

SHARE YOUR STORY: STUDENT LIFE AT MUNDELEIN

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Joan Pernecke's Oral History

Women and Leadership Archives

Loyola University Chicago

2022

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Joan Pernecké conducted by Chris Mattix on January 12, 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]

Introductions, family background, and how she ended up at Mundelein.

[5:00 - 10:00]

Working to graduate in two years, deciding her major, on-campus living, on-campus job, classes she took, and losing her notes before finals.

[10:00 - 15:00]

Losing her notes again before finals, someone stealing on campus, and changes at Mundelein while she attended.

[15:00 - 20:00]

Safety on and around campus and Vietnam War protests.

[20:00 - 25:00]

Making friends with Loyola exchange students, roommates, friends, and story about meeting Charles Manson's followers in California and not knowing who they were until watching a movie about them at Mundelein.

[25:00 - 30:00]

Manson story continued.

[30:00 - 35:00]

Costume party, Learning Resource Center, and faculty that had an influence on her.

[35:00 - 40:00]

Sister Jean remembering her, being the resident bug remover in Coffey Hall, and living in Coffey Hall.

[40:00 - 45:00]

Friends made while living in Coffey Hall and professors she worked with.

[45:00 - 50:00]

Professors continued and changes to Mundelein since her time on campus.

[50:00 - 52:32]

Thanking the BVMs and wrap up.

NARRATOR BIO

Joan Pernecke was a Social Studies major and graduated from Mundelein in 1977. She was raised in the Chicago area where she attended Catholic girls' schools. During high school, Joan earned 60 college credits before attending Mundelein. She recalls speaking with Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt, BVM and using her previous credits to start at Mundelein as a Junior. During her two years at Mundelein, she participated in the organization S.I.S.T.E.R., lived in Coffey Hall, and was an office assistant to a professor in the Home Economics department. Joan recalls several of her relationships with fellow students at Mundelein and Loyola University, including Iranian international students. After graduating from Mundelein, Pernecke obtained her law degree and worked as a prosecutor.

INTERVIEWER BIO

Chris Mattix was a graduate student in the Public History Master's program at Loyola University Chicago and a graduate assistant at the Women in Leadership Archives in 2021-2023. Chris received their bachelor's degree in history and human communication from Western Michigan University in 2020 and focuses on the history of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Transcriptionist: Chris Mattix

Interviewee: Joan Pernecke

Locations: Chicago, IL and Evanston, IL via Zoom

Interviewer: Chris Mattix

Date: January 12, 2022

[BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW]

[00:00]

Q: All right. For the record, my name is Chris Mattix. I am a graduate assistant at the Women and Leadership Archives. Interviewing Joan Pernecke, class of 1977.

Pernecke: Yes.

Q: On January 12, 2020 [Edit: 2022], for the Share of Your Story: Student Life at Mundelein Project. I am in Chicago and Joan is in Evanston, Illinois. To start us off, could you please tell us a little bit about yourself and your family, like when you were born and where you were raised?

Pernecke: Sure. I think you misstated it. It's 2022, believe it or not.

Q: Yeah. Right (laughs).

Pernecke: Hard to believe, but that's what they're telling us. So I'm going to go with that. I was born in Chicago, raised in Chicago, went to all Chicago schools, a number of different Chicago Catholic schools. Two Catholic grammar schools started at St. Felicitas, finished at Queen of All Saints, then went to St. Scholastica on Ridge in Chicago, finished at Montini Catholic out in Lombard. But our family was on the south side—southeast side of the city in Avalon Park, near the Chatham neighborhood. And then later in my childhood, we moved to north side near Cicero

and Peterson. But I was always raised in the city, went to school. So I'm here in Evanston due to a fluke of nature. But I'm a Chicago girl.

Q: So you went to a lot of Catholic schools it sounds like—or religious schools.

Pernecke: Exclusively, yeah. All Catholic schools, like most of my peers did from my neighborhood.

Q: Yeah. Was that an influence in going to Mundelein?

Pernecke: It was in part. There were a lot of other reasons I went to Mundelein, but that was definitely part of it. Yes. I went to an all-girls Catholic high school, St. Scholastica, for three years. I loved it. It was really, I thought, a great education, great teachers. And when I went to Montini, that was also a Catholic high school, but it was co-ed, and I really liked the single gender piece of it just so I could focus on school.

