his pictures, photos on the TV. So remember what it was like seeing that stuff. I went to a few demonstrations after I was married, with my husband. I went to a demonstration to let the Chicago Seven off down by the Federal Building. In fact, I jokingly said in the exhibit, "I'm in that crowd." You know, there's a picture and all the people are like eighth of an inch high. I said, "I'm in there somewhere." We didn't really get our kids so interested in, I don't know, stepping up and being in demonstrations.

[01:00:00]

Q: But that was formative for your life, it sounds like.

Gemperle: Yeah. It's the sixties. It goes without saying.

Q: Yes. It affected everybody in one way or another.

Gemperle: Right, right.

Q: The thing I'm curious too, going back to what you were mentioning earlier about 1968. So you were in the convent at the time, you said, okay, so you were in Dubuque?

Gemperle: No, I was on the West Side of Chicago.

Q: Got it.

Gemperle: Yeah. Saint Mary's.

Q: That's Saint Mary's, okay yes.

Gemperle: I was living in that convent. The upheaval, you know, the big rioting was on Madison Street, and we were down by 10th Street. So we were maybe a mile away. But we were not going downtown or anyplace else. We just stayed inside. Watched the TV.

Q: Could you hear it?

Gemperle: No. Now, in hindsight, I realized my brother-in-law was out there in the mess. It's funny how you find other people who were participants. My husband had gone to Mississippi for that summer and worked at a parish school, teaching kids, helping, tutoring, et cetera. And then he decided to come to Chicago. But it was kind of chaotic. I guess he changed his mind, I can't remember. It's hard to remember this stuff from so long ago. When you asked me about

Mundelein, I was trying to think. The big thing I remember as an art student at Mundelein is that they told us we had to go down to these exhibits on Michigan Avenue. There were all these galleries, buildings that are long gone, but they would say, "Oh, go see the Nichols' exhibit." And you'd have to learn where that was and figure out how to get there. Or we would go to the Art Institute and see some special exhibit because you had all this art history you had to study. So that was a big thing for me because I wasn't a city girl and I had not been traveling all around the city.

Gemperle: My aunt and my grandmothers told me, "Whenever you get on the bus, ask the bus driver where your stop is. Tell them you want him to remind you." So it was before all that automatic stuff. And they would the bus drivers are just great. They'd tell me, "Okay, you want to get off on Ontario."

Q: Compared to where you grew up, I mean, it was probably amazing, right? Just all the resources and art that was available in the city?

Gemperle: Right. That was like a second part of my education, is the city. And my younger brother and sister, my family, moved to Crete [Illinois], and they stayed out there and went to school out there. And I remember bringing my sister in to go to Marshall Field's to have lunch. She was so intimidated. She was just shaking. She was, like, thirteen. And I was like, "Oh, this is just Chicago." But there really was a difference of how she was raised. And my parents were happy to leave the city when they got married, so. Figures that one of their children would want to go back. Right.

Q: And I was gonna say you really-- and you stayed.

Gemperle: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

Gemperle: Oh. When we bought this house, we live in a 120-year-old antique house. And when we bought this house, they came to see it. And my mother just said, "Oh, that house is way too big for you." And she's right. I'm just not really obsessed with cleaning and taking care of a house. I love fixing things. We did everything in little projects. See this cabinet behind me here? That came from St. Mary's. When the school closed, they couldn't pay us the second half of our year salary, so they let us pick out furnishings. So I brought that here to remind me.

Q: You have a physical reminder (laughs).

Gemperle: Yeah. And then, in fact, because I was still working for the Archdiocese, and then they started having discussions about pension. I said, "Well what about the eight years I worked for you before?"

[01:05:00]

Q: What did they say?

Gemperle: "Well, we'll look into it." I think they accommodated me a little bit, because when you work for a Catholic organization like that, they pay you so low that then you don't get that much in Social Security. Because your pay is so low.

Q: That's interesting.

Gemperle: Yeah, you just don't realize it. And in fact, it really hits women.

Q: Gender dynamic.

Gemperle: Yeah. Yeah, it's women that are more likely to be teachers and take lower salaries. And in fact, the Catholic school system really counted on that. When they started getting people

who needed to be paid better, they were, you know, "What? We don't have nuns that we pay nothing to?"(laughs). It's really a problem. It didn't work as well as they thought it was going to. I'm trying to think of what else we did. Sometimes when I was in the dorm, especially when it was just seven of us on a Friday night, we would walk to Evanston up Sheridan Road and then take a bus or something back. But it was like, a safe thing to do. We didn't go to parties much. We were too young to go to bars, you know, so that was one of our activities. My husband just walked in.

Q: What did you do in Evanston? Did you go to Northwestern or downtown?

Gemperle: No, we would just look at the houses.

Q: Okay. How long did that walk take from Mundelein?

Gemperle: It took a while. It's maybe five miles. I don't think we ever walked there and walked back. I think we walked there and took the train back.

Q: Okay, so you took the 'L' back?

