

**SHARE YOUR STORY: STUDENT LIFE AT MUNDELEIN**

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Susan Markgraf's Oral History

Women and Leadership Archives

Loyola University Chicago

2021

## **PREFACE**

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Susan Markgraf conducted by Melissa Newman on December 7, 2021. This interview is part of the Share Your Story: Student Life at Mundelein project, an oral history project to expand and enrich the Women and Leadership Archives' (WLA) records of Mundelein College's history through interviews with alumnae on student life.

Mundelein College, founded and operated by the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM), provided education to women from 1930 until 1991, when it affiliated with Loyola University Chicago.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the WLA staff. Timestamps are provided every five minutes, within a few seconds of that exact point in the audio. Actions and sounds such as laughter are in parentheses, and notes added for context are in brackets.

### **TIME LOG AND OVERVIEW FOR SESSION 1**

#### Session One

0-5 Minutes: Markgraf educational and family background, her choice of Mundelein, her major, and influential faculty at Mundelein.

5-10 Minutes: Markgraf reflects on starting at Mundelein, classes she took, guest instructors, and her favorite study spots.

10-15 Minutes: Candlelighting ceremonies at Mundelein, socializing at Mundelein, Markgraf's life in Coffey Hall and roommates.

15-20 Minutes: Dating at Mundelein, friendships, Markgraf's motivation for success, technology while Markgraf was at Mundelein.

20-25 Minutes: Markgraf's Candlelighting ceremony, married life, life after graduation.

25-31:58 Minutes: Markgraf reflects on the influence of people she met at Mundelein, social activities and time management, the Mundelein Tea Room.

## Session Two

0-5 Minutes: The Mundelein Tea Room, respect for faculty, Markgraf's post-graduate job with Public Relations at Mundelein College, student job in the science department with Elvira Hastings.

5-10 Minutes: Student job as an elevator operator, Sister Jean, and Markgraf's first Eucharist.

10-15 Minutes: Writing for the student newspaper, confidence Markgraf gained at Mundelein, work with Public Communications Incorporated, jobs with Lerner Newspapers, Dairy Council Wisconsin, Dairy Foods, Dairy Filed Magazine, and FleishmanHillard Communications.

15-20 Minutes: Work with the Chicago Botanical Garden, Markgraf's company, Greenmark.

20-23:44 Minutes: Markgraf's children and experience with parenthood, alumnae who have passed and honoring their legacy

## **NARRATOR BIO**

Susan Renee Johnson Markgraf was born and raised in Joliet, Illinois. She liked the close-knit experience she had in high school, so she wanted to attend a college that had a smaller student body. Mundelein was a great choice because it had that smaller community feeling she was looking for and was an all-female school.

Sue was a public relations and journalism major, but she worked as an administrative assistant to Vera Hastings in the Chemistry department. She also operated one of the elevators in the Skyscraper. Sue developed a great community and bond with her fellow Coffey Hall residents and is grateful to the nuns who always wanted to get the best out of their students. At Mundelein, Sue got the confidence to do anything.

After Sue was married between her junior and senior year, her Mundelein experience changed a bit. She was not able to see her friends as often as she was living with her husband off campus, but she says she expected and accepted that. She used her senior year to study hard. A principle Sue believes in is to do well for yourself so that you are able to help others. She felt she was able to do that because of her time at Mundelein. Sue has also had a fulfilling and successful career after graduating that she attributes to the education she received at Mundelein and God's guiding hand.

### **INTERVIEWER BIO**

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

Transcriptionist: Keeley Shoudel

Session: 1 of 2

Interviewee: Susan Markgraf

Locations: Mundelein, IL and Palatine, IL via Zoom

Interviewer: Melissa Newman

Date: December 7, 2021

[BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW]

[00:00]

Q: For the record, my name is Melissa Newman, I'm graduate assistant at the Women and Leadership Archives, interviewing Sue Johnson Markgraf, class of 1983, on December 7, 2021, for the Share Your Story: Student Life at Mundelein Project. I'm in Palatine, Illinois, and Sue is in Mundelein [Illinois]. To start us off, could you tell me a little bit about yourself, like where you were born and where you were raised and your family and all that?

Markgraf: Sure. Thank you for doing this, by the way. Kudos to you all. I was born in Joliet, Illinois, Will County. I was raised there as well, went to school there, and then came up to Mundelein College after that. I was married during my summer between my junior and senior year, lived on campus at Coffey Hall, and truly loved my time there at Mundelein. So that's the genesis of me.

Q: And can you tell me why you chose Mundelein?

