

SHARE YOUR STORY: STUDENT LIFE AT MUNDELEIN

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Michela Coffaro Oral History

Women and Leadership Archives

Loyola University Chicago

2022

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Michela Coffaro conducted by Chris Mattix on January 31, 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 FOR SESSION 1

[0:00 - 5:00]

Introductions, family background, how Michela ended up at Mundelein, and joining the BVMs.

[5:00 - 10:00]

Familial background in social work, classes she took, and finding what she wanted to do.

[10:00 - 15:00]

Influential professors to her, Young Democrats club, and being student body president.

[15:00 - 20:00]

Student body president, meeting politicians, and taking her friends back home.

[20:00 - 25:00]

Social activities on campus, Loyola and Mundelein interactions, and going beyond what's in reach.

[25:00 - 30:00]

Campaigning for student body president.

[30:00 - 35:00]

Making a difference, values in life, and events at Mundelein.

[35:00 - 40:00]

Events put on, Mundelein songs, and plays and productions.

[40:00 - 45:00]

Sister Ann Ida Gannon, four values she runs on, and changes to campus when she attended.

[45:00 - 50:00]

Politics on campus, John F. Kennedy, Vietnam War, and life values.

[50:00 - 55:00]

Student body president, how the interview would be used, changing child abuse laws, and

Mercedes McCambridge.

[55:00 - 56:19]

Wrap up.

NARRATOR BIO

Michela Coffaro, previously called Mildred, was born and raised on the north side of Chicago. Her parents were born in Sicily, but met and married in the United States. Before moving to America, Michela's mother was a nun. This, combined with her Catholic education at Immaculata and then Mundelein, influenced Michela to join the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. However, after three months, she realized she could do more good work outside of the order than within it and left the order to return to her studies at Mundelein.

Michela was a commuter student majoring in sociology. She attribute sociology classes with Sister Mary Ligouri as inspiring her to go into social work after graduation. The values instilled in Michela at Mundelein have stayed with her throughout her life and career: Through her time at Mundelein, the importance of valuing each person as an individuals with the ability to make a difference through their words and actions was deeply instilled in Michela.

After graduating from Mundelein in 1963, Michela went on to become a certified social worker and then got her doctorate in psychology. In the 1970s, she was one of 18 picked for contributing to her community in the last 50 years by helping change the laws regarding child abuse.

INTERVIEWER BIO

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

Transcriptionist: Chris Mattix

Locations: Palatine, IL and Milton, Delaware via
Zoom

Narrator: Michela Coffaro

Interviewer: Melissa Newman

Date: July 28, 2020

[BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW]

Q: For the record, my name is Melissa Newman. I'm a graduate assistant at the Women and Leadership Archives. Interviewing Michela, also known as Mildred, Coffaro. She graduated in 1963. And we are talking today on January 31, 2022, for the Share Your Story: Student Life at Mundelein Project. I'm in Palatine, Illinois, and Michela is in Milton, Delaware. So Michela, to start us off, could you please tell me a little bit about yourself, like when you were born, where you were raised and your family?

Coffaro: I was born in Chicago, Illinois, on the North Side, and was raised in Chicago for the first—well, I stayed there for about fifty-five years. And what was the rest of it, about my family?

Q: Yeah.

Coffaro: My father and mother were both—each born in Sicily. They met here, because of family members and—introducing them. And my father owned a real spaghetti factory. And my mother was an ex-nun from Sicily. So that's—I also had four steps brothers and sisters who have been wonderful to me.

Q: Could you tell me why you chose Mundelein as a college?

Coffaro: Well, it's the second-largest Catholic college in the United States. And also I went to Immaculata High School. So I already knew the BVMs [Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary]. And in fact, I had joined the BVMs for about three months. I believe I had started at Mundelein, then had joined and went back. And the Sisters were kind enough to have me take some summer courses so I could be with the class of '63.