Q: Were there any other reasons you chose Mundelein?

Pernecke: Yes. The biggest reason is probably also one of the most notable things about my career there. So through high school, I'd taken a couple of advanced placement courses, a few of those. But I also, with my mother's wise urging, took tests that were available, back then. It was college-level examination program. It's no longer available, unfortunately. But it was there for probably fifteen/twenty years in the '60s through the '70s and early '80s. And she encouraged me to take all these examinations that would let me test out of, or get college credit for things that I had already learned. So the maximum number of hours that you could get was sixty. And so when I was looking at the paperwork, there was no website back then, looking at the paperwork, I signed up for all the things that I knew that I'd probably do okay in. English and social studies and history and those sorts of things. And she really encouraged me to sign up for every possible test that I could take, including chemistry and other sciences and mathematics. And I'm like, "I just don't think so, mom." She said, "No, those will be my treat." Since I had been doing everything on my own dime.

So I did. And lo and behold, I got sixty hours of college credit—six-zero. Two full years. Yes, thank you. So flabbergasted and excited and surprised and thrilled, I went to all the colleges that I had an interest in, including it was [St.] Procopius—now St. Benedictine, a couple of other colleges in, DePaul, Loyola, and none of them would accept the full 60 hours. And again, I'm doing this with my own money, my own savings, my own earnings. And so I really needed to make sure that I was able to maximize every single credit hour that I had earned. And when I went to Mundelein at that time, the dean of academics was Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt [BVM], and she met with me. We had never met each other before, obviously. And I liked the idea of a city campus, a smaller campus back in Chicago. I missed Chicago. My mom had moved to Lombard, so I had lived there with her the last year of high school.

[05:00]

But I really wanted to get back. And I liked the diversity of the city. I liked the setting. I liked it right on the lake [Lake Michigan] and all that kind of good thing. But most importantly, when I met with her, she said, "Well, you know, that's good for you and wonderful. However, I don't think that you're going to be able to get all of your degree requirements in just two years." And I had already had the '75-'76 course catalog. And I asked her if they had the '76-'77 course catalog. And she said, "Well, it's not finalized, but we have a draft. We have some working ideas." I asked her to share that with me. She did. She opened a desk drawer, pulled out some file, made a photocopy for me, and said, "If you can come back, come back in a week. And if you can show me that you can get all your course—your graduation major requirements in two years, you can do it." And so I came back, I mapped it out. It was a little twisty-turny, but I was able to get all of the degree requirements within those two years. So she basically said, "Well, you did. And welcome aboard." So she let me enroll as a junior, and that was the start of my career. So that was the main reason, among many, that I chose Mundelein is because Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt let me convince her to enroll as a junior and take all sixty of my credit hours.

Q: That's amazing. Yeah. So once you got to Mundelein, what did you decide to study once you were here?

Pernecke: I had already decided because I had to—I had already decided my major, and that was social studies and then history. And I started right in. It was a wonderful experience in terms of the classes. I felt very supported. The professors were all wonderful. So I had already had the plan since seventh grade of what I was going to do and how I was going to get there. So I just followed my plan. And the first year was great. The second year was even better. I lived in Coffey Hall and worked on campus part-time for one of the professors there, in what we would colloquially call home economics or fashion and design, department, and just did some filing and organizing and that sort of thing. I did some hours in the LRC, the Learning Resource Center, which had just opened. It was a beautiful facility right on the lake, as we know. And so I was able to work on campus, live on campus, go to school, and it really let me maximize my time in terms of studying and all that kind of good stuff. As well as not having to travel back and forth to Lombard or someplace else.

Q: Were there any courses that stick out in your mind today that you took?

Pernecke: Honestly, no, nothing in particular. Although, like I said, I think all the professors, there were very supportive. They were understanding, they were good teachers. I learned a lot. I was able to do well in school. And a couple of interesting things happened the second year, which was I finished junior year. I stayed on campus. I went home, worked over the summer and so forth. But when I came back, I continued, now, this is my last year, and I always took meticulous notes. Like really detailed notebooks. And I had all these spirals. At the end of the first semester getting ready for finals, my notebooks are missing. They're gone. And I had them either in my backpack or in my dorm room. But my recollection is I went to work on campus, and when I came back, they were gone. And we didn't lock our dorm room. We just didn't. So I was obviously upset and worried. And so I went to the professors. I said, "I don't know what to tell you. I never anticipated this. I didn't think that this might be a thing." And so each and every one of them said, "You know what, all of your papers and your exams and your tests so far this semester have been fine. We're going to exempt you from exams."