Markgraf: I chose Mundelein College because my high school was a smaller college at the time. I went to Joliet East High School, and I'm a product of the Joliet Bands. Which, if you know anything about music and bands, Joliet produced some very awesome musicians, of which I am not one. But my high school was very close-knit, had a lot of good friends while I was there, and was able to get very involved, which I love to do, and I did at Mundelein as well. So I chose Mundelein because of its small student body, smaller student body at the time, and because also it was all women. I'm a very focused and driven person, and always have been. And when I chose Mundelein, I wanted a school where—an academic institution where I could really focus on what I wanted to do with the rest of my life and the education that I needed to get there. I didn't want to be distracted by the guys, by bars, by parties, I wanted to really focus. And Mundelein was a very fun school, but it also primarily provided the academics that I needed to get where I am today.

Q: So could you tell me a bit about your classes and any remembrance of your professors, that sort of thing?

Markgraf: Well, of course, Sister Jean was always a fixture, so Loyola can't really claim her too much. She was first a fixture of Mundelein College, but I had a lot of wonderful professors. I focused my education on journalism and public relations, and one of my—one of my teachers there was Betty Prevender, and I will never forget Betty. She was tough, very tough. And throughout my entire career at Mundelein College, she gave me B's on everything I wrote. And my senior thesis, she gave me an A. And I asked her, "Why was it so hard to get an A from you before this?" And she said, "Because you wouldn't have tried as hard. I wanted you to try

harder." And that is a philosophy that was the Mundelein College I knew. And that striving ability, the progressiveness of the women who taught there really, I believe, was as valuable to my education as the book learning that I received.

Q: How so? Could you expand on that a little bit?

Markgraf: Mundelein's academic team was always what women are fighting for today. They were Me Too before there was a Me Too movement. And what I mean is that they were walking the talk about the role of women not only in the workplace, but also in the family and the opportunities that are open to all of us if we so choose to pursue them. And that is we so choose to pursue them. The work that goes into that you wouldn't have tried as hard is what Mundelein College to me means. That you can always do better, you can always strive for more. And the women that taught me embodied that. And the movements that we see today are wonderful, finally. But it's what we lived as students at Mundelein College.

[05:00]

Q: Sorry. That was really wonderful. It's great to hear that. Could you also tell me a bit more about the specific classes that you took, and how—

Markgraf: You're really pulling my memory.

Q: (laughs) If you don't remember—

Markgraf: I had to take a religion class, and I should preface this to say that I was raised Methodist, I married Lutheran, and I went to a Catholic college. I am pretty ecumenical. I'm going to answer your question, but the first thing that we did as freshman at Mundelein College was the Eucharist, the service to welcome students. And I was tagged to carry the Eucharist. And I thought, well, I'm not Catholic, but they asked, I'll do it. My classes there were hard, and I was never a straight-A student, and I had to really challenge myself. I, of course, majored in journalism and public relations, took a lot of writing classes, a lot of reporting classes, a lot of classes that focused on not just the execution of tactics for PR, but the strategy and the reasoning behind them. I still have all of my textbooks, by the way, and I sometimes do refer to them, but the classes that I took were directly for my career path. I had to take the core classes in year one and two, and I almost got out of the religion class, but I couldn't. They held me to it, and I met that criteria in a different way than sitting in a class. But that's what I remember.

I remember my first class at Mundelein and being completely blown away when I looked around the room and everyone had coffee. It was an early morning class. Everyone had their coffee. And I was like, wait a minute, wait a minute. I got to start this over because I didn't get mine. I didn't even know we could bring coffee to class because we never could eat or drink in high school.

Right. So here I am, a freshman, and I'm like, oh, man. I remember some of the guest instructors that we had who were working journalists in Chicago media and being wowed by that. Being at the same time, wowed by that, but also not starstruck by it, but that this is someone who would think to come to my class to talk about what he does for a living, or she. That was very valuable



to me, and I try to do that myself now whenever I'm asked because it's important. It's important to be instructed by people who are actually doing what they're teaching. And I did get that from Mundelein, and it was very meaningful to me. I'm sorry about my dog barking.

Q: That's totally okay. Happens, can't control it. Right?

Markgraf: Right.

Q: So in terms of your studies, where did you go to study on campus?

Markgraf: I went to a place that probably is completely off limits now. I went to actually a couple of different places. I sat on the rocks right on the lake [Michigan]. You know those big boulders that are right at the lakefront? Yeah. Those were not cordoned off like they are now when I was a student there, and I loved sitting on those boulders and watching the water and studying and doing my reading there. One of the classes I took, not to go back too far, but was on children's—writing for children. My class assignment during the whole term was to read children's books and study them. So that was cool. But at any rate, I would also go to the library, of course. And there was a carrel way up on the top floor, way in the back, that was hardly ever used, and that's where I could be found. And Coffey Hall, the lobby in Coffey Hall. You can put me anywhere in the city of Chicago blindfolded, and I will tell you where the lake is because I can smell it. Even here, sitting in my office, I can smell that the lake is that way because when

you live close to the lake for three years of college, and then I continue to live by the lake when I was married for a couple more years, it gets into your psyche.

