

BETTY (HAUSMANN) FERGUSON



HOME OF GOOD SHEPHERD PROJECT

BETTY FERGUSON

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Interviewer: Toby Harris

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TRANSCRIPT (EDITED)

6 N 1/1

SIDE A

Today is March 25, 1999. I'll be interviewing Betty Ferguson. She was a former teacher at the Good Shepherd Home. And we're at the Good Shepherd Center in Seattle, Washington. This is Toby Harris.

Tell me your name as you were known at the Good Shepherd Home and what you did there.

I was known when I first came in June as Miss Hausmann. And then that December I was married and so after that I became Mrs. Ferguson. And they were all very formal and there was no calling by the first names or anything like that. So I was Mrs. Ferguson for the rest of the year.

I taught 12 months from June until June because girls went to school year-round. They went 12 months of the year to school.

12 months.

Uh huh, with no summer vacation.

They never had any more than one day off for....

No, and looking back, I don't think they really had Christmas vacation - they never left. They, occasionally, I think, were able to go if someone came for them but for the most part, they were here every day, 7 days a week. So the routine was the same for them every day.

What were your hours?

I came at 9 in the morning and I was let in the front door. It was locked. I would ring and they would let me in and then I was taken to the wing of the building which had about four classrooms in it. And that was also locked. And Sister would unlock, or Mother - they were all called Mothers in those days - she would unlock the wing of the school...

The north wing?

The north wing. And I would go into my classroom. And the girls would come and they would stay there through the morning, probably from 9 'til, I would say probably 11:30, and we would have class. And then there was a break of at least two hours, it might have been two and a half hours and there were four teachers and we were served in the dining room downstairs. The girls would bring us a full meal, like a dinner, not a lunch. And then we had that long lunch hour because the girls would spend, I think it was two hours a day, doing work. So then we went to class 'til 5:00. We would be here until 5:00.

So they got in a full school day but they also had those two hours where they worked. And I believe they worked in the kitchen or the laundry or the sewing room. I don't know if there were any other jobs. And those jobs rotated. I don't know if it was monthly or every two weeks but they didn't do the same job all year. And in the laundry, I know at that time, they did laundry for the Great Northern Railroad and I know they made the communion wafers for the Archdiocese of Seattle in their kitchen and they sewed the uniforms which were like housedresses. All of the girls' clothes were sewed right here. And the nuns taught them how to do this and the same with the cooking. The nuns were in the kitchen and they would teach them to make the pies. We ate very well at lunchtime. Everything was homemade, very good.

Do you remember any of the meals that you had?

Well, they would be big meals. You would have stew or meatloaf or fried chicken. It was a big meal. And dessert always. There would be two girls assigned to this little dining room. And then after lunch, the four teachers, we would go out and just walk around the neighborhood and do shopping up on 45th or whatever because we had that time.

The girls were extremely sweet girls. There was never a discipline problem because the nuns were certainly in control. And I think they had privileges taken away if they didn't do what they were supposed to do. But I never had, ever, a discipline problem with the girls - never. Nobody talked back. Nobody ever did anything. Quite a change from teaching today. What else can I say about it? They didn't have homework. We never gave them assignments. They did everything in the classroom. All of their work was done in the classroom. And they did not bring paper or pencil to the classroom which was a shock to me when I first came. I couldn't understand that. But Mother explained to me so there would be no writing of notes back and forth.

They were not to know what went on in the outside world. They were very cloistered. They did not read the newspaper. And I asked Mother once about that because I think I walked in with a paper under my arm one day. And she said, "well, so often their families or their friends are in trouble with the police or something and they would read about it" and they just wanted them to be completely removed from whatever undesirable environment it was they had come from. So that was kind of an unusual thing for me at that time.

The girls were extremely happy. They were sweet girls and the Mothers were very loving to them, very kind to them. And they had movies and they had all sorts of game days and activities of that sort. They put on plays, they had theatre here. They were taken on some excursions that were planned. But I was never part of that. There were other people that would do that.

What sorts of excursions?

Well, I think they were taken to the mountains and things like that. But always - when I was here, no-one ever attempted to leave. They seemed, I think for many of them, this was the nicest home they'd ever had. It was kind of like a very strict boarding school at the time.

You were here Monday through Friday?

I was here Monday through Friday, five days a week. And as I recall, I don't think we had days off. I don't think there were - certainly Christmas - and they were very, very religious. I, myself, am a Catholic so that didn't seem strange to me. But certainly, the Sisters emphasized the religious part of it. And they did a lot of - they would sing as they would go through the halls. And it was always a religious type of song. The Mothers definitely stressed that this was their home. And referred to it as their home. It was not considered an institution, it was a home.