[10:00]

So it's like, wow. So I didn't have to take exams the first semester of senior year. Now I'm keeping my books and my notebooks and all my spirals next to me, Velcroed to me. And I was—

the second semester—working again for the professor, who was in the fashion and design and clothing and textiles. And while I was working for her, I took my backpack, and I put it in a file cabinet in her classroom that was very inconspicuous and just sort of off—not in a corner, but sort of out of the way and closed the file cabinet drawer and went about my work. And I had to run some errands for her or go do something or get something. And when I came back, I am not kidding you—the backpack and the notebooks were gone again. So I felt like a real—I didn't—and really, it happened again. I had it with me. I kept it with me. I never left it anywhere. When I used to go and take a shower and stuff, I'd bring my backpack with me or lock the dorm room. So there you have it. Anyway, they were gone again, and I got the same dispensation, which I was ever so grateful for.

Q: That's crazy. Did you ever find out what happened to the notebooks?

Pernecke: Well, somebody stole them twice.

Q: [laughs] Wow.

Pernecke: Yeah, somebody stole them. Twice.

Q: Well, luckily, you were able to get that dispensation. Was there anything meaningful like that that happened while you were on campus that you remember? Like any other story like that.

Pernecke: You know this is interesting because I hadn't connected the dots until now. But there was one instance where—I didn't have any other—there were no other thefts. I had no other things taken from me. But this was freshman year, and it was one day, I remember I was coming downstairs—I lived on the second floor coming downstairs—I took the elevator. Don't ask me why I wouldn't take the stairs—but I didn't. And so I got off the elevator, and we had our security desk there. Security desk where you had to be a resident to come in. You couldn't just be some random person, which I appreciated. And I left and went and did whatever. And then later that day, the RA [resident assistant] and one of the nuns, and I don't remember which one it was. She was very kind, but they wanted to talk to me, and I'm like, "Okay." And they were asking me

questions about a wallet. And did I know, had I been in so-and-so's room, or had I seen the wallet or had I taken the wallet? I'm like, "What are you talking about?" And it turned out that someone in—they found this wallet with everything but the cash. No credit cards back then, but everything but the cash laying on the floor of the elevator. And it was there when I got off the elevator. I didn't notice it. And so someone else had taken this wallet and grabbed the cash, pitched the wallet down on the floor of the elevator. So, of course, they're asking me, since the student who was working the desk that day said, "Well, I saw Joan Pernecke get off." So I should have connected the dots that there was someone with very sticky fingers on campus, unfortunately.

Q: Yeah, that's crazy. So you were on campus for two years?

Pernecke: Two years.

Q: Were there any changes you noticed in your time at Mundelein or since?

Pernecke: Yeah, not particularly. I would say it was pretty much—from my memory, pretty much the same for both years. I liked being on campus. Like I said, I loved any opportunity to do something at Piper Hall, the mansion. And we did have a group, sort of not really a club, but the acronym was very silly. It was called S.I.S.T.E.R.—Social Interest Society Toward Education Renewal. And we did a lot of social awareness things around the environment and migrant workers—which was a big issue then.

[15:00]

Migrant workers rights and recognizing them for the difficult work conditions and often unfair work conditions and wages and so forth. So we did those two kinds of projects. And we had our meetings—we were allowed to have our meetings at Piper Hall, and that was always fun. But I enjoyed the building very much. I thought it was exquisitely beautiful. And so any opportunity to do anything there or even be in the building.

Everything else was pretty much the same in terms of the dorm, the campus. There was a period of time while I was there those two years where there was a lot of street crime happening in the area. And so unfortunately, some female students had been robbed. A couple of them, I think had been, and I don't remember the specifics or the particulars, but a few of them had been either sexually assaulted or attempted to sexual assault. And so what happened was the Loyola campus started a program to get male students who would volunteer to escort us, the Mundelein students, either to the LRC and back or to someplace within the general campus area to walk us. And we would just have to call or have the desk call and say, "I need to go walk over to the whatever bookstore, or I need to go to the LRC, and I'll be studying until like ten o'clock or whenever it closed, can you meet me at the door and walk me back?" And so I thought that was a really effective way and simple way for Loyola and Mundelein to work together. Because Loyola had a lot of male students, more than female at the time. And so they just had this list of volunteers of guys who would do that. And I thought that was really nice and again, a very simple, cheap way of further ensuring students safety. It was unfortunate that it was needed, but it was. As rough as the city is right now in terms of out of control street crime, it wasn't good then. This was again, '75 to '77. And in particular, that area in Rogers Park was really dicey. Or could be really dicey.