[10:00]

Markgraf: And that's part of the pride of being in Chicago. And I think it's part of the pride that is still instilled in us as Mundelein College, that we have the beauty of God's creation right in our backyard. And I think I can speak for my student colleagues and say we appreciated it very much.

Q: And could you talk a little bit about your experience as a resident of Coffey Hall?

Markgraf: Oh, man, that was fun. We had a ring ceremony whenever anyone got engaged—I don't know if they did it up until the end, but we had a ring ceremony. We would all sit in a circle on the end of the hall where there was the big living room. We'd all sit on the floor in a circle, and we'd pass a candle around. And I think what we did was we gave best wishes to the person who was engaged and said a prayer. And it was really awesome. During the time I was there, All My Children was really hot. We would all grab our cookie dough, our ice cream and our popcorn and try to work our classes around when All My Children was airing so we could watch All My Children. And that was the Luke and Laura time when Luke and Laura were getting married and it was exciting to watch. I remember sitting in the hallways at the end of a long day or well into the morning hours and just talking. Always there was popcorn and talking. I do remember going to Hamilton's on a somewhat regular basis, which was down and around

the corner. And it was a pizza place, a hamburger place. And for those of us who were legal, it was a bar. And we had some fun times there.

I can remember the payphones. When I was in school, back in the dinosaur age, we didn't have our mobile phones in our pockets. We—or in our hands. We had a payphone—one payphone at the end of each end of each side of the hallway and with—I don't know how many of us were on that floor, but somebody never had enough quarters or somebody would always hog the phone. And we would compete for who's next with the receiver up to our ear. So that was fun. Coffey Hall—I also remember—my room always happened to be on the Sheridan roadside where the bend is, or was. And on rainy or icy nights, particularly, we would sit in my room and look out the window and just predict how many accidents were going to happen against the guardrail. When people were going too fast and couldn't make the curve. They happened (laughs) on a regular basis.

I think what I mainly got from Coffey Hall was bonding with the other students, of course, all women, and having that relationship where we're all in the same place at the same time, striving for similar things. It was really wonderful experience. My RA, I still keep in touch with her, and she happened to marry a colleague of mine. So how's that for weird? And I remember too, that there was a woman on the floor who was a hairstylist. Guess what? We got free haircuts. We always paid her, but that's what life was like. The rooms I know now are teeny tiny, but they seemed okay to me then. They weren't teeny tiny to me then. They were nice size. In my third year, I actually had a room to myself because my roommate left the school. And so that is actually the only time in my entire life that I've had a room to myself [laughs], because I have

two other sisters. And then I was married in my fourth year, so that was pretty cool. That's Coffey Hall for me.

Q: Well, I've got a bunch of follow-up questions for you.

Markgraf: Okay.

Q: (laughs) We can work backwards.

Markgraf: Okay.

Q: So do you remember why your roommate left at the end of your third year?

Markgraf: I think she just transferred to a different school. It wasn't because she was tired of Mundelein or anything. I think she just left. I don't remember if it was family or she was transferred or what.

Q: In terms of the phones on the halls, did you have to fight over them, or did you have, like, great long lines?

Markgraf: We never fought. We never had brawls or anything like that. But it was like, "I'm next." "No, I said I was next," kind of thing. Sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes.

[15:00]

Markgraf: When you got two phones on the floor with—I don't know how many people there are on that floor, residents-- because we had two to a room, except for the RA. It could get intense. I don't know, but I think the RA had a phone in her room, and sometimes we'd used hers, even though we weren't supposed to. That's what I love about Mundelein. There are rules, but if you broke them, as long as they weren't serious rules that you were breaking, who cares? It was fun. It was a fun time. I had friends in high school, but I've never really had close girlfriends. It's not me. I don't have time. I'm too busy working and raising my family now. But Mundelein gave me a taste of what that could be like. And what it did, instead of bonding with girlfriends to go shopping, it was bonding with girlfriends to help me in my career and vice versa. If somebody sends me a resume or calls and says that they studied at Mundelein, I'm going to pay attention. Or now, Loyola.

Q: Well, thank you.

Markgraf: You're welcome.

Q: Without being too personal, I suppose. What kinds of people were you calling on the phones?

Like family, other friends? Boyfriends?

Markgraf: Oh, my boyfriend at the time, who is now my husband. My boyfriend went to University of Chicago, and so there were many excursions back and forth. Usually I went to see him because that's one rule that Coffey Hall had that they were very strict about is no boys in the room after, I think, it was nine o'clock or ten o'clock. And University of Chicago is a little lax. So I would often take the bus, take the train, and then meet him at University of Chicago. And so I was always talking to him on the phone. Sometimes my mom, but mostly him.

