

JUDITH THERESE McNULTY BVM ('51)

Interviewed by Mary Alma Sullivan
on _____

Mundelein College
Oral History Archives

Judith Therese McNulty: My name is Judith Therese McNulty BVM. I graduated from Mundelein College in 1951. My major was Sociology, my minor Psychology and I had a B.A. degree. My family was Irish Catholic. My father's parents were born in County Mayo. My mother's grandparents were born in County Mayo. My mother and father were college graduates. My dad was an architectural engineer. My mother graduated from Trinity in Chemistry but when ... I was the youngest and when I was in about sixth grade, she went back to Loyola University and got a Master's in Social Work. And she was a medical social worker and then became the head of The Cradle Adoption Agency in Evanston. I have an older sister who was a Mundelein graduate, class of 1946. And she majored in Sociology and became a psychiatric social worker. Married. When she went to get a Master's in social work at St. Louis U. My brother, who was second oldest, was a Loyola University graduate in English. And he went into sales.

I attended Mundelein because I lived in St. Gertrude's parish and college was just something that was done in our family. And it was walking distance away and it was Catholic. I loved Mundelein. I would probably say the most challenging thing was Sister Mary Lagorie who was head of the Sociology Department, Sister Mary Benedict who was head of the Psychology Department. I took probably every soc and psych course that were offered at Mundelein. They probably were the most enriching — although I did have a lot of English. Took music. Sister Mary Katherine Cienna. Have no talent in music but K.C., as we called her, taught me to play in every scale and gave me a tremendous background on the musicians of the pieces I was playing.

Well, the most frustrating — I was a high achiever, so the most frustrating would probably be if I didn't get very high grades, the highest grades, and on occasion, like in any school, there were some teachers who were not the greatest. I think I found Father Hagen, who taught Philosophy, about the worst. He would only give credit if you had the exact memorized answer from the book.

My relationship with different faculty members I would say was very strictly teacher/student. I respected them, particularly the ones that were excellent educators. But I would not say that I was on any pal to pal relationship. It just was not done, nor would I really want that. I thought we had some excellent lay faculty. Miss Furan was one who I had had in

Freshman English. She was really superb. My classmates still remain probably my ... my best and lasting friends. It was interesting that being great rivals in high school, Immaculata, St. Scholastica's, Marywood Mellencroft — Marywood I guess it was — in any event, the Catholic women's high schools, which was about all that existed. I think St. Gregory was the only co-ed. In any event, when we got to college and participated in activities, that rivalry left. And I make a point to see my friends every year in the summertime. And last summer, 19 ... well, this summer, 1998, I think we had ten from our class — which I think is phenomenal. So I would say my friends who majored in all areas, all subjects, my classmates in sociology who were not necessarily my best friends but we studied for comps together, my friends in the Cherapins — who many were my best friends. In different organizations, different organizations that I participated in, you did get to know these people. And they were great.

What did you do the first ten years following graduation?

Well, my first year I worked for the Cook County Department of Welfare and had a Blind Assistance, Disability Assistance, Old Age, Pension and Aid to Dependent Children case load. I was fighting a religious vocation and felt that if I did go into social work that maybe the Lord would leave me alone and say that was enough. But it didn't work. And so in 1952 -- I'm not proud of this but it was either enter or, you know, I would go nuts

because it was constantly in the back of my mind that I needed to enter — I entered the Sisters of Charity. And so from `52 to March of `55, I was an invitiante. And then I was sent to St. Agatha's Grade School March to June of `55. Sister Mary Yvonne was not in very good health and just waiting for a young sister to come out. So from March to June, I was at St. Agatha's and then in September, I went to St. Augustine Memphis which was a co-educational Black Catholic high school. And I taught I think six different subjects, some of which I never should have been teaching. But in any event, I did. I was there for two years. And then I was sent to Our Lady of Angels Clinton Boarding School for Girls. I was there for nine years. So that takes my first ten years. In the boarding school, by the time I left, I had been Senior Prefect, the coach, the counselor, the librarian, and had taught eighteen different subjects.

In what ways has your life been influenced by the years you spent at Mundelein College?

It's been a lasting influence obviously. It is where I met the BVMS. I had the Benedictines in high school. I didn't know I had a religious vocation when I was in high school. There just was no question when I was going to enter that I would enter the BVMS. And yet, I never took teaching, you know, education at Mundelein as a major or minor. But in any event, I think the Lord actually called me to the BVMS. I was influenced by the education, which I suppose I took for granted. For the most

part, it was superb. And as I say, I've made lasting friends and it's just a lasting influence in my life.

