

KATHRYN QUINN KNOWLES, '51

Interviewed by Mary Alma Sullivan, BVM

November 13, 1997

Mundelein College
Oral History Archives

M. Sullivan: The following is an interview with Kathryn Quinn Knowles, class of 1951, Mundelein College. The date is December 8, 1998. The interviewer, Mary Alma Sullivan, BVM, class of 1951.

Katy, would you please tell us for purposes of the record your full name, including your maiden name, graduating class, your major and your degree?

K. Knowles: I'm Kathryn Quinn Knowles. My maiden name was Quinn. I'm the class of '51. My major was English and I got a B.A. degree.

M. Sullivan: Can you say something about your family and social background? For example, immigrant parents, working parents, brothers and sisters, war time experience, anything.

K. Knowles: Yes. That's everything! My parents were from Ireland. They both were working when I was at the school. We lived in Edgewater, on the edge of Uptown. So it was real easy to get to

school. They were very interested in my education because I was the first one in the family to go to college.

MS: Brother.

KK: Oh yes, my brother John was a really great guy. He was in high school when I was in college.

MS: And he's still living?

KK: No, he is not. He died young. He was only 49.

MS: Oh my. What ... how?

KK: Complications of diabetis.

MS: And the war -- did that have much affect on you?

KK: No. Don't remember it. Remember December 7th, the announcement over the radio. And I remember very little besides that. Yeah.

MS: The end of the war and the death of Franklin Roosevelt. And probably the death of Franklin Roosevelt, in my family, was bigger than the war. Because _____

KK: No. I don't think we were either. I can remember stamps, rationing stamps. And very little else.

MS: Now how is that you came to attend Mundelein College.

KK: I was at Clark College for my first year. And I had gone to Clark because I got a scholarship from Immaculata, a tuition scholarship. And I was homesick. Very, very homesick. I mean, I could have been in California or, you know, Thailand or some place. I was so homesick. And my parents missed me very much too. So I decided then to ... and really, my close friends were

at Mundelein. So it was really a tough decision to decide to come back.

MS: But why Mundelein? Why not the University of Illinois?

KK: Well, because of the BVMS. Yeah.

MS: Can you recall the activities, events and/or experiences you found most satisfying in your college career?

KK: Yes. Working on the magazine. Definitely. As we said before, Mary, I absolutely loved to go up to that office. Now, I can't remember if I started when I was a freshman. Maybe when I was ... No, it had to be when I was sophomore, right. Or a junior. But I loved going up there. I felt so comfortable there. Sister Ermin made it a very welcoming place. She appreciated you and any tiny bit of talent that you had. So, I loved it there. And that's what I remember the most.

MS: And you also went on to be an editor of the publication.

KK: Yes, co-editor. With you!

MS: Co-editor of *The Review*.

KK: Of *The Review*.

MS: What about ... Weren't you connected with *Quest*? Or not?

KK: Oh, yes. Yes, I was too. That's right. Thanks for reminding me.

MS: Tell us what *Quest* was.

KK: Oh, *Quest* was our year-end publication, wasn't it? Or did we do it ... No, it was poetry that came out twice a year. Yeah, I do remember. I've got the books there. You know, in a

prominant place in my ... That's right. I'd forgotten that.
Yeah, that's right.

MS: I'm going to stop right here. [tape turned off a moment.]
Now, can you recall the activities, events and/or experiences in
your college career that were the most challenging?

KK: Oh, certain classes were very tough for me. And fear of big
exams, for instance -- comprehensives. They were very ... And I
remember the joy when I did get a good mark, you know, on the
comprehensives. Sciences classes were difficult for me. But,
challenging? I don't ...

MS: And in your major -- that was a joy, was it?

KK: Well, yeah. Certain teachers, certain classes were jus
absolutely wonderful. I remember Sister Richard and Newman
class. Oh gosh. I remember it to this day. I remember the
room. I remember where I sat. And she ... You know, in her tiny
voice. She gave so much. Brilliant gal. Really brilliant. And
I remember working ... I remember ... This wasn't my major. Of
course, it might have been allied with my major, but I remember
working in the library. Worked during printing, I think, at that
time, and other things too in the library. Loved that. Really
loved it. Now that I'm thinking about it, my ... it was joyful
for the most part, my college years.

MS: So then what would be the most enriching? And if we're
going over the same ground ...