Q: Yeah, that's crazy. Walking through Rogers Park, that's not what I associate with it.

Pernecke: It was pretty bad.

Q: Yeah. So you mentioned Piper Hall first, let me tell you, it's still beautiful. That's where the archives are. But you also mentioned working with S.I.S.T.E.R. and migrant workers. Were there any other, like, political or cultural events that occurred while you were Mundelein that you remember?

Pernecke: Not that I particularly recall. There may have been the activities that we did with the S-I-S-T-E-R. were pretty much limited to migrant workers and the environment, but I don't remember others. I didn't participate if there were, there probably were during that period of time. But I had a pretty tight schedule with work, school, study.

Q: So you started at Mundelein right at the end of the war in Vietnam. Do you recall any protests or any lasting effects of that war and the protests that happened on campus during your time there?

Pernecke: I do not. And again, there very well may have been. There very well may have been. But speaking of the war in Vietnam—I don't recall being involved in that. There probably were some again. But one thing that was happening at the time, there were a lot of exchange students at Loyola, and there was a group that I befriended through just meeting people randomly out and about in the general college area—campus areas. There was a group from Iran, and they were all male students. They had been sent by their parents to study, obviously, and I befriended them. They were just very interesting, very polite, and very new to the culture.

[20:00]

But certainly because their parents clearly had resources, they were savvy enough to be able to navigate. One of the funnier things that happened was one of the guys who was just a sweetheart. His name was Bashad Barbud, and he didn't have a decent winter coat. And I'm like, "Really?" And so I had an extra one from Uncle Dan's Army and Navy Surplus. And it was like this really cool khaki coat with these big pockets. It was just a really cool coat, and it was a man's coat. So I gave it to him and his friends teased him merciless. And I didn't understand what the issue was. It turns out it resembles to a great deal the uniform of a garbage collector in Iran at the time. But he wore it proudly. He did. He wore it anyway.

The unfortunate piece of that is that, not while I was on campus, but a few years later, I had lost contact with Bashad and the other guys. But there was the overthrow and the Shah of Iran was deposed, and a new government came in. And most of these—I'm wondering what happened to these young men, because their families, obviously, like Bashad's father, was a minister of some importance in the government. And I just always wondered what happened to him and what happened to his family and his other friends and whether he was able to go back or not—whether he was able to go back at all. And I just think about—that was something of political, social importance that happened to people that I know, so I think that was either '78 or '79. So it was a couple of years after I left.

Q: Yeah. Were there any other relationships like that you formed with other students that you remember?

Pernecke: Yeah. I mean, I had my first year roommate. She and I were quite different. I'll just leave it at that. So we didn't socialize very much. But my second year roommate was a blast. I often wonder how she's doing, where she is, hoping she's happy and well. I'm going to give you a shout-out out, Betty Voss. She was wonderful, fun, generous, down to earth, kind, just a really nice person. And she and I got along, I thought really well. We had a great second year. Her brother went to Loyola as well. I think he was a year ahead or maybe—I don't remember. But it was kind of a built-in way, if I had nothing else going on, I'd go with her. And there were lots of different parties and gatherings and so forth and so on. So I did that. I don't remember his first name, somebody Voss, but they were—V-O-S-S, they were really nice brother and sister.

And then there were just a lot of nice students on both campuses. I did make friends with a number of people, male and female, and we did things together or not. But there were a couple—there was one—actually I hadn't thought about this recently. This was a very odd story, but it was one I'll never forget. So I made friends with some of the other guys at Loyola that were in a fraternity, and they lived in a dorm house, not a dorm, but a frat house just south of campus over there somewhere, some big old house I can't remember. But some big old house. And I don't even remember the name of the frat. But my friend and I, he invited me over, and we were going to watch—the group was going to watch a movie. And so there we are in the frat house, and we are sitting on a couch in the main living room of this big old house. And I've got a bowl of popcorn and there's other people behind us, boys and girls, young men and young women. We're watching the movie that had just come out, *Helter Skelter*, which was about the crimes and the murders that [Charles] Manson and his followers had committed. And so I guess I need to tell you the backstory story first. So when I was young, my mother and I took a vacation to see my aunt, her sister-in-law in law, out in California and also to visit her daughters and their families who were living in California near the Los Angeles area.