Q: So when you joined the BVMs, did you get sent out to Dubuque, and you were there for a few months and then—

Coffaro: Three months right. And then back again because I felt—the reason was at that point in life, I thought that I could do more outside of the convent than inside the convent. That was my thought at the time. I think it was a good [inaudible] of decisions. I have two wonderful daughters and had gotten married. It really worked out quite well.

Q: I should just say, why did you think that you wanted to join the order in the first place?

Coffaro: Well, because the same thing that I wrote about Mundelein is what I wrote about the Sisters, about strengthening my faith in God and through their kindness and their inspiration. My belief in—certainly reinforced regarding the church teachings. And the women were strong and kind. And so when you put that all together, I felt that the regard for women as equals was very important, and it went on to continue at Mundelein. And so the opportunity came available by getting to know the Sisters more personally. And I made an application for that. And also my mother came from being an ex-nun, so it sort of all fit at the time.

Q: Yeah. What was your mother's reaction when you told her that you wanted to join?

Coffaro: Well, she cried, but not because I was joining, but because I would leave her alone. Because by that time my father had died when I was at the end of my seventh birthday party.

Yeah, right? So, she would be alone because I was her only child—because I had four step brothers and sisters. But I was her only child. So she cried, but was happy also because of where I was going.

Q: Did she tell you at all about her religious service as a nun, and why she—?

[05:00]

Coffaro: What's fascinating about that question is that she worked with the elderly as well as children. And in my lifetime what have I worked with? (laughs) Residential care for children in Chicago with Catholic Charities. That was seventeen years. And also, I ran residential care independently with other nonprofits. And then currently—and even before this—I had worked in nursing homes as a therapist. I'm both a Master's in social work as well as a doctor of psychology. So it all fit in.

Q: Yeah, and when you came back from the Dubuque to re-enroll in Mundelein again, what was that transition like for you?

Coffaro: Well, it was easy because we're only talking about three months. And as I said, the Sisters helped me with classes so that I would be in sync with the class of '63. So it really was quite easy. And also I got a job at Carson Pirie Scott in Chicago, and that was great. And people were very cordial. It really didn't make any difference that I had been in or out because it was all—the atmosphere was similar in actuality. Because we're there for each other.

Q: Yeah. I was going to ask how so?

Coffaro: Well, in terms of coming back, three months is not that long of a time at an early freshman time. And I can't remember the name of the movie where there was the nun. And I remember being in the convent, and I said, "What happened to her when"—it was the one in Austria and Germany where whatever that movie was.

Q: The Sound of Music?

Coffaro: Yeah, The Sound of Music. And I said, "Oh, what did she do?" While I was in the commons—they said, "Oh, she left." So that didn't help, let me tell you. So I remember that very clearly, that it did impress me, I have to say. So anyway, what was—were we on the question? Did I answer enough?

Q: Yes, I was going to then turn to Mundelein studies. What did you get out of your classes there? What type of classes did you take?

Coffaro: Well, my studies were, the most significant, it wasn't—the primary study was elementary and high school level teaching. That certificate is what I was going for. But what really influenced me was sociology, because they sent me—Sister Liguori [Brophy, BVM], I think might have been her name—and was quite influential, sent me over to Catholic Charities in Chicago. So I got to know what was going on in Catholic Charities. I was so impressed. And I actually went for a job after I graduated, and they said, "Well, we already have seventeen applicants." And I said, "Well, now you have eighteen." And I got the job. I ended up staying, as I said, for seventeen years, but also was able to make quite a difference there. And I was grateful—totally grateful for the opportunity. What really happened before that, or during those times when I was thinking about that, I went to a class, a classroom where they had the first-graders because I was doing an internship. So the teacher walks out of the room and all of the kids fall out of their desks. They did it on purpose. They laughed. And of course, I was in shock. There went that career. So I thought social work might work. I love your smile, by the way.

Q: That's very sweet of you.