- KK: Probably my courses in my major. And working on the magazine. That was wonderful. You know, to think, to really do it and see it in print and have some value to your thoughts.
- MS: Any frustrations?
- KK: Lots of frustations! [chuckling] A few frustrations. In certain classes, there were certain teachers. Yeah.
- MS: We'll come back to that in another question.
- KK: Naming no names.
- MS: Actually, recollect your relationship with different faculty members. Your experience of them. Pro and con. Or, if you choose, just pro. Can you say, for example, is there anything you would add to what you've already said about Irma and
- KK: Richard. And one of the library nuns ... and I'm afraid I don't remember her name ...
- MS: Clara?
- KK: Yeah, it was ...
- MS: Little?
- KK: Yeah. Very kind. Very, very kind. And really, that's about it.
- MS: And, any really, really horrendous?
- KK: Yes. But you can't quote me on this. I do remember it for a class in psychology. We were given some question - It's funny, I still remember. And I found the answers in the library. So I duplicated them and gave them out to everybody.
- MS: I think we were in collusion with that.

KK: With my friend Mary Sullivan!

MS: We were standing at the door feeling like we had really done a social service for our classmates.

KK: Do you remember it? And it's not petty to remember it.

MS: Oh, vividly. And the book, as I recall, there was only one copy of the book and it could only be used in the library.

KK: And I felt so good because I worked in the library; I found the book. Gave the answers to everyone. To me, that was the bottom line -- that we should all ... No, I didn't know that the search of the book was the important thing. [laughs] But, if I recall correctly, our grades were lowered.

MS: I have no ...

KK: And we were publicly ...

MS: reprimanded. And I have no hesitation that it was Sister Mary John Michael, who went on to become President of the college I think for three years. After we had ... Of course, after we left.

KK: Oh, really? Well ... We all learn and grow.

MS: Well, I think that part of it was just being stunned by the fact that we would be considered ... that it would be considered duplicitous or whatever.

KK: No, it didn't. I thought I was being a good person.

[laughs]

MS: A good samaritan.

KK: [laughing] I'm so glad you remember.

MS: Oh, absolutely I do. In fact, I from time to time see Sister — she's in our _____ now. And I ... it's too bad to have to remember ... because as I recall, she was a good teacher.

KK: Yes, she was.

MS: So it wasn't that. It was just ... and just the way it was handled. So if that's petty, we're both petty. [chuckles]

If you could recollect now your relationship with various classmates. Your experiences with your classmates.

KK: Oh, best time of my life, of my school life. Mary Sullivan, Myrnie Ward, Peggy Egan, Jean Schaffer. Most of them were friends from high school. And we were social friends as well as school friends. It was a really good time. Wonderful, wonderful women. Happy to have known them. I wish I had kept in touch with everyone.

MS: You know, Peggy Egan told me an interesting story which is related to this. And it has to do with the fact that having gone to with the fact that having gone to St. Scholastica High School and then coming to Mundelein, where so many people were coming from Immaculata and large groups from other schools as well ... and she just kind of assumed that they'd pretty well hang together and she just kind of thought, "Well, I'm just going to go along and ... you know." And she said ... She mentioned particularly the group from Immaculata in which she belonged. Because she said it was absolutely ...

MS: Our group.

KK: Exactly. There was absolutely no question. It was not an exclusive bunch. And she was integrated just like ...

MS: And of course, part of that's because of Peggy's personality.

KK: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah.

MS: Great, great friends.

KK: It was a great group. And yet, it seems we had other friends. Peggy mentioned, for example, that she had another little group of friends that she ...

MS: Yeah. Maybe the girls from her major or from St. Scholastica. Yeah, I still have some of the friends that I knew at Immaculata, as I recall. Peggy Butler and Peggy Barrett and that group. But, enough about that. [laughs]

MS: Katy, what did you do in the first ten years after graduation?

KK: Oh, let's see. I taught. I taught first grade and went to school some more, because I wasn't an education major, you know.

MS: Oh yes.

KK: So, I had lots of courses to pick up. But, ...

MS: Where did you do that?

KK: They were various Board of Education courses and they were ... For instance, they were at different high schools, you know. Or at the Board, the district office. And I also went to Loyola downtown to work on my master's in English. So I took courses

there too. And, I taught ... taught at Portage Park for a couple of years and then I taught at Bateman which was near my home.

MS: So it was in the public school system?

KK: Yeah, Chicago Public Schools.