[25:00]

So we did that. And one particular day on that visit—this was during the summer of, I believe 1970—there was a street fair of some sort. And so I'm wandering around. I was twelve or

thirteen, and I'm wandering around off by myself, and my mother and my aunt are lagging behind. And I see people that look very different from what I was used to and interesting. And I see these very broad courthouse steps. It was a modern building with, like, modern lights, very much different from what I was used to in Chicago, from my experience. So I'm wandering over there, and I see these—there's a group of people sitting on the steps. And they all had shaved heads. And from a distance, I couldn't tell if they were men or women. I wasn't used to ever seeing a woman with a shaved head. And as I got closer, I could see that the majority of them were women, and they were all wearing this, like, dark blue, blue jean material, like dungaree material jackets and pants and everything. And some of the women—there was a couple, one or two men, but they were mostly women. They not only were doing this very elaborate and beautiful, but bizarre embroidery, but they all had, like, X's carved into their foreheads. Not a marker, not a tattoo—carved into their forehead, what looked like to me. So as I'm getting closer, I'm like, "Oh."

Well, anyway, I stood there. We had a long conversation for about fifteen or twenty minutes. They were asking me who I was, was I visiting. And I was explaining all that kind of stuff. And I'm visiting my auntie and my cousin, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And we're talking about embroidery and the best hoop and French knots and the best threads and all this kind of stuff. And I hear from behind me my mother's voice, which in retrospect, was a dash stressed, "Joan, come away from there." And I'm like, "Okay, okay." Being twelve or thirteen. Yeah. And so I finally did a few minutes later because she repeated her urgent request. I walked back, and she never talked to me about who they were or what they were. We didn't get a newspaper in our house. I didn't watch the news. And it was happening in California.

So I had no idea who these people were. And I had no idea why she was so freaked out about it. But years later, now this is six years later. I'm sitting on the couch in the frat dorm with the bowl of popcorn on my lap. And there's a scene in this movie, *Helter Skelter*. It's not a long scene, but it's outdoor outside the courthouse where the trial had occurred—Manson and his followers trials had occurred. And the scene shows some of his followers and family members who were brilliantly by Vinny BoBugliosi, who was the prosecutor in the case. They had been put under subpoena, but then ordered because of witness exclusion rules to not—you couldn't be in the courtroom because he was trying to make sure he had them under paper and also keep them out of the courtroom, so they wouldn't disrupt the proceedings. They were sitting on the courthouse steps and that's who I met.

So here comes the scene in the movie. My eyes—I was like, my reaction was over the top. I just remember going (gasps) and then pointing at the television like "that's why...Oh my God!". I jump up in the popcorn's everywhere, and people are like, "What are you talking about?" "I met those people!" And they're like, "Are you kidding me?" I'm like, "No, I'm not kidding you!" So it was another memorable event. It's like, wow. I have no idea who was there other than the friend I knew from the frat, Tom. But yeah, because my mother would never—she never said anything to me about it. She's like, "I just want to forget about the whole thing." She told my older sister about it because my older sister was living in San Francisco at the time. And she had happened to call our aunt's phone and say—talk to my mom and say, "How's the visit going?" She's like, "Well, it's fine, but," and described what happened. And Nancy's like, "Why didn't you—what?" And she goes, "I tried to stay really calm, but inside I was screaming at the top of my lungs." Anyway, so that was my experience in the frat dorm.

Q: Yeah. Wow, that's crazy. Do you have any other stories like that about your time at Mundelein? Well, not like that, I assume.

Pernecke: Not like that.

[30:00]

Q: Any other fun or interesting stories that pop into your mind today?

Pernecke: Yeah, I went to a costume party. I think first or second year, I can't remember which year it was, but I had a pretty effective costume of—like, a black, velvet kind of long dress, kind of a creepy thing. And then I had teased out my hair, which is very long, and put baby powder in it. And I had this really weird makeup. And I remember walking down Sheridan Road, and it was just a moment where some older fellow walked out of a bar, had been over served. And he looked at me, and he wasn't quite sure what he was seeing. And then he scurried back in the bar. But that was just like—it's Halloween sir, so it's near Halloween. That's what's going on.