I do remember one time shortly after I started at Mundelein as a freshman, I was going—I don't remember where I was going, but I was on the 147 bus. I think it was coming back, actually from downtown. A person who was with me was a Mundelein student, but an upperclassman, and she looked out the window, and she said, "You see that woman right there?" And it was a woman who was homeless, pushing a cart, and wearing, like, layers of clothing. And she said, "She graduated from Mundelein." And I said, "Oh, hell no." Excuse me, but, oh, hell no, that will not happen on my watch with anyone that I care about or know. And I know it happened for a reason. And I think for me, the reason was motivation. Motivation to do well for myself so that I can do well for others, because they always say, "Put your own mask on first before you can be of help to anyone else." And that's what I learned from that random, odd experience. And I don't know if she was just telling me that or if it was really true, but it meant a lot to me, and it still sticks with me. I'll never forget what that woman looked like.

Q: Yeah, that sounds really powerful. Okay, so also, in lines of maybe, like communication technology, did you have TVs in your rooms to watch All My Children, or were they communal?

Markgraf: Yeah, the TV at the end of the hall in this living room area that we all shared. Some people may have had televisions in their room. I did not, couldn't afford that. I had an electric typewriter. And I thought it was hot stuff for having that because we didn't have computers, we had electric typewriters, and we were struggling all the time with that whiteout stuff. And I was like, hey, have any more whiteout stuff? Because I'm out or mine dried up. It was usually that kind of thing. Technology then was simple. And I know we didn't know what we were missing because we didn't miss it. And I do think about that a lot today when the cell phone is always, like, right at your fingertips, and we've got these fancy—you should see my office. I got two big monitor screens. I've got his laptop going, and that's how I run my business. But then? Mm-mm. And I was lucky that I had a little stand to put my typewriter on because some students were typing on their beds because they didn't have anywhere to put their typewriter.

[20:00]

Markgraf: So, yeah. We didn't go home either. At least I didn't. Living in Joliet, I would go home maybe like one weekend a month. And usually I went with my boyfriend, who's now my husband, because he and I grew up together, lived in Joliet. His family lived near mine, so we would commute back and forth together. And that was always a struggle, and I don't realize until recently how much of a struggle it was. A bus, a train, and then a parent picking us up. It's hard.

Q: And you've mentioned your husband and I know you got married while you were still at Mundelein. So does that mean you had your own ring ceremony?

Markgraf: I did! And I was very excited about that. I have to ask my RA, who I still keep in touch with, how that worked, because I don't exactly remember all of it. I remember the candle. I remember the kind words and the prayers, but I think there was a little more to it than that. It's kind of like if you were a Brownie or Girl Scout, kind of like the circle ring. It was kind of like that.

Q: And then how did things change for you? Or how was your time at Mundelein affected after getting married and no longer living on campus?

Markgraf: It changed dramatically because suddenly I'm a full time student, and I did have student jobs on campus. My student job had changed that last year, and I had a little more responsibility. But it was also hard because I was commuting. I wasn't commuting far. I was commuting from Touhy and Rogers Park, Touhy and Sheridan. So it wasn't horrendous, but I was commuting now and had to plan for that. And then when I got home, who's going to clean? He was working full time. I was a full time student, but I was home at different hours. So who's going to clean? What do weekends look like? And who's going to do all the things that, at that time, women just did. You know, cooking and—. To this day, I gave up cooking about 15 years ago for Lent. It's the only Lent promise I've ever kept. I still don't cook, because those days were hard, and they were challenging. And I didn't know how to cook. I had to teach myself. So that fourth year was difficult also because I didn't have the Coffey Hall ties. And the upperclassmen



that I had been friends with were gone. So for me, it was more of a button down, get through it year.

Q: Did your relationship with the friends that you had made on campus change significantly because--?

Markgraf: Yes, the moment this ring ceremony happened, they all went [makes pew noise] because I was not really available anymore. I mean, Friday nights, I didn't go to Hamilton's. I came home to be with my husband. Mostly me that they went [makes pew noise], because I just couldn't be available to them the way that I had been at Coffey Hall.

Q: Okay. Was that really disappointing for you, or were you? Or were you like, it's okay.

Markgraf: No, it wasn't. I mean, if you think back to your own high school and college days, it's like, you know, you know you make friends for a time for a reason. But life changes things and evolves, and some people come with you, and some people go their own way, and that's life. No, I even knew then that it was going to be that way. A lot of them did come to my wedding, though. I should say that.

Q: That's nice. Was it something that you were aware of because of other ring ceremonies and how that happened?