MS: And then ... Well, you continued to teach then.

KK: Yeah, I did after I got married and then after my daughter Ellen ... you know, after Ellen was born, I took off for about ... I was home for about eight years. And then, a year or two after Meg was born, I went back because I had heard that it was a good time to go back, maybe the only good time for awhile. I could still choose my school, per se. I did have to take the teaching exam all over again. And then I taught until three years ago.

MS: And first grade? Primary?

KK: All the time.

MS: That's courage.

KK: [laughs]

MS: That is courageous. I remember substituting one time for a first grade teacher. All I had to do was really just go in there ...

KK: Really?

MS: Yes. I mean, it was in a grade school ... a high school situation. And the high school was out for the holiday but the grade school still was continuing and I had to go in there. And I taught ... It was a very orderly classroom. The sister who was

there, who taught it regularly, was kind of like a ... kind of like a top sargeant. So everybody, you know, ... every hour of the day they knew exactly where they were to be and who was to collect what and who was to ring the bell and ...

KK: Oh, oh. Wonderful.

MS: So from that point of view, I had no trouble. What got me at the end of the day, when I looked back, was the continuousy of ... I mean, even when the little folks were busy ... They were busy. And they were very orderly.

KK: And you had to change activities so often.

MS: And they ... But their little bodies just kept moving.

[laughs]

KK: Yes. That's right. I can see that picture in front of me. Very true. Very true.

MS: They just ... They just can't sit still ... even when they're busy coloring or doing what they do.

KK: Very difficult. You really have to change activities at the very least every twenty minutes. That part is hard. It's hard to get used to.

MS: Special calling. Can you describe in general your view of the education you received at Mundelein and the educational environment in which you lived for four years?

KK: I think I took it for granted that I was getting a good education. And, of course, I was. I found ... I found out that later on. And I think I have a greater appreciation of what I

read that someone else has written because of my, you know, English major. Definitely I know that. And it's ... I've had a life long love of poetry ever since. And I'm a voracious reader. Although, most of the time I think I'm reading mysteries. But I do love to read. And I think a lot of that _____

MS: One of the criticisms that is leveled at graduates of Catholic women's colleges has been that, well, there is no real competition, you know. And the premise being that competition is the thing that really makes you achieve, achieve, achieve. How would you respond to that? Was there competition?

KK: Oh yeah. Definitely!

MS: How would you characterize that?

KK: I don't think it was the kind of ... I felt ... I always felt driven to do well. And I think that a lot of that came from myself. But I think a lot of it came from the other, you know, students and what was expected of me at school. And it was ... it was mostly friendly competition actually. I never would think someone would say that. I mean, are they judging by what you do in life as a ...

MS: No, I just think ... No, I don't know.

KK: I think that's what they're judging it on.

MS: But, I think the argument being, "Well, life is competitive and really if you don't ..." Actually, this is many of the ... many of the people who say this are people on the fringes of ultra feminism, you know, who are saying, "Well, you know, if

they were in the men and women's institutions, then the men would somehow pressure them ..."

KK: Yeah, I realize what they're saying. I don't know how they're basing that. I mean, maybe they're saying, "Well, we don't have ... only ten percent of the executives of big large companies are women." Maybe that's what they're basing it on. But, you know, I mean, for instance, a teacher, as you know, has such terrific influence, particularly if you're in an inner city school as I was for so many of my years. So, I don't know what they base it on. ... find out.

MS: For your experience though, you experienced healthy competition?

KK: Yeah. Friendly competition.

MS: And you expected to do well.

KK: Oh, absolutely.

MS: According to your ability. Okay. Could you respond to one of these statements? I'll read them both through once and then, you know, if you want, I'll repeat them. So which of these seems to be ... seems to be the most pertinent as far as you're concerned? It seems that Mundelein College environment during your college years supported both the Catholic religious tradition of the time and a climate of social responsibility. Or, B, your religious faith was nourished but the encouragement of social responsibility was negligible. Or C, you were encouraged to have a keen sense of social responsibility with little or minimal attention to strengthening the Catholic religious tradition of the time.

KK: Well, you know, I don't have to think about that; I pick the first. That both were encouraged. Well, first the courses we had to take. You know, that you actually did have to take some religion courses, philosophy courses, so on. Social responsibility? You know, so much of that was inherent, I think, just in the way that our teachers were and the way they treated us. And I know, you know, I never thought about it as I have to go out and do good or, you know, I need to ... But, I mean, it was just there. And I just embraced teaching as part of that. I _____ teaching small children as part of that. So, I think they were both there. I mean, _____ know what other people said. Did other people say they ... one over the other?