[10:00]

Q: And the charities—the Catholic Charities. Was that something that you were involved in throughout your time at Mundelein, or was it mostly afterwards?

Coffaro: No, it was afterwards. I had the Lindquist case, which was a famous case, and eventually I helped change the laws for the better in terms of child abuse. I know we want to talk about them Mundelein, so we'll stay with it.

Q: Yeah. So you mentioned Sister Liguori as an influential professor. Could you expand upon that a little more?

Coffaro: Well, the thing that the Sisters did, and I have that right in my notes. It said, "They made opportunities available." Okay. And that was one and the other opportunity—just to talk about opportunities from the Sisters—I put down that they linked us up with the boy's high schools and, I mean colleges. And so—then also they linked us up with political people, which I stayed involved throughout the years—the Democrats. And they always helped students—they help reinforce whatever values that you had that you treasured. And the support that they gave for us as individuals—with individual likes and dislikes—was exemplary. Can't even say it. Can you say it exemplary? The nuns were giving glory to God every single day. That's my summary of them. The Sisters, they made all the difference in the world.

Q: Yeah, that's wonderful. And you mentioned the Democrats. Was that the Young Democrats club on campus?

Coffaro: Well, it wasn't so much the club on campus, because I did join in with some of the current people that are still on TV once in a while. At the time, I understood that it was difficult to be in politics itself because of, shall we say, the negotiating among them for offices or for power. And so I went in a different direction and really getting overly involved that way. And so in terms of making a difference, I use that education regarding teaching and the education regarding sociology and systems to further my life. So I used the principles I learned in Mundelein in my lifetime.

Q: What sort of principles were those?

Coffaro: Well, I was reading—before I was able to get my email and talk to you—I was reading one of my acceptance speeches, because of becoming the student body president. I said that it didn't matter whether someone's on the committee, or they did volunteer work, or at school at the time because each individual was important. So who they were was someone that I, as president of the student council, wanted to support. So that principle of us being valued individuals was primary in my mind.

Q: Yeah, that's wonderful to instill in all students I think. Were you involved in any specific Mundelein clubs then?

Coffaro: Well, it was mostly—I was internally political. I realized I ran for one junior president, and then what I can see from my scrapbook is how I supported all of the fundraising and entertainment that we did. And so most of my involvement was introducing everybody. That's literally what I found when I went through—that as opposed to being the ones with the awards themselves or the recognition.

[15:00]

Coffaro: But I had the top recognition. So it wasn't like I was looking for anything, but I could see that it was a privilege. And my marks weren't as high as later on because of the involvement, because it took a lot of time to be involved in Mundelein. Because we were literally part of making a difference with each other. We didn't just have the name or the officers that had the names, and we didn't do anything specific. So I wasn't as involved in particular clubs.

Q: Was your role as president something that you had for multiple years, or was your term just one academic year?

Coffaro: No, that was a student body president, which is the top honor. I had been junior president also. I didn't see in freshman and in sophomore year, I just saw that I traveled (laughs), had a nice time, went to dances, even won a few. Yeah. It was the jitterbug. From a club difference, it was more being everywhere than one particular place. That's what happened because of my interest in being supportive. Because one of the things that I have been supportive

of throughout my life—which has been a strange event—is that I am supportive of people who are not recognized, not given attention and becoming real friends with them. Not just acting like a friend because I feel sorry for them, but just to get to know them as people. And so that's what I did also in college.

Q: Yeah, that's wonderful. Truly. In terms of your political activity on campus, you mentioned that professors introduced you to politicians. What was that like? What did that mean?

Coffaro: Well, they had people come in and give us speeches about Chicago, and the Mayor had come there. That's how I got involved in the city, as opposed to too much internally. Of course, I probably was in the club. I just can't recall if I had—I don't know how the memberships after all these years, who knows what I did? So, I mean, we're talking a thousand years ago you know? You're very funny because I'm looking at you, and you have the mute on. Yeah.