I really liked being in the LRC to study, except if I was by the carrels, by the water, then it was difficult because I would be so focused on watching the lake and listening to the lake. It was hard in the middle of the winter when the lake would freeze over and get these giant ice donuts. I just thought it was a really beautiful part of campus. I appreciated the building very much. I liked it a lot. For some reason I did—I can't remember if it was part of what I was doing for the professor or something separately, but I worked just not a long time, maybe a few days or weeks at the Learning Resource Center, doing some of the librarian duties in homage to my mother, who wanted me to be a librarian. So I thought, you know what? I'll check it out. I know I'm not going to. But I'm just, in an abundance of caution. So I did that, and I did like it, but not enough to choose that as a career.

I did keep a list of interesting or weird titles of books and authors, and the only one that I can remember off the top of my head from this list—and I don't remember what the book was, but the name of the author was Fairfax Throckmorton Proudfit. I thought, well, isn't that a moniker? Each one of the names Fairfax or Throckmorton or Proudfit in and of itself would be interesting and unusual. But this guy had them all three strung together.

Q: Wow, what a name. (Laughs)

Pernecke: Yeah.

Q: So you mentioned kind of going back a little bit. You mentioned sitting down with Sister Jean Dolores [Schmidt, BVM] and talking about your credits. Are there any other faculty or staff that had an influence on you during your time at Mundelein that you remember?

Pernecke: I would say everyone positively. I couldn't really single any particular person out, but there was no one who wasn't supportive. And they were all business. No one gave me any special treatment, but I thought it was—as a group they were, again, really good at what they did, really focused on education, all business. But that kindness that comes with—I have two aunts on my mom's side who are sisters. One is, they're passed away now, but one was a Sister of Mercy, a teacher. Another was she was up in Wisconsin, taught at Alverno College and Mundelein, she's of the Carmelite Order. And so I was used to that very combination of very effective, very

educated, but yet kind mentoring from—that's the kind of women they were. And that's the kind of women—I had a couple of male professors—but the nuns, overall, there was still a good number of Sisters there working. And so I appreciated that.

I did have one other thing I didn't want to forget to say, and that is Sister Jean Dolores not only did—let me convince her to enroll as a junior, but she also handed me my diploma as I crossed the stage in May of 1977. And even more amazing, we know lots of amazing things about Sister Jean and what an inspiration she is to so many and has been for so many years. But this was just a couple of years ago, when she was approaching her 100th birthday.

[35:00]

My friend and I went to a brunch that they have every year in the spring where there is—they honor that year's graduates of fifty years prior. But I just make a habit of going because, again, I love the campus and I really appreciated everything they did for me there. And I saw her and went up to her, and this was a quiet moment after everything had happened and brunch was over and the awards and the announcements and all that kind of good stuff. And I sort of squatted next to her wheelchair and said, "Sister Jean, I don't know if you remember me, but I'm Joan Pernecke." And she goes—I didn't even get my full sentence. She goes, "Oh, I remember you." She said, "You're the girl who had all those credits from testing, weren't you?" And like, "Yes!" Oh, but wait, Chris, it gets better. I—it brought tears to my eyes. It might even today. And then she said, "I remember you." I'm like, "Thank you. That is so nice that you remembered that it was such an important milestone in my life that Mundelein let me come in as a junior and get my degree in two years because all my money, I was paying for everything." And she said, "No, I remember you." And then she said, "and you lived in Coffey Hall, didn't you?" I'm like, "Yes." "And you were on the second floor?" I'm like, "Yes!" And then she said, "And you had all those beautiful plants, all the different kinds of plants in your window sill. You were like the plant girl in Coffey Hall." I'm like, "Yes, that's amazing you remember!" She goes, "And you rescued the critters—."

Oh, that was another thing, I wouldn't let any of my—I would try to—I would announce, if you see a spider or any kind of a critter or bug or something that you're freaked out about, come and get me. I will remove it from your presence without harming it. We had a lot of spiders because we were lakeside. She said, "You were like the spider girl or something." Again, tears welled up

in my eyes. And I thought it was absolutely amazing that not only her memory was so strong, but the carefulness of that sort of memory about people, it is remarkable. She's remarkable.