Well, I would say the education that I received did support the Catholic religious tradition of the time and very definitely a climate of social responsibility. I would say probably because I majored in sociology, I don't recall that we, you know, did food baskets and visited the poor and ... I mean, we became intellectually aware of the conditions in the world. And I think frankly it was through the soc major. Most of us were going to enter the field of social work. At that time, to get a Bachelor of Arts degree, you couldn't major in social work. There was no social work major at Mundelein. It was soc, sociology, with the idea that we would probably enter into the field of social work.

I'm extremely grateful for my education at Mundelein. I would say that's probably grown throughout the years. Unfortunately, I think when I was young I probably just took it for granted that the education I received was just excellent. But I never, you know, I never really I suppose dwelt on that. I just thought this was par. Age, hopefully, has brought some wisdom. Hopefully. [Tape turned off.]

Interviewer: This is Part Two of the interview with Judith Therese McNulty, class of 1951. The date is

JTM: November 9th

Int: 1998. Judy, can you say a little more about your friends? In the preliminary responses, you said that your friends were very important in your college life. And what I'm wondering is if you could be more specific about how they did influence you. What were they like? What characterized them? Whatever.

JTM: Well, now that it's almost fifty years since graduation, I think that from this point of view I would say their faithfulness and loyalty. I have remained close to my Mundelein friends throughout the years, particularly after Vatican II when I was more able with the religious order to participate in society. I really think that my college friends and high school friends are my best friends. I do see them every summer. Make a real point to do that. It's part of my vacation. And it's beautiful to see their growth. I hope mine is mirrored in that. They, most of them, have married and fortunately happily. Have quite a few kids, most of them, because of course they were living in the era of the church when that was done. Many of them returned to working in order to provide college educations for their children. And it's interesting seeing them over the years. At first, you know, I saw all the pictures of the kids. They were young. And then saw the wedding pictures and now see the grandchildren. But now the conversations aren't really centered on the kids. It centers on their interests and things in society, the conditions in the world. And they definitely have not remained static as far as their education was concerned.

Judith Therese McNulty Interview

They're well read. They're well versed as far as conditions of the world are concerned. Their lives are not narrow or stagnant. It's stimulating to be around them. I treasure the times that I do that.

Int: In the first part of the interview, you ... I'm quoting now. You said that your sociology major was the basic reason for your social awareness. What about those in other majors? In other words, it seems like a sociologist seems to have more direct connection with some of the disadvantaged of the world, or at least the problems of the world, whereas English majors and history majors need not necessarily have that kind of acute awareness. Would you say that was true of your friends? You mentioned just a few minutes ago that the fact that they are very much aware of problems in the world, have ...

JTM: Well, many of them ... You know, when we were in college, you never majored for example in education or social work because we were definitely a liberal arts college, a liberal arts college. But many of them had an education minor, if that was what it was. At least they were trained in education. So many of them, when they returned to school — I mean returned to work ... They worked when they graduated from college but got married and then women did not work raising their children. But many of them worked in inner city schools. So they were very, very conscious of the conditions of society. Those that did not enter the field of education or social work, I think, for example English majors

— I had a lot of journalism friends — they had to be aware of conditions in society because these were some of the things that they wrote about. Had some econ majors as friends and they basically were aware. So I guess I would have to, you know, ... coming from a sociological perspective I think we were in college immediately directed towards the conditions of society, perhaps to an extent that some majors were not, although I'd have to say journalism had very _____ had to be aware of the conditions, economic people were aware of the conditions. The teachers became aware of conditions. So, I suppose I would have to enlarge what I said. Perhaps that awareness was permeating _____ the education _____. But largely because I was a soc major. I think one of the best things when I look back was any time there was a holiday, we never got it because we were always _____. [chuckles] But we went to various agencies to see the various aspects of social work and became aware of ... or perhaps _____ center our attention. So yes. And now, talking to these graduates and aware of particularly what their kids are going through, raising children today. So that being aware must have been very definitely part of the entire education experience.

Int: Judy, your ... you were quite involved in college actually. I mean apart from your major. You were among other things, if I look back at the pages of *The Skyscraper*, you were Sophomore President. President of your class in sophomore year. Member of

Judith Therese McNulty Interview

the Sodality. And very active in sports, particularly in the Cherapins. Can you say something about what those kinds of involvements — and maybe others that I haven't even recorded here — I may be missing something ...