Q: I'm laughing back here, but she can't hear me. You can see it.

Coffaro: Yeah, I know. It's a funny laugh. So it's nice we're able to do this. And I appreciate the effort you're putting in this.

Q: Oh, yeah. And I think it helps much more to do it face to face, too, so you can see my reactions.

Coffaro: Right. Anyway, so going on to jobs on campus. I didn't have a job. I had the job. Maybe I could put it that way. I didn't live on campus, but I had a lot of friends that were on campus. And also I mentioned traveling because that was fun when there was an opportunity. And also I was able to bring friends over to my house because I like to cook and my mother—my ex-nun mother was an extremely good cook. So that was fun to be able to do that. So I really was able to have the advantages of both places being on campus and off campus.

Q: Right, because with you on the north side, it was pretty close or not too bad of a commute, I assume, right?

Coffaro: No, it was only maybe twenty minutes, if that. Because it was all the north side.

Q: Yes. And then easily you can bring friend's home for meals, holidays.

Coffaro: Yeah, and of course, I drove.

Q: Okay. You had a car?

Coffaro: Yeah. My mother actually had a Kaiser Fraser. You probably never heard of it, did you?

Q: No.

Coffaro: (Laughs) Okay. All right.

[20:00]

Coffaro: I'm looking at the questions, too. Are we on social activities now?

Q: If you would like, go for it.

Coffaro:

Well, that was this thing about being able to have contact with other colleges where the boys were that was really nice. Because some of this—being an all-girl school—it could have been a much tighter social situation. And it wasn't. It was absolutely wonderful. And my friends were we even traveled one year to Texas because some of the fellas we knew had gone, you know, that we had dated, went into the Army, that kind of thing. Two things: first, networking, but

second, opportunities. That was the best thing that Mundelein ever did for me. And ironically, now that there was Loyola, I got my master's at Loyola even while Mundelein was still functioning as Mundelein. I don't even know if some of the Sisters did go over to Loyola? I don't even know that.

Q:

I was wondering how much interaction there was between Loyola and Mundelein when you were at school.

Coffaro: Well, that was more of a personal thing that if something was going on, I would join in. But it came later because of the master's, which was really part of Loyola at the time. That's about that for that part. The meaningful experience thing, that is the Sisters, and the Sisters being willing to engage with us. Because they were not only teachers, they lived what they taught. Because in other situations, educators are not that close to the students. And they were available, they were cordial, they shared their feelings which were positive or if there was a funeral or whatever happened, they were genuine. And there is nothing more than being—better than being with people who are genuine. So that's how I went on then with the social work. And then someone walked in one day in Catholic Charities and said, "This is for you." And it happened to be an opportunity for a doctorate, which only took me ten years to get (laughs).

Q: Doctorates are tricky ones. I do not pretend that it's for me, but good for all of those who are willing to.

Coffaro: One day at a time, you know. Yeah, I always went for something that was beyond reach. In fact, even in terms of getting the student body president. I saw there were one person starting in freshman year and then junior year, and we even ran against each other in that year—junior year. And they were part of actually a clique that lived in the dorms. I don't know if you recall that I mentioned I don't do cliques well. So, it was surprising that I actually got it because it really took pretty high votes to get it, because there were several people running. But to see that experience in itself—the courage to run, having enough self-esteem to do this—it needed support of not only your friends, but it needed the support of the Sisters. To know that you could accomplish this and work side by side with them. So that was huge for me. It has changed my entire life in both getting in trouble and getting out of trouble.

Q: What do you mean by that?

Coffaro: Well, when you take a leadership role, there's always people that don't appreciate what you do. I won't get into the current—what's going on currently.