One vivid memory is of girls who had left coming back with their families. And this would be a big excitement and some of the other girls would be allowed to go into parlor and see a girl who had returned. And if she'd had a baby, that was very exciting. And when I became pregnant and left then because I was pregnant, they were all very....they thought that was just wonderful. That seemed to be quite a goal of all of them - to become a mother. That seemed to be the thing at that time.

Did any of them want to become nuns?

I don't recall them saying that. But they all acted very religious at that time. Of course, that was the mode of the place. But I just remember the Mothers as being so good to the girls. And I never saw - and I was here for 12 months - I never saw a harsh...any harshness or anything. Nor did I feel anybody was ever being treated harshly. Another woman that taught that was here at that time was Mrs. Krueger. She was an older woman, had raised a family, quite a bit older. And she lived here in the neighborhood and had taught here many, many years. But I don't know her family....I never kept up with her. When I left, I started my family.

There were four of you?

There were four lay teachers and it was my first teaching job. I was just out of college in June and started right here. And as I say, was married that December. All of the others must have been in their 60's and to me, that just

seemed, of course, so old. I enjoyed them when I was here with them but I never saw them when I left or ever kept up with them once I left the school.

Do you remember how you got that job?

Yes. I remember distinctly. [laughter] I had graduated from the University of Washington and taken a fifth year at Seattle University to get my teaching credential. And I was engaged at the time and so when I graduated after the one year at Seattle University, in order to get a teaching job, I would have had to go out of the city, to Wapato, Washington or Chehalis or someplace. It was very difficult to get a high school position for first year teachers. And since I was going to be married and my husband was at the University of Washington, I did not want to leave town.

So when I was at Seattle U, I had a class from a Father Codd who was a wonderful Jesuit priest and I got to know him quite well. I probably told him this or whatever. He was head of the education department so he had heard about this position so he called up the Mother here and I came out and talked to her and she hired me. Very inexperienced as I was - but it was a very pleasant experience for me.

What was the age range of the girls that were here?

Mrs. Krueger had a class that was before high school. Maybe there were 7th and 8th graders. There might have been a 6th grader but I don't think so. I think there was probably 7th and 8th graders. And the other three of us had the high school classes. And I taught, if you can believe it, Latin which I hadn't had since I was in high school and American History. And then another woman taught the math classes and someone else taught the sciences, I guess, I don't know. I think I taught English also. But the classes, as I recall, were two hours maybe and they studied at the same time. And I think I was studying right along with them - the next chapter, probably. [laughter]

How would you describe the classes compared to other schools at that time?

Well, I taught no place else at that time. I did go back to teaching about 20 years later in the Seattle Public Schools and have retired from that now. But the girls, as I said, it was an extremely easy position to be in. I would hand out their books when they came in; they didn't ever bring anything in with them. And I would collect them when they left. But they were always very well behaved. There was never any talking, whispering. They were full of questions. They were quite curious and when I was being married, that was quite an interest to them.

They had lots of questions about your personal life?

Yes. They were quite interested in my personal life. I think I was - I don't know what to them - probably a novelty. But they were just very sweet girls. They were all wards of the court at that time. And some had been in trouble and

that's why they were there. But others were just taken out of undesirable home situations. But there was certainly no evidence of any of that when they were here. They were very cooperative in the classroom, did their work.

There was no hostility?

No. Absolutely not. They were sweet girls. But I was not supposed to....I was raised in Everett. And there were some girls who had come from Everett and she did not want me to....I was not to ask her questions about those kinds of things. My personal life was one thing I could talk to them about. But if they ever were to ask me if I knew so and so, I was never to get into that with them.

Was there any sort of guidance or preparation training that they provided you with when you first started?

No. I sort of marvel at that now. And it was an accredited high school too at the time. And I was in there inexperienced.

What had you heard about the Home before you went?

I knew nothing about it. I was not raised in Seattle. I didn't even know it was here. Father Codd told me about it and arranged an appointment. I came out and talked to the head of the school and she hired me.

So you didn't have alot of preconceived notions.

No.

Were you aware of the some of the girls' individual stories and backgrounds?

No.

The nuns never consulted with you about it?

No, I was never part of any of their consulting about them or if they were having problems with any of the girls that I taught, I never knew.

When someone first arrived... how often were there new girls?

There were new girls and the new girls were kept separate, which was kind of interesting....say, a new girl came in from Tacoma. And there were girls from Tacoma here. I know they were never allowed together for maybe a month or....there was a period of time.