Q: Yeah, that's amazing. Kind of an aside. I work in the same building that she still works in, and I see her all the time. And she is, I believe, 102 now. And I've always wondered, why are you still working with students? And now I understand, she genuinely cares.

Pernecke: She loves them. She truly loves them.

Q: Wow.

Pernecke: She truly loves them and cares about them.

Q: So, you mentioned—and Sister Jean mentioned—that you lived in Coffey Hall. What was that like during your time there?

Pernecke: It was okay. I mean, nothing spectacular about it other than it was right there. So the convenience factor was huge. Again, I liked the fact that there was—even back then, decent security, you had to sign in and sign out. And while I was there, the rule was still in a place where there were no male visitors unless they were your blood relative. And it was Sunday afternoon between noon and five or something like that. It was like Sunday afternoons. So I think my brother came one time. My brother came to visit one time, but other than that, I thought it was again, a decent dorm. Most of the other students there were wonderful. Again, my first year roommate, was not—she and I did not see eye to eye, but the second year roommate was amazing. There was another student who lived across the hall, and she was very interesting. She was very much into Eastern philosophies and yoga and meditation and reflexology and all sorts of things back—which were almost unheard of in Western culture—in Western race—cultures back in the mid-seventies. But she was into it. And I remember I got sick—really sick one time, and I just had a horrible fever.

[40:00]

And nothing was helping. I was trying to stay hydrated and rest and sleep, and I just was feeling worse and worse, and my temperature wasn't going down, and my fever was getting worse. And she offered to do reflexology on my feet. And I'm like, "What's that? I have never heard of that." And basically, in a thumbnail, it's that there are different areas on the soles of your feet and your feet that connect to different pressure points, the different systems in your body. It's based on Eastern medicine. And so I'm like, "Okay, what have I got to lose?" And I'm not kidding you. She worked my feet. It hurt—it didn't feel really good, but there was something she did with my right toe, and it popped. And as soon as it popped, I could feel my fever break. And it worked magic.

The other really fun student that I remember, she had a great camera, and she wanted to take some pictures. And so we agreed that one day we found a place to go. Not on campus. It was on campus, but it was not out on the ground. So in that high rise in the main building at the far south end, there was a window that would open up, and there was a little graveled, walled area. I think it's just right on the second floor. It's not very high up, but it was basically just a little area out there. I don't know what it was used for. It wasn't for real use or living or anything, but it was like maybe they got—I don't know, access to pipes or something or gutters. I don't know. Anyway, we crawled out that window, we opened this big, heavy window, we crawled out there, and we took some pictures out there. And they are still to this day, some of my very favorite pictures of myself. She's a really good photographer. I think her name was Iris. I'm sorry, Iris, if I've forgotten your name, but she was really an amazing photographer. And it was a windy day, so we had some fun with flying hair and all that kind of stuff. But she did some beautiful photography and all just had on a pair of overalls and a Henley shirt. Nothing fancy, but some great pictures. And I thank her for that because I really appreciate them even to this day.

I really can't think of anything else in particular about my time there other than really, again, appreciating the consolidation of the campus. And it made my schedule a lot easier because classes and work and study and housing and everything was literally within steps. Yeah.

Q: That is the great thing about that campus. It's very contained.

Pernecke: Yes.

Q: So you worked with a professor in the home economics, fashion design, textiles department. Do you happen to remember what their name was?

Pernecke: Unfortunately, no, I don't. I wish I did, but I actually have some of my old paperwork from college. Some stuff, but it's somewhere in a file cabinet. And I didn't look at it before today. But she was really nice. She was great. It was obviously after her workday was done. And it was fun because this is something—Yes. She had all these vintage magazines, fashion magazines and women's magazines from the '30s and '40s. And man, they were elucidating. They had advertisements for smoking and why it's so healthy for you because it will calm you down. They had advertisements for skin bleach. They had advert—can you imagine, like bleaching your skin? Yes, sir. But they had advertisements for all sorts of things that were—now we look at it like, what are you talking about? But yes, smoking for mothers because it helps calm your nerves. There was a lot of nerve calming going on around that— (laughs) in the '30s and '40s. And the snake oil stuff was sort of the lingering edges of snake oil. What the heck is actually in that bottle? But it was still in the advertisements. And of course, the fashions were gorgeous.