[25:00]

Coffaro: But it's part and parcel of being in a leadership role. It has happened over and over because even in my own town, recently, even in my own church. But as soon as you take a stand, and you want to work with the system, and you want to help people be what they say they are. Like in a church, anything like that always has a push against your own values. Because if you question somebody not following their values instead of them following their values and saying, "Yeah, you got a point there" kind of thing, what happens is they become defensive. So that's why the positive and the negative are with it. So my belief is anybody who runs for anything has courage, really, because God help you afterwards. Those are if you ever want to come over, have dinner, have some lasagna. I'll tell you my stories.

Q: That sounds great. I mean, we're starting to do that right now, but I guess non-Mundelein stories are good, too.

Coffaro: But the essence of Mundelein—and I had already come from Immaculata, so I had the experience of feeling comfortable with the Sisters because that was my high school experience. So that really helped me transition into college.

Q: And do you remember anything about the campaigning process to become student body president, what you had to do? Who your—?

Coffaro: Well, someone wanted to join in and have us run together. And I really didn't want to do that. Even that took courage to say no. I just felt that I wanted to do it as myself. And obviously it worked. The person I believe became a vice president, but I'd have to look that up

again. My name is Michela Asunta Coffaro: , so I remember I used that Michela at college or somehow that M-A-C—I use it as branding kind of thing to campaign. I can't remember. Do you remember for 1,000 or 2,000—the numbers of students? I think it was 2,000. I think it was pretty high.

Q: I'm not sure to be honest.

Coffaro: Yeah, whatever it was, I mean, it's pretty big to be able to talk to that group, really. I remember I had a really—I dressed with—it was a black dress, but it had something on the cuffs that were red on the neck. And you had to think about everything again to make a difference. So it's just being out there and being with people. And it's a quick thing that has come up throughout my life, whether it's a town or church and so forth. It's fascinating what happens when you take a stand. But then hold on to your self-esteem and know that you are worthy, you just keep going. In these different little stories that we're not going to talk about today, people have told me, well, walk away. Why be around people that are wanting this or that? Well, because if you want to be part of a system and you believe in the system, then you support it. It sounds simple, but it's not.

Q: Oh, I'm sure. I believe you. When you were on campus—between classes or something—what would you do? Where would you go to study, to eat, to have fun, that sort of thing?

[30:00]

Coffaro: The memory of it is vague on a daily basis. Because when I live my own life now, and I do what I do, I know that I'm going back to the values at Mundelein. Obviously it started earlier with my father dying at my birthday party. At the end of your birthday party. It was in a newspaper once I got interviewed, and they said I managed my mother. Whoa, that's pretty big. And that's what happens when you're a little girl like that. When you're with a single parent, you grow up faster because then you're their support system. So that's where some of my appreciation came in later on because then I had this building filled with these penguins (laughs). That's how they looked in the beginning, following you around and supporting you. I'm glad you're having this interview because some people might not believe how much you can be influenced. And so anybody that's listening to this ever that as a single person, your word and how you act makes all

the difference in the world to others. Even if you don't see it immediately. Because what has happened to me when I've been in corporations, even at Catholic Charities, I make a suggestion—three years later, they would take it up. But you have to have courage to start out in the first place to make a suggestion. So that's where somehow I got on that track.

Q: No, but I think that's great. It kind of creates a theme for your time at Mundelein and what really has lasted throughout your life.

Coffaro: Yeah. And I probably became obsessive about a subject. If I was running for something, it would be then how can we make a— that's how I started out our interview about how can we make a difference to people. And even to say the thing that I mentioned, about, you don't have to be on a committee, or you don't have to volunteer. The reason for that is not in any way to be negative about helping. It says you have value no matter what. And nowadays, if I have someone who is totally given up in a nursing home, what I have left is a saying, your very existence gives glory to God. So that's my story.

Q: Beautiful. And how do people react when you tell them that?