MS: It's been a mixed ...

KK: Really?

MS: But I think for different reasons. For example, Pat Harris chose B because ... and the reason that she did ... She said her religious faith, ironically ... she's Greek Orthodox. Her religious faith was nourished but she said, to be honest with you, I had to go right home from school. So I didn't participate to any great degree in the after life, you know, after class life of the college. And she said, it's in those areas that, you know, that kind of thing would happen.

KK: That's interesting.

MS: Yeah. So it's everybody's ... It's not necessarily taking another position from yours. It's simply the same _____

KK: Right. Elaborating ...

MS: ... was such that ...

KK: from outside

MS: Yeah, that I really ...

KK: forces.

MS: And then she said whatever I ... anything that I did by way of, you know, helping others or needy ... she said, I did in my own community rather than as part of _____ dorm. Which makes sense.

KK: Yeah, it does.

MS: Alright, now, I'm looking here at some of the things that you were involved in. We talked about your being an English major. Talked about the library and *The Review*. You haven't said much about your creative writing, although you've touched a little bit on the fact that you had the opportunity. Do you remember _____?

KK: What?

MS: Well, does that mean anything to you?

KK: What's it called?

MS: _____

KK: No.

MS: From what I can gather ... and this was in another ... I don't know if it was Peggy Egan or ... totally ... It had to do with vaudeville. It was a little show or something.

- KK: I have no memory of it. Absolutely none! I must have done very badly to block it out.
- MS: Your name was mentioned as being one of the participants.
- KK: I don't remember it.
- MS: Okay. As soon as I find out, I will get back to you.
- KK: Wow. I'd be interested to know. I can't remember ... I mean, I can't sing. What would I have done?! Maybe I helped run it, you know.
- MS: You could have.
- KK: Maybe I sent the people on the stage at the right time. I don't remember it at all. That's funny.
- MS: You know, as I recall, at Immaculata, you were very interested
- KK: I was in plays there. Yeah. Yeah, I was. Don't you remember?
- MS: Oh sure.
- KK: I mean, we didn't have boys at that time.
- MS: That's right.
- KK: And I had the honor of playing a boy in the skit.
- MS: Well, I had the honor of being stage manager so I didn't even get out in front of the audience. [laughing]
- KK: Fernando. It was in Ramona. Do you remember? Oh my gosh; that's so funny.
- MS: I just remember the one at Immaculata where we ... It was Dido and Aeneas meeting and Rosemary Shaughnessy, who now BVM ...
- KK: [laughing] Yes! She was a ...

- MS: ... slave
- KK: No, no. She was Mercury, with the helmet, you know.
- MS: On roller skates and fell down on her you know what.
- KK: Oh gosh, yeah, I remember that!
- MS: I remember that.
- KK: That's so funny.
- MS: Somebody was fanning Margy Carey as Dido and was laughing so hard that the fan kept _____
- KK: Would that have been from Latin class?
- MS: That was from the fourth year Latin
- KK: From Aeneas. Oh my gosh.
- MS: I remember looking out from back stage and looking at Sister Mary Frances Patricia, the expression on her face!
- KK: [laughing]
- MS: We were probably the only group in the world in our Latin play that made a comedy out of the Aeniad. It was memorable! Anyway, do you have any stories or anecdotes or anything you want to add? Any story that stands out in your mind? Whether you were the central character or whether someone else.
- KK: I don't remember anything right now, but if I do, I'll write to you and let you know. No, I can't ... You know, I have lots of ... I mean, I just have a problem remembering.
- MS: Remember anything about assemblies?
- KK: High school assemblies, yes.
- MS: Nothing about the cap and gown and assembling in our places?

KK: No, no. I don't. I don't remember that at all. Weren't we on the stage for graduation?

MS: We were. We were on the stage, yes.

KK: I can remember that. I can remember my mother bringing me flowers to graduation. I remember a group of us went to round table afterwards. Remember that?

MS: I do indeed.

KK: Well, I don't remember anything else about assemblies. Oh, I think I remember Virginia Valuni giving a concert. Do you remember that? And she wore a beautiful white grecian looking gown. I do remember that.

MS: M-hm.