Did they come right into the school? Into the classrooms?

Yes, they came right into the classroom.

Did you have a range of skill levels and ages in your class?

Yes. Of course, I must have, in looking back. Yes, there were some girls who were quick to - of course, I had been more sheltered at that period of time than young women are today. But I was quite surprised at some of their lack of knowledge about certain basic things. And I had just never been taught or been exposed to that kind of life. And that was kind of a shock that some people didn't know some of the basics, just about American history or just about...their life in general. Many of them had come from quite deprived backgrounds. But they wore uniforms and they had their hair done there. There was a beauty shop and they all worked in it or some worked in it and they could go in there and they would have their hair fixed. So they were all very attractive. They were very clean and very attractive so you would never know by looking at them that there was anything in their background, deprived background. And their speech patterns and some of those things, their grammar, some of those things were not perfect but there was certainly no bad language, anything of that sort. And I suppose it was because the nuns would take away their privileges. They had movies, they played on teams. To work in the office was a very big privilege and some of the seniors, I know, would help in the school office. And that was a thing to be sought after, desired.

But the seniors and juniors were all mixed in one class but they had different privileges?

Yes, uh hum.

Was that according to their age, were they seniors?

Or their schedules, where they had come from. I taught American History and I suppose, if some had had it, then I didn't teach it to them. I had no say in making of the schedules or anything about the background of the girls. I came in the morning and I did my work. I didn't take papers home at night. I did everything right here. And other than the few things they would tell me, of course, this is a long time ago now. But I'm sure they were not supposed to talk to me about their personal life. And there was no time for it. They came in and they sat down. We did the class and the bell rang and they stood up and left.

The forms of discipline....you never saw any discipline being-

I saw none.

It just wasn't even needed?

Well, as far as I saw. And as I say, I worked with Mrs. Krueger who had been here many years and we used to spend the two or two and a half hour of lunch together. We would walk outside. We would leave the school and walk up to the shopping area and do our little things. And she used to talk about the school. She'd been here for many years. And so I think, the nuns, there were enough of them here, and -

Do you remember how many?

Well, in this book, it will tell us.

You have a yearbook?

I have a yearbook, 1952. And it shows the nuns and the faculty. And then there were priests who would come and say Mass.

Was there daily Mass?

I'm sure there was. I'm sure the girls went to daily Mass. There's several of these. The religion would be taught by these priests. Maybe that was done on Saturday, I don't know. But then, look, there were quite a few nuns here.

And they weren't teaching in the school. Oh, some of them were teaching in the school.

And then the lay people who worked in the laundry.

Bookkeeping. But it was some place else - those classrooms. Typing and community.

About how many girls were in the class?

Oh, in the class? 20, 25. It was a full classroom.

Do you know if school was optional for those girls?

I'm sure they had to go to school. That was part of their daily schedule. But see, when I came at 9:00, they'd probably been up since 6:30 and been to Mass and done quite a few things maybe before I came.

When you used to have your break with Mrs. Krueger, what kind of stories did she used to tell you? Do you remember any stories of earlier years?

No, I don't remember other than it seemed like it had been always that way. But she was very friendly with the Sisters. She lived here in the neighborhood, lived in Wallingford district and had raised her family here. So she was more aware of the place than I was. And of course, it was the year that I was getting married and living with two other women at the time, all at school. So if I had it to do over again, I'd probably pay more attention.

So you worked with Mother ~~Mary of St.~~ William?

I remember well Mother William and I remember Mother Serena. Those two I remember. And the others, there was a Sister Dominic that I just remember speaking to but those were the two that I dealt with.

You ate your lunch in a separate dining room?

We walked downstairs and sat in a nice dining room and the girls would bring us our food, in courses.

When we were walking around just before we sat down here, you had mentioned that the walls used to be all the dark wood.

All the dark wood was here.

Throughout the hallways. And you remember the entryway being very open?

Yes, very open and the dark wood. And very clean. They had alot of woman power here to do the work. Everything was spotless. Everything was starched and very clean.

There was a woman here, I don't see her name here, was a social worker. I had known her in college and used to see her afterwards. Her name, I don't see here. But I'm sure they did have alot of social services for the girls but it was just not.....

Lay people coming in?

Yes, I'm sure they did have alot of those things.

What about medical care?

I don't know. They must have had....

You said when you walked in, it was always locked. All the doors were locked.

Everything was locked. The wings were locked.

And each wing was locked. And when you first walked in, the office was to your right, just north of the entrance?

Yes, right.