Coffaro: You know, they actually start thinking about it? Because when I say it, I say, "Do you know?" It's not in a quiet voice. It's a very distinct way of saying, and they act like they never thought of it that way. Because what do you do in a nursing home? You have breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Have some activities. And people are overly concerned about their value as a person by what they do in a job. In actuality, I cut through that because that's when I'm really desperate about getting through. Because everyone doesn't have the same religion or values that you do. So you don't want to encroach on their life in a negative way. You want to be positive. But when all else fails. And it really does work, does work very well.

Q: Good. Getting back to Mundelein—in terms of traditions or culture on campus, was there anything that you remember sticking out as like a quintessential Mundelein thing to do?

Coffaro: Well, the thing that was interesting to me—I wish we were in Chicago, because if you want any like—if you need any pictures of some of these events kind of thing, I could send some pictures if you need that. But what I found in the scrapbook, which is my little buddy now, was the events that were not only events that we produced, like a play or something from outside, but also the events in terms of amateur hour kind of things.

[35:00]

Coffaro: They were also significant because we were able to share with each other who we were, and we could fundraise because fundraising in the Catholic Church sometimes is a little necessary to say the least. That really struck me in reviewing what we were doing, because—besides the grades and besides some of the stuff we mentioned, those events were very very important for everyone because it brought us together. It's like coming in the back door again with this value system concept. But you're coming in a way that is a lot of fun and joining together and laughing and singing. And in the Mundelein song—in the Mundelein song at the end—I had never even realized this because—it talks about loyalty and sunshine and being together. But at the very end, it even suggests beyond our lifetime, the last lines. So obviously I kind of reviewed some of this, and I just loved it. And then we make up songs for our own junior year or sophomore year, and so we make those up. So that was another way, again, of getting together. That part about getting together and having a purpose always had something beyond it besides, like just singing. It was singing what? It was conversing with whom? And getting to know somebody that came to campus, that kind of thing. So it always had an interaction connected with it. Very Sister Mary Ann Ida [Gannon, BVM], totally, totally clever, smart. Ever.

Q: About these songs that you mentioned, were they songs that you wrote and then performed for Mundelein, or was it something that just—

Coffaro: No. When we had our meetings. If we had something junior year together, then we would sing it. It was the interaction of creating it. There wasn't that much singing of it because there had to be something going on with your particular year at the time. But it was just something that created more—a better morale. That's really what it ended up being.

Q: And in terms of the plays or productions that you guys put on, was there any that you remember specifically, what sort of productions they were? How often—?

Coffaro: Yeah, they're in that famous—in the other rooms I've got all the different —what I was looking at when I was looking at those were the people that participated. Again, here we go again about participation, because everybody's name is listed just page by page of whoever was in something. If we produce it ourselves, that was a big thing in terms of not only being a director, but being a producer. I remember there was some controversy one time, and to this day I can't remember what it was, but it had to do with being the producer and relating to the director. In which direction should we go? That's how intimate we were with what we were doing. It wasn't done for us. It was done with us and by us. So I know I'm a little pushy on that point, but that is the experience. So in terms of particular conversations and so forth, I don't remember some of that, but I just remember being a part of something that was so special and relevant.

[40:00]

Q: Sorry about that. I thought I hit the button. Yeah, right. What do you remember about Sister Ann Ida [Gannon, BVM]?

Coffaro: Well, the first word that came to mind was 'elegant.' She was tall. Well, everybody's tall in relationship to me. But when she spoke, what she had to say was relevant at the time. It wasn't the kind of thing where you'd be like, oh, my God, when is she going to stop? It wasn't that kind of thing. It was always right on, relevant, and in present time. And that, again, makes a difference in terms of respecting someone and knowing that she was in charge. That idea of being in charge, which is—when I talk about the student body president thing, it doesn't start in senior year where you're campaigning. You're campaigning from day one, in essence, and you're competing from day one. And the sad thing that happened at the end was that the person who was competing against me, her friends thought she won. That was sad. They didn't get the numbers right. And I remember it was her friends. It wasn't her, per se. Anyway, we took care of that, just like we took care of it in current time. I'm holding back. You can tell I'm holding back here.