Markgraf: Just because I knew from my high school days or there were people that I was friends with that no longer—I should say too, my husband and his family, his two brothers and sister, we all grew up together, so they were my friends, really. They were my real friends. In fact, his sister was my very first girlfriend when I was four years old. So those are the people that I really spent the most time with, and I still do. But I knew that the others from, like, band in high school, in yearbook and newspaper, and everything I was involved in, were going to be fleeting. I knew that then. And in fact, it's the one thing I told both of my kids is, "the friends you make now may stay with you, but don't be sad if they move on, because you should move on with your life and grab your own opportunities and make your own way." So I was okay with it then.

[25:00]

Q: Yeah, that sounds fair. Jumping around on my question list here, but that's okay.

Markgraf: I'm jumping around on my answer. So we're even [laughs].

Q: You mentioned that you are still in contact and friends with your RA at the time.

Markgraf: Yes.

Q: Tell me a little bit more about her and her influence on you at school.

Markgraf: She had a lot of influence on me. My friends have always been older than me. And she was tall. She still is tall. And I was short. Still am short. She was the perfect RA. She was a quintessential RA. She took us all under her wing. She made sure we were okay. She made sure we had help when we needed it. And she was a friend. She was a true friend. And, as far as I know, I think she's still pretty active at Mundelein, or at least seems to be. More active than me. So one Halloween, because I'm short, and she's tall, we had a costume party at Coffey Hall down in the foyer area there and invited, I think, the Loyola boys. And it was a dress up thing. So she went as the Jolly Green Giant, and I went as Little Sprout. Somewhere, I have a picture. I have to find it, but that was fun. And it's no surprise to me that she has done well in her life. She was very polished and very professional even then. So she's a professional, but she had this edge to her that was very open and welcoming. She still does. And so when I found out that she's married to a colleague of mine, that was like, wow, old home week. It was great to reconnect with her. You might want to talk to her, by the way, for your project, too.

Q: I was going to mention, I don't think I caught her name.

Markgraf: Her name is JoEllen Greysh. JoEllen Greysh-Ball. JoEllen Greysch-Ball, yes. I believe she lives in the western suburbs. She's still in the area.

Q: Great. I will mark her down.

Markgraf: Hunt her down. Tell her I told her to talk to you.

Q: Do you remember any other parties that you would have partaken in at Coffey Hall or Mundelein?

Markgraf: I remember going to a frat party and hating it, just wanting to get back to the dorm. It was like a complete waste of time. I'm a very time-oriented person. Perhaps it's my journalism training. I don't live by the clock, but I make sure that I know how to use my time properly. And even then, I was like, I don't need to be here. What the heck is this? So I left. It wasn't even on campus. It was down Sheridan Road at some apartment building, and it just didn't feel right. I'm not saying that it wasn't a good party or that it was—not judging anyone who went. For me, it wasn't a good use of my time. That's really all I remember in terms of parties, because, like I said, I was a pretty focused student. I knew my parents were paying a lot for my college education, and only recently have I come to realize how much they sacrificed for my tuition at Mundelein. How much they sacrificed. At the same time, my dad was building his own business. But I knew then, that Mundelein was not an inexpensive school, and that I needed to be sure that I did my part for my parents, and I think I did.

Q: So did you participate in many social activities, or were you more focused on school then?

Markgraf: We didn't really have, like, social activities, maybe, like, what they do now. I remember when my son started college, they had junior jam and things like that. We didn't do

that. Our social gatherings were at the end of the hall or in the Tea Room or at Hamilton's. That was really the extent of what we did socially. That Halloween party is actually the only one that I really remember from my time there.

[30:00]

Markgraf: The Tea Room was wonderful, by the way. Not a really good place to eat, but it was a good place to chat [laughs]. To have tea [laughs]. I did get a little refrigerator and a microwave, and I wound up going to the grocery store and getting my own food. I couldn't eat in there. But it was a great place to get together and talk and meet with your professors. And I remember one of the walls had wallpaper that looked like a forest on it. And I thought that was really, at the time—I mean, I've seen it now everywhere, but at the time, I was like, "Oh, that's pretty cool."

Q: So was the Tea Room also the cafeteria lunchroom?

Markgraf: We called it the Tea Room. We had to be fancy like that. We were special women. We had to be fancy.

Q: At one time, there was a dress code for it, I believe. Was that the case for you as well?

Markgraf: Before my time. Our dress code was jeans and blouses and polos. I don't think many women wear polos anymore, but jeans, blouses, polos, and—did the video freeze here?

Q: Yeah, your face is frozen, but your microphone is still coming great.

Markgraf: (laughs) Well, I don't know how you're going to use that, but please cut that out. But no, we just dressed kind of like students do today. What the heck is wrong with this? We can get this going again.

Q: Maybe. Here, let me pause the recording really quick.