[45:00]

Pernecke: She also had, and she let me take some of the pictures in the magazines, and I still have them. And there was one file that she had. I can't remember it's like a binder or file, whatever, accordion folder. But they were from Hollywood, and they were costume photographs. So back then, different studios would have their gown designers and their costume designers take these eight by ten, mostly black and white—I don't know if I have any in color. They're all black and white as far as I can recall, pictures. And they would either sell them or maintain them or just keep them as documentation. I'm not really sure what the purpose was, but she had a bunch of these. And again, she let me take some of them, and I still have them. And they're amazing. And they're stamped on the back with the name of the studio, the name of the stars, sometimes the name of the movie or the production that they were in. But I kept it. They were quite interesting. And so that's a really wonderful set of artifacts that I have from college that were from that professor who shared them with me.

Q: Great. So I've got—we're winding down on the questions we've prepared, so I've got only two more. The first one is, are there any guest speakers or performers you saw at Mundelein that stand out in your memory during your time there?

Pernecke: Boy, not while I was there that I can recall. Not while I was there. I've certainly gone back since then for different speeches and presentations. They had a number of things for a few years in the '90s at the LRC. Not recently. And then still go back every year for Vespers in the first weekend in December and lessons and carols when it's available. So not while I was there that I can recall, unfortunately.

Q: So you mentioned you go back often. What would you say has changed the most since your time at Mundelein on that campus?

Pernecke: Well, obviously, Coffey Hall is now administration and offices, as opposed to that. The stairwells—the stairs are now there's ramps, the ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act] requirements are being met. I'm glad the lobby and Coffey Hall hasn't been—I know it's been updated in a certain way, but I'm glad it hasn't been changed dramatically. The other piece is—other than the stairwells, the stairs and the, Coffey now being administrative offices. The other thing, obviously, is that it's no longer functioning as its own independent college, but I'm grateful that it still maintains its—Mundelein still maintains its identity and the sign outside of the Skyscraper and all that. I'm really grateful that the interior of the Skyscraper hasn't been messed with too much. And I always love the art deco. It is beautiful, and I think it's beautiful and really appreciated all the touches, especially on the first floor.

Pernecke: Obviously, the mansion, Piper Hall, has been the second and third floors have been updated. And now there's the Women's Archives [Women and Leadership Archives] on the third floor. Back when I was going, the third floor was an attic, and the attic was used for storage. And it used to store the old—at some points—the stage sets for the theater department. And I remember nosing around there a couple of days and just, nobody else on campus, just exploring. And it was essentially just an attic. And so that's changed. But again, I'm glad that they maintained it. I'm glad that the first floor is as beautiful as it has ever been. So fortunately, not too many changes. The one thing I'm also really glad that they maintain is still every year they

put out the Nativity scene, the very large, almost life-sized Nativity scene on the corner there. And I don't see very many of them anymore. And I think it's really lovely, and I'm glad they still do that.

[50:00]

Q: Yeah. I actually just found out about that over this last holiday. I found out they moved the Wise Men every day, which I've never heard of before. But it's nice. It's super festive.

Pernecke: Yes. Because when you think about it, think about how amazing—and just one last thought on that. I've always been very impressed with the historical reality of the Magi, and we don't know exactly who they were, but they were from the East and the Middle East in different areas there. And, boy, they certainly showed how much and with what regard some ancient peoples regarded signs in nature and foretellings and astrology and all that sort of thing where these were people from different areas. And they didn't get a group text or an email or even a telegram, but yet they had the foretelling from Zoroaster about a Messiah and noticed the star of Bethlehem and followed the heavens and followed that star. So it's a good reminder that some things that we still today think are kind of weird and woohoo weren't so weird and woohoo for lots of people for a long, long time.

Q: Absolutely. So we've reached the end of my questions for the day. Is there anything else you'd like to say on the record or just recall?

Pernecke: Just want to thank the Sisters at Mundelein and the Mundelein community for letting me get through my two years to finish my degree on my timeframe and my time plan. I really appreciated that. I went on to use that degree to great purpose, got my law degree and then became a prosecutor and various other types of law jobs. But I really appreciate everything that they did for me and the opportunity that they gave me.

Q: All right. Well, thank you so much, Joan, for sharing your story with me. Yes. Appreciate your time as well. I'm going to stop the recording. I will stay on with you just for a moment to talk about next steps. Thank you again.

Pernecke: You're welcome. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]