Q: There's so much material you could say about it, right?

Coffaro: Right. Currently. So there were four things I wanted to share with you.

Q: Yeah, okay.

Coffaro: There was a little book that I got by someone named Miguel Ruez. And there are four things that I have run on. And it's one, don't assume. Two, don't take it personally. Three, do your best, and four, keep your word. So those four things, I was doing part of that. But when you see it in writing, it solidifies what you stand for [phone rings]. Got rid of it. Okay. So that's that.

Q: Yeah, I think those are good values, good things to remember—instill for good character. Really.

Coffaro: Well, the thing about don't take it personally, is really important. That has helped me throughout my lifetime, because that's that issue of self-esteem. And that's where so many people lose it. They can't hold on to truly who they are. Again, giving glory to God. Okay. If you believe that, that you're special and part of the world's energy, that's who we are. That's what we have to offer each other and ourselves.

Q: Do you remember if there were any changes on campus at Mundelein while you were there? Whether they be physical changes or changes in rules or traditions or something.

Coffaro: No. Stuff was always going on, whatever. But I don't remember anything in particular. I know politically it was kind of hot at the time, and I'm talking the larger issues, you know. But otherwise it was, what are we going to do Friday night? When you talk about traditions in terms of—even as alumni, I would go to every single thing in Chicago if I were there right now. They really are keeping it alive, which is wonderful. I'm very grateful for your involvement.

Q: What was the political scene like when you were on campus. And how much did Mundelein get involved?

[45:00]

Coffaro: Mundelein itself didn't get involved. It was the people that were interested at the time. Mayor [Richard J.] Daley was running things in Chicago. In terms of Mundelein being involved, it's more the opportunity of bringing in some speakers. And then meeting them and then doing your own thing on the outside of Mundelein. So it isn't Mundelein, per se. It was more opportunity from Mundelein.

Q: Got you. And I'm trying to think like—I was thinking JFK's [John F. Kennedy] assassination and the Vietnam War, but that was actually kind of—

Coffaro: No, well, in terms of the war—it did have to do—. I can't remember my stand on it, because—see, I did have the involvement. But right now I really can't remember. It really is a long time ago. You waited too long on this one. But you're right. I just know I was—I felt strongly about, I think, with the Vietnam War, that we were not giving the soldiers who were coming home the kind of attention that they needed. I think that's what it was. But I'm really stretching on this one.

Q: No, that's fair. I am asking you about things from sixty years ago.

Coffaro: Yeah, right.

Q: Which is wild to think about. So you've been doing great. I don't know where my memory would be.

Coffaro: Well, the thing is, if you believe in what you're doing—that the whole essence of—that's why I sound like I'm repeating myself on values. But once your values become habits, you

make a difference all the time and don't even know. I just got a group home named Michela's Place, and I'm alive. I mean, how does that happen? Well, that happens by joining—again, a board—and I kind of pushed to be on a particular board of a not for profit who is in eight States and have been with them for ten years and voila. But I wasn't working to be named—Michela's Place to be named after me. That's not what I was doing. So if you can take—when someone is able to give it like those nuns on a daily basis. I mean, it was all very heartfelt. That's the part that if it was a takeaway. And I don't know today if there's enough of that, really, in terms of interactions and caring for people beyond teaching them. That's the essence—teaching is good. However, if the rest of you doesn't come along with it—the kindness and the interest in other people's lives—it doesn't stick. That's why I don't know who you're talking—how many people you've talked to, but I'm hoping that you're getting some similar kinds of reactions because of how we lived for four years. I mean, you really miss it.

Q: Yeah. Compassion is a huge thing that I don't think can be overstressed, especially in today's age.

Coffaro: Exactly.