Gemperle: Yeah. No, I never really saw much of Northwestern's campus except for those little walking things. I was trying to think of what else we did. Getting art supplies was a real challenge. The school bookstore had some things, and then you really had to go all the way downtown to the Loop to get any art supplies of any quality. And we were always waiting to see if somebody would open another art store. Just because there was limited choice and art supplies were expensive.

Q: For the art supplies, did you have to pay out of pocket or?

Gemperle: Oh yeah.

Q: So the faculty didn't buy the art supplies?

Gemperle: Oh, no, no.

Q: Oh, wow.

Gemperle: They didn't supply anything. And me as being so inexperienced, I didn't know what I was buying. But no, you had to buy your own paints, your own canvases, your own brushes. Also, I don't know if you realize this, but when I went to college, we still had to wear skirts. We were not allowed to wear pants, so we were all dressed up all the time. And then we were going into these messy art classes, and we had smocks. But I would say almost every good skirt that I still wore from high school got paint in it. There's just no way. Finally, I think when we came back, I feel like there was some lessening of the dress code. When I came back in '68. It was a lady's school (laughs). All you ladies have to be dressed up. But I've talked to people who were in other colleges at the same time, and that was very typical that all the women were in skirts and dresses.

Q: Because at the time too, the other women's college--was Rosary open at the time as well?

Gemperle: Yeah

Q: Yeah, it was probably a similar dynamic there.

Gemperle: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. But I mean, that's interesting too. Like being a lady, but then also doing art. Right. As you said, it seems to clash a little bit.

[01:10:00]

Gemperle: Yeah. Right. Where are the blue jeans.

Q: So no one wore--did anyone wear blue jeans or pants or? It was all skirts.

Gemperle: I can't remember-- what I remember was being upset about getting paint on myself, but I can't remember if we were allowed to wear pants when we weren't in class. You probably have to look up something in the history of Mundelein and see if anybody talked about that. But I had a friend who was at a school in Iowa, and she was always dressed up too.

Q: Was this kind of unspoken that you had to wear skirts, or were there any formal rules that you had?

Gemperle: I think there were rules.

Q: Okay, sure.

Gemperle: I think if there were rules, then you can follow that and maybe see when they were dropped. Surely by 1970, they must have been dropped.

Q: Yeah. It seems like Mundelein was becoming more progressive over time, over the course of the '60s too.

Gemperle: Sure. The nuns stopped wearing those habits.

Q: Yeah, that was pretty drastic. Too especially after Vatican II right?

Gemperle: Yes. And we did spend a lot of time reading the documents from Vatican II, and seeing how the church could enter the 20th century, because it was really stuck in the 18th century. That was a big thing.

Q: That's interesting, too, because that really is a major change, not only the Catholic Church, but specifically in Mundelein to see how that played out too.

Gemperle: Well, then Mundelein had a thing they called institutional analysis, and they were figuring out how many students were daughters of college graduates and how many were first time college--where their parents had not gone to college, and they were the first in their family.

Q: Oh, first generation. Yeah.

Gemperle: Yeah. And they had a whole analysis of this, and I don't know if you've ever seen it, but it's a whole written report where people were coming from--

Q: What year was that analysis?

Gemperle: Let me think. I feel like they started it in '60-'62 in somewhere around in that, because they told us about it when I got-- and I don't know how many years they did it or what they did with it. I'm pretty sure they called it institutional analysis.

Q: Okay.

Gemperle: So it might be the phrase to search and see if you can find out anything about it. Yeah, because I was the daughter of a college graduate, but it wasn't my mother, it was my father. And that would have been typical that males would have gotten education, but I'm just sure there are probably young women there whose mothers were educated. My mother was very poor, and she got a partial scholarship, and my grandmother couldn't pay the rest of her fees to go to Mundelein, so she went to work when she was eighteen.

Q: Yeah.

Gemperle: And if both your parents went to college, then you have different perspective on this.

Q: A different level of privilege, too.

Q: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, absolutely. Especially thinking you about how college access has grown over time, too. Especially in the second half of the 20th century and beyond.

Gemperle: Yeah, it was a big thing. And then my sister dropped out of college. I was so shocked at that. But she was this little suburban girl and had a very small world (laughs).

Q: Where did she go to college again?

Gemperle: What?

Q: Where did your sister go to college?

Gemperle: Marian College in Indianapolis?

Q: Yes. Okay.

Gemperle: Yeah. And she got accepted at the University of San Francisco, but that was too far for her to go. She was too afraid.

Q: Sure.

Gemperle: And then my brother went to Illinois Southern, and he dropped out after three years. I'm like, "what is the matter with you? You need that college degree." Well, then he married a woman who got him to go back to college and get his engineering degree. And my sister, oddly enough, started off majoring in art, and then she moved to Florida and got a degree in accounting. Well, those things are just so diverse. No wonder she was confused (laughs). I can't even imagine getting a degree in accounting. She worked in business.

[01:15:00]

Q: Well, very different from art (laughs).

Gemperle: Yeah. My students at St. Greg used to say, "You know Mrs. Gemperle: , we really like math." And I'd say, "Oh, really? Well, I'll incorporate some math into art because we have design, and we can do proportions on--" and they said, "No, we like math, because there's always an answer. When we're in art, we don't know what the answer is." Well, that's because you're creating the answer. See that's a heavy burden on a teenager.