[INTERRUPTION]

Transcriptionist: Keeley Shoudel

Session: 2 of 2

Interviewee: Susan Markgraf

Locations: Mundelein, IL and Palatine, IL via Zoom

Interviewer: Melissa Newman

Date: December 7, 2021

[BEGINNING PART 2 OF INTERVIEW]

Q: Okay. We are now back recording. So, before the slight interlude, we were talking about the Tea Room, and etiquette in there, but sounds like there wasn't much to worry about. No rules to restrain you anymore.

Markgraf: It was a really innocent time, looking back. It was really innocent. We were there for education. That's what we got. I don't know that any of my friends were—none of them were really into partying or—Mundelein, that wasn't the culture there. We also had these Sisters and professors that we looked up to and respected. And I don't know, I guess I don't think about it then, but now it's like anything else would be disrespectful to them.

Q: Did they eat with you in the Tea Room as well?

Markgraf: They did. And they went to Hamilton's with us, too. [laughs] Yes. They were in the classroom during the day and they sat with us in the Tea Room. They went out to Hamilton's with us. They were part of our lives. Very much so.

Q: How did that kind of change your dynamic of what you experienced in high school with the student teacher relationship?

Markgraf: Different in many ways, but not so different in others. My high school journalism teacher, I was very close with her. And so when I got to Mundelein College, that's the same kind of relationship I had there. And I believe that was one of the reasons why I wanted to go to Mundelein was to continue that focus and that momentum and build the relationships that I knew I needed. That make sense, Melissa?

Q: Yeah, most definitely. I mean, obviously the teachers and professors were a large part of your life and--

Markgraf: They were.

Q: --They influenced you in a very positive way.

Markgraf: They really were. Three weeks before graduation, I was hired by Mundelein. I worked at Mundelein for a year after I graduated. Renee Berman was director of public relations at Mundelein College, and I didn't really have a student job with her, but I had helped in the office with some things. And so she hired me three weeks before graduation, and I could hear my parents go, "thank God," all the way from Joliet to Cook County to Mundelein. That was really wonderful. So I found myself giving back—I found myself giving back to a place that had given me so much and putting into practice at the place I learned from what I learned. And that was pretty darn incredible.

Q: Yeah. Could you tell me a little bit more about the other jobs that you—any jobs that you had—?

Markgraf: The student jobs I had?



Q: Yeah.

Markgraf: Okay. I'm going to end with the first one. I'll start with the one I had when I was a senior there. I worked with the science department, the head of the science department. I'm trying to—Elvira Hastings. I was her assistant. I worked as her assistant, and I didn't know anything about chemistry, and I still don't. But I was doing things like typing up her letters, I was really being an admin for her in the department at that point, and I loved it because she was fantastic. And by the way, she did give me an honorary degree in chemistry when I graduated. But the job that I had, that is the envy of anyone when I ever tell. I ran the manual elevator for three years. Three years! That was pretty awesome. And I got that elevator: no bumps, even, by the time I left. I would pause the elevator—so another place that I studied was between floors.

[5:00]

Markgraf: I would park the elevator, which was a no-no, but I did it. I confess. I parked the elevator between floors and studied that way. Wow, talk about concentrated focus. And then when I'd hear the elevator ding, I'd wait just a second. If I was involved in something heavy that I was reading or writing to see if the other person running the other elevator was going to go get that stop. And usually I would just let her do it. But I worked that for three years. It was an incredible experience. The gate that opened and then the manual. It was fun driving.

Q: Was that a coveted job on campus?

Markgraf: It was a coveted job, yes. And it was mine. When I first found out that's what I was going to be doing, I was like, huh, they still have manual elevators? I'm sure they're long gone by now, but, yeah, I knew that elevator real well by the time I graduated.

Q: Did you have, like, a little couch or something in there so you could like have—?

Markgraf: We had a chair. We had, like, a card table chair that we could sit on. But when you stop, you were supposed to stand up. You couldn't keep sitting. You had to stand up to let the people on, and you had to anyway, because you had to pull the gate. But it was a kind thing to do. So we didn't sit the whole time.

Q: Were there any weird issues with the elevators ever?

Markgraf: No, I hadn't have any weird issues. I always loved it when the Sisters would get on, like, early in the morning, coming down from their tenth floor heaven, getting on the elevator and seeing them all. I loved that. That tenth floor—was it the tenth floor? Man, that was a mysterious floor. That's where they lived. And we were forbidden to ever go there unless somebody had dinged the bell, from what I recall. Maybe it didn't even stop on the tenth floor. Maybe they came down to the ninth. I don't remember, but it was always mysterious. What do they do up there? Does it look like the dorms?

Q: Fun little treat to go get them, then?