JTM: Well, those were, I think, the major ones. I was always active in sports. And my best friends probably were the Cherapins. I was in it four years. Some of those people are still my friends today, although my friends aren't the same from _____ Cherapins. But I was active in sports in high school and I remained active in college. _____ So I did meet a different group it seems. It was very, very _____.

Sodality was an interesting experience because of the fact that you had people _____ and it was more like an intellectual experience. It was sharing. At that particular point, when this was not done in the church. To a certain degree, you know, we had, you know, a format to follow but you got a little bit more into the heart of what we were. And the leadership, you know, I enjoyed activity _____. Those were the major things. I think I was sociology _____ and that was pretty much a soc _____. But, yes, I was very definitely involved in extracurriculars as well as the academic areas in school. And I think that breeds a sense of belonging and an opportunity to meet people which you would not necessarily meet within the classes that you went to. Like soc majors went to all soc classes. It was so broadening with respect to _____.

Int: Tell me, did you enter Mundelein College knowing you were going to be a soc major? Or did that come and in what way did that come? How did you arrive at that?

JTM: No. Well, my mother was a chemistry major in college. And she was a stay at home mother until I was in about sixth grade and then she returned to Loyola University and went into the field of social work. Got her M.S.W. Entered the field of social work. My sister was a soc major, entered the field of social work. My aunt and my cousins, all the women it seems have been in our family, if they worked were in social work. So, it was ... you know, I didn't ... There was just no question that was what I was going to do. I mean, I was going to enter the field of social work so it was pretty much I think the family background. The men did not enter the field of social work but the women did.

Int: Did you have an alternative? I mean, when you entered Mundelein, was there anything ... before you finally got into the social work track?

JTM: I liked psych a great deal. I took every psych course that was offered. I probably would have been a double major if they'd had it in that day. I mean, I was a minor supposedly in psych but I took every course that was offered. But, no. I mean, I'm glad I took music. I'm glad I had the English background that I did, which of course I used later in teaching. But, no. It was definite. You know, I was ... My family members didn't say you

had to be a sociology major and enter the field of social work. It was just something that was ... I guess I must have internalized. I loved soc.

Int: And the models were there.

JTM: Right. Right.

Int: Can you think of anything else you want to add?

JTM: Well, you know, I think as I probably said in the beginning of the tape, I think I took so much of the education for granted. I mean, we really had a marvelous education. But I thought that was what was normal in all schools. And I think it takes age and hopefully a little bit of wisdom to look back in retrospect to appreciate what we had. We did have the best. I mean, a wonderful school with wonderful teachers — for the most part. I mean, you know, in any school you have some ... but really, nine-tenths of the teachers were superb. And wonderful friends, lasting friends. You know, and there are very, very few negatives.

Int: It's often been said that by way of criticism of women's institutions that there's really no challenge, you know. That women would be better off if they were with men, therefore they would be challenged by men. And I'm wondering, especially in light of your own friends, you know, who would be your peer group, your support group and so on, whether you felt that's true. I mean, were you challenged and if so, how were you challenged?

JTM: I think we were definitely challenged and we were not intimidated. I think having taught in co-educational schools that in some instances — I don't think this is as true today as it was previously — but a lot of girls would be afraid to manifest leadership as if they were _____.

And I think that we did not have that problem. I think probably ... you want to know what Mundelein could have done more as far as provide social situations for the two colleges, it would have been ... It was pretty much on an informal basis, which is okay _____.

But, no, there was no intimidation and I think leadership was encouraged and so in that area I think we had _____.

Int: Okay. That's it. [tape turned off]

JTM: Hello. I was just saying that I find it interesting that today I'm not in the Chicago area but I find it extremely interesting that there are very, very few high schools that are single-sexed. And I think that's largely _____.

When you think Loyola and Ignatius are both co-ed, St. Vita's is co-ed. I think Scholastica and Regina Dominican probably are the two ... girls schools left. And I don't know about Regina Dominican but I suppose Scholastica is struggling. And there aren't ... I don't think there's a women's college left in the Chicago area. And I think this is largely financial. When a college becomes co-ed, it seems as if the male colleges are the

ones that survive although Rosary I believe is very _____
_____. Because it's come out to a certain population. And
this I find interesting so that ... and having taught in co-ed
schools, which I now regard as very natural and normal and
because I think such things as girls' sports that now have to be
provided in a co-ed school, that the girls are not intimidated in
a co-ed situation whereas a generation ago, we're talking about
when we graduated, I think we would have been. Today, I don't
think that's true because it's an entirely different society.
[End of interview]

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