Q: There's no truth.

Gemperle: Right? So funny. Well, I'm not sure I can tell you much more about Mundelein. We did have those wonderful lunch-- Sunday lunch. There was a man, an African American man who made the most wonderful Southern fried chicken, and we never got tired of it. Every Sunday, it was like a treat. They, Mundelein put on just fabulous meals the whole time we were there. And it was a cafeteria line, and we would jokingly call some of it mystery meat, but it was mostly meat, potato and vegetables. Pretty similar homey food. And then we used to go to Loyola's church for mass. Because Loyola was so radical they had turned the altar around before all the other churches did. So that's why we're going to mass there. We walked on the lakefront, you know that dorm is right on the lake, Coffey Hall.

Q: Yeah, Coffey Hall.

Gemperle: So that was a lovely place to sit and do some of your reading. In the spring, we could see the fishermen fishing for smelt in the lake.

Q: You could see it from your dorm room?

Gemperle: What?

Q: You could-- could you see--?

Gemperle: No, just from the lounge.

Q: Okay.

Gemperle: Or you would walk around outside, you'd see them. They were down a level from the campus. And the Loyola's campus has just expanded so much it's just unbelievable. That hadn't changed much in '68. The campus was pretty much the same.

Q: So this is kind of bringing us towards the end of the interview anyway. I have one more just kind of question specifically about Mundelein and then the impact Mundelein had on you. So were there any experiences you had at Mundelein that you found meaningful either at the time or looking back? And I think we've touched on some of that already. So that's one question, experiences that you found meaningful at Mundelein. But the other question is how did Mundelein impact you for the rest of your life?

Gemperle: Well, they used to joke about the Mundle-Bundles. I went to a co-ed high school, so being in an all-female environment opened me out to be more myself, a little freer. It gave me a

sense of direction. They were really big on sense of direction. And that's why the social justice thing came up. And that's why how you can contribute to society was very important. It was not an education for you alone, it was for society to reach out and make life better for other people. So I would say that was the chief impact. When I meet people that graduated from Mundelein, we all kind of nod like, "Oh, yeah, we know." It's about 'get busy and get things done.' It's not about my own personal, I don't know, things that just I want to do. This is about the whole world. And you know, I'm not sure I could say anything that I did because of Mundelein. I did know that Edgewater existed when I was at Mundelein and I knew that things were changing along the shoreline. I kind of missed that they were tearing down all the old mansions. I recently did a walking tour showing photographs of all the old mansions, and I can't remember that I saw any of them.

[01:20:00]

Gemperle: But the economic time changed, and when we worked to save the two mansions in Berger Park, it was like, we can do this, we can have an impact here and do stuff. And I think that really came from being in that kind of a school. It wasn't just about notebooks filled with notes and stuff. It seems like we got to do something with this knowledge. So does that answer you for that question?

Q: That's perfect.

Gemperle: Okay.

Q: And that was something you're already something I wanted to just kind of follow up on was you've been talking about creating the Edgewater Historical Society and then some of the things you've done right. Saving the mansions in Berger Park, which is huge. Just thinking a little more about that connection as well. So is there anything else about your connection as part of the Edgewater Historical Society as tied to Mundelein or influence of one on the other?

Gemperle: I don't know. When I started with the Historical Society, I did this gathering together process, and we met with Sister Mary Kramer [Mary Angelita Kramer, BVM] at Mundelein to discuss the oral history project, which we did, which was twenty-five interviews. And then my friend Claire wrote a grant to the Department of Cultural Affairs for a video, and I ended up being the coordinator of the video. Sister Mary Kramer is so funny. She said, "It's so much fun to work with you, Kathy, because once you have an idea, you're going to get it done, it's going to be finished." And I said, "Oh, really? I don't always think that." But she said that was one of my characteristics. And we came up with a mission for the Historical Society that really was related to the whole community. So it was about teaching people about neighborhood history and giving them a sense of place. And I think, you know, I probably got that in some ways from my Mundelein experience. Mundelein was not isolated from the community.

Q: And what you've been talking about too, even in terms of your teaching experience, was all about place as well. I've noticed that in your comments.

Gemperle: Right.

Q: So, I'm reaching the end of my questions that I prepared for you today. Is there anything else you'd like to say on the record before we end? Anything else you'd like to share before we stop the recording?

Gemperle: (Laughs) Before we stop the recording? I don't know. I feel like my Mundelein experience was a great experience. I'm not sure that was so great in the arts, but a great personal experience. I think I went to school in an era that wasn't really looking for female leaders, but at Mundelein, they were looking for female leaders. And I remember as a child, my father said, "we don't want you to be a follower. We want you to be a leader." And I fit with that image that I could do this, that I could reach out to people and get people to share. So, yeah, Mundelein was looking for female leaders, and they found lots of them.

Q: That's perfect. Well, thank you so much for your time today. I really appreciated talking to you.

Gemperle: You're welcome. It was nice chatting with you.

Q: I'll end the recording now.

Gemperle: Okay.

Q: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]