Q: And I will say that something that I've heard from a lot of other Mundelein alums that I've talked to is just how important the Sisters were in their value—creation of that self-esteem and value for themselves and their own abilities. So I think that confidence building to be the people they want to be is something that I've seen as a trend for Mundelein students, which is just incredible to hear.

Coffaro: That's great. Thank you for sharing that.

Q: Yeah. Let me see. I'm running towards the end of my questions. Are there any special experiences that you have at Mundelein that you found to be influential or meaningful in particular, or was it kind of—I know you've spoken a lot about the values you were solidified there.

[50:00]

Q: But on the whole, are there anything like looking back that you're like—?

Coffaro: Well, the student body president thing was big in the sense that I was not part of the clique. And when I say clique, it was a nice group of women who are wonderful. However, the fact that I can accomplish some change in the system—which people don't understand why I don't walk away from stuff that gets a little negative, as I mentioned before, it's because you actually can make a difference. People—they want to help others, but they don't look at it as making a difference on a larger basis from an energy point of view. They just see that they help somebody, and they feel better. But it's bigger than that. If every single person understood their energy and what they had to give. And there's a book called *Excuse Me, Your Life Is Waiting*. I tell everybody this one by Lynn Grabhorn. She is now deceased. But *Excuse Me, Your Life Is Waiting*. That one book will change your life because each of us is bigger than we think we are from an energy point of view, and we really can get anything we want. So we'll leave it at that.

Q: Yeah. No, that's wonderful. And thank you for that recommendation. Has there been anything that we've talked about or haven't talked about, maybe brushed over, that you would like to discuss that I haven't asked you about?

Coffaro: No. But my thought as we were talking is how to use this historical information to help other people who are in the situation where they're teachers, and they're influencing people. And to understand how gigantic who they are will make a lifetime difference in the lives of those that they're teaching. How are you going to use this to make my talking with you today, to touch someone's heart and soul and mind, to understand how valuable they are. So that will be my question. If you ever have an answer. I would like to have.

Q: Well, I know that we're wanting to use these interviews as a way to deep dive into what things were like at Mundelein through the ages. And really, I think, I've conducted many of these interviews, and I'm starting to see trends and themes and things that can be highlighted much more. And so hopefully we continue to do more projects that incorporate these different perspectives in unique ways to highlight individual interviews and bring them together. Because we will obviously be able to watch any of these individual interviews themselves, but hopefully

we can also synthesize it for them in a way in different projects in the future. Which hopefully will get to your point of making that impact.

Coffaro: Well, one big thing for me was I was one of eighteen people picked—and I don't know if it was the fifty-year anniversary or the 150-year—for the nuns. Whatever time it was, it was in the '70s, eighteen people were picked that made an impact in some way. For me, it was this idea about changing the child abuse laws and helping people be more aware of what they're doing with children—actually is what it comes out to. But Mercedes McCambridge was sitting next to me, and she was a riot. She was a movie star. But doing that kind of thing where you recognize people for what they do, and it's very encouraging, very encouraging. So that's the kind of thing that was done at Mundelein College.

[55:00]

Coffaro: And this was afterwards, after I graduated, and I took my two children with me, and they were like—I think they were probably seven and nine somewhere—somewhere in there. So was the '70s, that kind of thing I hope you will be able to do in conjunction with whoever is sponsoring—because of course this was costing money. So when I get the envelope I will put something in it.

Q: Well, that's great. We'll always say thank you for that.

Coffaro: Yeah. I love making you laugh. Thank you for this. You're very kind.

Q: Oh, thank you so much. I'm so glad that we got to connect and that we could talk about your experiences and what you took from Mundelein. It sounds like there's been such a far-reaching impact on your life, and it's wonderful to hear. From these interviews and from yours, I can tell that Mundelein was such a special place. So I love hearing that. I am going to stop our recording, and then I can talk a little bit more about like next steps and what we can expect, okay.

Coffaro: Okay. Thank you very much again.

[END OF INTERVIEW]