Markgraf: Yeah, they're special ladies. I don't know how many of them are still living from when I was there. But when you look at Sister Jean, she embodies all of them. The Sister Jean that people see today that is basically Loyola's claim to fame when it comes to basketball. She even has shoes made for her. That is who I knew at Mundelein College. And universally, the Sisters were like her—giving, caring, poised, confident, knew their stuff, and weren't afraid to share it with other people.

Q: Could you talk a little bit more about Sister Jean and any interactions you remember having with her?

Markgraf: You know what, I don't know that I had her for a class, but I remember her from the elevator. I think she was my counselor at one point, because I do remember a one-on-one interaction. And actually, I remember my mother—when Sister Jean first came on the scene with the basketball team. She was on the news or something, and my mom called and said, "Isn't that the same Sister Jean you had?" Yes, it is. But she's ageless. I swear she's ageless. She looks the same as she did however many years ago it was when I was in school there. I guess that's what peace does for you. It doesn't age you.

Q: Saintliness, that's for sure.

Markgraf: Yeah.

Q: And I remember when we chatted last week, you mentioned that the nuns assumed you were Catholic, and there was a weird—.

Markgraf: That was the Eucharist story that I mentioned earlier. I believe that they assumed, maybe they knew I wasn't, but I believe they assumed I was Catholic that first time, that first service, when they asked me to carry the Eucharist down to the priest in the front, and I was like, "I'm not Catholic." But I figured, you know what? If they think I'm Catholic, I'll be Catholic for this moment. [laughs] I hope I don't offend any of them by that, but there was no offense meant, I just thought it was funny.

[10:00]

Q: Oh, I'm sure that there's no offense taken there. Let's see. I meant to ask you also, since you were a journalism major and the career that you're on now and writing a lot, could you talk about writing for the student magazine when you were—.

Markgraf: I did write for the student magazine. I have an article in one of them, so it was either '84, '85 or '86, and I don't remember which one, but it was on the influence of a father and a daughter, and it was pretty much first person. But that was my first magazine piece. Mundelein

College put me on a trajectory I never could imagine while I was there. If you were to ask me then or tell me then what I'd be doing now, I would not have believed you. Mundelein's claim to fame on my life is the confidence that it gave me to do anything. And if I didn't know how to do it, I could teach myself. From Mundelein, I worked at the college for a year after I graduated, as I said, in PR there. And then I went to Public Communications Incorporated. It's now called PCI, still in business downtown in the city. And I worked there for six months. It wasn't my thing. The accounts I was working on was not my thing, were not my thing. At the same time, I was freelancing for a very popular community newspaper at that time called Lerner Newspapers. And I was at a low point at PCI, because here I was coming from a place that was warm, that was comfortable. And now I'm in an agency that I didn't feel at home in for a variety of reasons. And the call came completely out of the blue from one of the editors at Lerner Newspapers and said, "I just read this. Why are you doing PR? You need to be here." I said, "Offer me a job, and I'm coming." And she did.

Markgraf: I took a bus in a blizzard all the way from downtown back to Rogers Park. I was 40 minutes late meeting with her. She hired me anyway. I stayed there for almost ten years. I worked my way up from a reporter to covering a lot of different types of stories and features to editor of all of the special sections, which at the time, I think, were like five or six for the entire chain. Lerner Newspapers had zones that circulated in specific communities of the Chicago area. And so eventually I was working on all of the newspapers before I left there. Lerner, because of Mundelein, put me on a path where I was writing a lot about food, gardening, the environment, the issues that a lot of us are talking about today. I was writing about then and made some good contacts at a place called the Dairy Council Wisconsin. And then I went there after I left Lerner

and managed all of the public relations for the Dairy Council Wisconsin, which was the sort of the PR arm for the dairy industry in Wisconsin and Northern Illinois. And then from there, I went to Dairy Field Magazine, where I was executive editor of the entire publication. And then from there I was hired away by the news editor at the competition, Dairy Foods. So I went to Dairy Foods as the editor. And then I decided I needed to prove to myself that I could do something other than food and agriculture and horticulture. So I took a job at FleishmanHillard Communications, which is one of the largest and most prestigious public relations marketing firms in the country, if not the world. And I managed reputation management at the height of what was then a Ameritech in a very large service crisis. And Ameritech was one of the accounts I worked on. I learned reputation management. I learned how to handle difficult, challenging conversations with media. And I realized that I didn't like telecommunications [laughs].