KK: I think that was ... Well, I mean, it would have been at Mundelein. But I ... And I think it was during our years there. It might have been afterwards. I'm not sure.

MS: I looked over the list of people from the outside that came in to our assemblies, formal assemblies, where we really did have cap ... The seniors wore a cap and gown. And really, the list of the people at the time that were really ...

KK: And I don't remember any assembly.

MS: celebrities.

KK: My gosh.

MS: Now, that's not just in our senior year too. That's over those three or four years.

KK: Can you name any of them? Do you remember any of them?

- MS: Not right off. I think Graham Greene. Was it Graham Green or ... who was the fellow that wrote at the same time?
- KK: No! Graham Green — oh my gosh!
- MS: Anyway, it was somebody of that ilk.
- KK: Do you remember assemblies?
- MS: Yes, I do. I remember because I had to take attendance. It was a nightmare. Remember governors? Governor of a classroom?
- KK: No, I don't remember that either.
- MS: You were maybe spared that. Anyway, ... well, you might have been an officer. Were you an officer?
- KK: Not in college.
- MS: But then they had governors of these homeroom groups.
- KK: Oh my gosh, I don't remember assemblies at all. Isn't that funny? And I do remember high school assemblies very well. Remember when the Von Trapp singers came?
- MS: Yes, yes.
- KK: Remember when Mr. Peanut came?
- MS: Yes.
- KK: [laughs hard.]
- MS: Do you remember Elizabeth Bentley?
- KK; No.
- MS: She converted to Catholicism from Communism and no one in the country would ... She was an academic and no one, of course, wanted to touch her with a ten foot pole.
- KK: She came to Immaculata?
- MS: No, she was at Mundelein for a year.

- KK: Mundelein.
- MS: Taught in the Social Science department.
- KK: Wow.
- MS: Sociology, I think.
- KK: I wonder if part of the reason I don't remember a lot is because I missed the whole first year. And somehow you get in to the ... into the spirit of the school when you're a freshman. And I'm wondering if that ... I can't even remember if I worked. I worked, you know, forever. I wonder if I worked when I was in ... Besides at school, I had an outside job. So I can remember that ...
- MS: Yes, I can you you did, yes. You worked at Harding's on Wabash.
- KK: That's was when I was in college.
- MS: You were in college because ...
- KK: Yeah. 21 South Wabash. I remember working there but I don't remember the date.
- MS: And you might have even been in the Men's Grill, which meant big tips. Because I had a very brief like three days ... You said the money can be really good, you know.
- KK: No, that was at ... Wasn't that at Stouffer's?
- MS: Oh, was that Stouffer's?
- KK: And then those Irish girls that worked there that pushed us around. Do you remember them? We both quit!
- MS: Was that in college? Was that college? It must have been.

KK: I think it was college. Come to think of it, you're right.
Oh, it was terrible.

MS: Freshman and sophomore year.

KK: Wasn't it terrible? It was the shortest job in history!
That I had. Yeah, then I went to Harding. And then my brother
worked there too. Do you remember that? I got my brother a job
there. And our personnel director was Miss West. And she came
to me one day ... and he was a busboy. And she said, "Kathryn, I
just want you to know that when we tell your brother to clean out
the bun warmer, you don't need to eat everything in it!" [laughs]

MS: Obviously, she was soliciting your help. Got to be clear.
Splitting hairs is ... [laughs] While I think about it, you had a
year at Clark.

KK: Yeah.

MS: And then, of course, you finished at Mundelein. Was there
any kind of difference? I mean, granted you were boarding at one
place and commuting at another so that was significant. But,
apart from that, in terms of the student body or ...

KK: Well, yeah. Uh, huh, yes. I was just going to tell you ...

MS: classes ...

KK: The student body at Mundelein was much more homogeneous than
at ... than at Clark. At Clark, you know, we had girls from
farms and we had ... we had day people at Clark and then, of
course, we had boarders. It was much different. _____ Much
more _____. But then, of course, at Mundelein I knew so many

more people. Maybe that's why it seemed that way. Because we were all city girls. And we were all day time, day students at Mundelein and it made a difference. We had ... I mean, you know, ... Sophisticated we were not. We were more sophisticated at Mundelein than at Clark. [Phone rings] Excuse me, Mary. [Tape turned off.] [End of interview]

Transcribed by Victoria Haas
of TapeScripts+
Maywood, Illinois