[15:00]

Markgraf: So I happened to be putting it—we had cassette tapes back then. I happened to be putting a cassette tape into the television for a client segment that we did. And before I turned on the tape, I saw a segment on television—WGN here in Chicago with the Chicago Botanic Garden. And there was this little voice of God that said, "you will work there." If you have the voice of God in your head, you really should listen when it's guiding you. Long story, but I did wind up at the Chicago Botanic Garden and helped to build a nonexistent marketing and public relations department into a world-class public relations marketing department that launched the Sciences of the Chicago Botanic Garden and the brand of the Chicago Botanic Garden that you see today. I learned to listen to that voice when I was at Mundelein doing challenging assignments. And I was there for about six years at CBG and opened my curtains one morning,

beautiful fall day, said to myself, "I could retire from there." And I heard that voice and said, "Oh no, you won't." And I broke out in a cold sweat. Every time I tell the story, I break out in a cold sweat and goosebumps, and I literally sat hard on the edge of my bed, which is right by the window. And I heard if you love it that much, you will let it go. And I fought for a while that that guiding, and eventually-- when God wants you to do something sometimes, and when you resist, he has a way of going and putting your back up against the wall until you do things his way. That's what was happening at CBG. Things for me were starting to get weird. And so I did resign. I had to resign twice. The first one wasn't accepted. And when I resigned the second time, I wasn't sure what I was going to do. And I just said, "Okay, here I am. What do I do?" And he said, "Greenmark."

Markgraf: Greenmark is my firm today. We exclusively represent green spaces, places and issues. My CEO is the big guy upstairs. I don't even carry the title of president because I'm guided by what he initially told me when he told me to go Mundelein. And the path and the thread from my Mundelein days to today is very taut and very direct. Greenmark turned sixteen on April 1 in 2022, purposely started on April Fool's Day. And we have worked to build some very significant brands, many of which most people would know. The Lurie Garden and Millennium Park, the Millennium Park Foundation, two of the Chicago area's prestigious garden centers. We work with clients that grow plants for the Midwest in Kansas. We have a landscape architect designer client. We focus entirely on God's creation, whether it's Earth, water, sky, air. And all of our clients are in that space. This is where I will retire, but not anytime soon. So that's what Mundelein gave me. I never dreamed in a million years that I would own and run a business, particularly a PR firm, because after I'd worked at two, I was never going to have

anything to do with them again. So never say never is really a good practice. But Mundelein said to me, "Yes, you can do it. Yes, you can."

Q: That's just wonderful, truly. And I feel like this is kind of a natural ending. I feel like we've come full circle now, but I also don't want to—if you have other thoughts on your mind that you wanted to share—.

Markgraf: I do have one more thought, and maybe you can edit it back in later on, but I've always worked. I didn't even take my full maternity leave. I have two, I call them young adults.

[20:00]

Markgraf: They're grown children, but they're young adults now, who I believe because they saw mom working and taking time for them as well and making both my priority, as well as myself, that I'm very proud of where they are in their careers at thirty-six and thirty-one. They are doing amazing things with their lives. And I would just say, if you're in that space as a young mom, don't beat yourself up. Because your passion is also your career as well as your family. Because I do believe that kids learn modeled behavior. They learn work ethic. They learn how to appreciate education. They learn how to value family from their parents, whatever that parent model looks like. And I beat myself up then. And today, I would say to my twenty-something self, "don't." Because it will always be okay if you have faith, and you trust in that higher power that's guiding you.



Q: That's lovely. Thank you so much for everything you shared.

Markgraf: You're welcome. It's all gospel truth. It's not the gospel, but it's gospel truth. [Laughs]

Q: I really enjoyed talking with you today.

Markgraf: Thank you, Melissa. Thank you for talking with me. And thank you for doing this project. If you would like other alumni, JoEllen, for sure. One of the women who was in my wedding party, I've lost complete touch with, but her name was—I don't even remember her name now. I'd have to look at my wedding pictures. But if you need anybody else, let me know.

Q: Yeah, we're definitely always taking in referrals. We will probably do another iteration of the project in the future. So always looking for new voices, and we'd be happy to take any recommendations.

Markgraf: You know, I think I just want to say one more thing, because I would be remiss in not saying this.

Q: Of course.

Markgraf: There are a few women from my days at Mundelein that have gone, have died. And I think this project honors the living legacy that is Mundelein College. But it also needs to nod to those who were invested in their education and their lives as students at Mundelein, who never had the opportunity to live full, long lives. And they need to be honored to in some way as part of this project, Melissa. One of my dearest friends, passed away from lung cancer, I think she was in her forties. Those that didn't come along with us really should be honored in some way as part of the project.

Q: Well, yeah, we would definitely be happy to take down any names of people that you know that have passed too soon, and we can definitely—.

Markgraf: Yes. I will send you an email with that information.

Q: Great, that would be—

Markgraf: Rather than say it. Okay.

Q: Well, I'm going to stop recording, but one last thank you, and I will make sure to actually stay on for a little bit afterwards. I'm just going to stop recording. We talk about next steps, okay?

Markgraf: Go Mundle-Bundles!

[END OF INTERVIEW]