And then the school wing started after that?

Uh huh.

And those doors were locked when you first arrived. And you also remember the ballroom.

I remember the ballroom very well. This was quite interesting. At the end of the year, the graduating seniors had a graduation and they called it the junior prom, I think. My husband and I were asked to be chaperones. And I do recall, the girls needed formals. And I remember I went to my mother's home and got alot

of my old high school formals and brought them here. And so my husband and I were asked to be chaperones which we were. So we came that night and were escorted and I was given a corsage by the girls and we sat in the auditorium along the wall with all the Mothers and the girls were all there in their formals and flowers and there was an all girl or an all woman band. And the girls that had dance programs, they danced with each other. They filled in their dance programs and traded dances with each other. There were no dates at all. My husband was a little taken aback by this. But the girls had a wonderful time and halfway through they served punch and things. They had it all decorated up. They had decorating committees and it was just like it would be in a high school except they did not have boys for dates.

What kind of music did they play?

I don't know. I think it was the music of the times. I don't remember being astounded by what music was played. But it was...

The popular music?

Yes, it was the music of the day.

Do you remember other special events?

No, that was the only thing I was ever here to....other than just coming here to work.

You mentioned something about teams.

They had lots of sports. That was a big thing. I think they had hockey teams and basketball teams. And the girls had that activity. They had alot of game sports. They had movies on the weekends. I think they had book clubs and the things you would find in a typical boarding school at that time.

They did the sports outside of school hours?

Yes.

You said the school was called St. Euphrasia School at the time?

Yes. But it was always referred to as the Home of the Good Shepherd. I don't think I even knew it was called St. Euphrasia. I must have known while I was there. But in the Northwest Progress which was the Catholic newspaper, they used to, and I don't know if they still do, put the graduating classes' picture in the paper every year. And St. Euphrasia High School would be in the newspaper. The girls seemed kind of proud of their school.

With the sports teams, did they just play each other?

They just played each other. I don't think, no, they didn't go out to play other teams. Strictly intramural.

Let's look through that yearbook a little bit more.

Okay. Here are the pictures of alumni, it says here. Okay, here are the....

The former residents....

Coming back to visit. And they mentioned who it was.

And the parlor rooms, these are the visiting rooms that were in the front here.

Uh huh. Here's someone being married. They're coming to visit.

Were girls usually here for that whole school year?

Nobody left that I ever had in class. No-one left that year.

[looking through yearbook] They had style shows. They would do things like that. Clothes modeling. They had music lessons. Tennis. And they put on a play. Sports. Baseball. Music. And here they went on a trip.

They did take a trip to Mt. Rainier in that year.

Oh, this is Father Gaffney from Seattle University.

94 girls went to Mt. Rainier.

That would be a big event.

And then this shows the different chores that they were responsible for.

Here's a picture of the pies being made and the dormitories, making altar bread.

They made the altar bread -

They made the communion host for the whole Diocese of Seattle, I believe. And the school, I'm sure, received revenue from that. And here's the laundry.

The laundry, the sewing....

And office machines. Sewing room, clothes room.

They made all of their own uniforms?

I think so. I think they made their clothes here. And they all wore kind of the same thing. It wasn't exactly but the same type of thing, they would wear. Now

this is Christmas during the three Masses, Christmas carols, Christmas play, "the afternoon was spent dancing".

On Christmas. Oh, "after a delicious turkey dinner...."

Now this is Christmas pictures. Here's the Christmas play. "To Jesus through Mary". Now here this, they had Sodality - we had that when I was young - which was a religious group. The girls would belong to Sodality and here they had Sodality beanies and they had meetings here in the evenings.

But they really taught them a lot of social skills. They taught them office work. They really prepared them to go out and find jobs afterwards. Blessed Mother Sodality. And of course, everybody wanted to belong.

Everybody wanted to belong? Was that something the girls talked about during class?

No. I didn't. Well, I did know about it - I shouldn't say that. But they just weren't allowed. They walked in, we did our work, they stood up, they walked out.

Holy Week and Easter. Typical high school things, you know. "Dimples like Bridgett, hair like Pat Pearl." This is on religion. Mother Serena's Feast Day, Fourth of July, trip to Mt. Rainier.....now it says summer vacation here. Maybe we did have time off from school for a few weeks, I don't know.

You were saying that....

There's great emphasis - on this page, it shows the girls working in the laundry and doing things and the caption reads "working in our home." And that was stressed - you had the feeling that it was the home for the girls and the Mothers certainly tried to give them familylike atmosphere here.

Did they stay until they graduated?

I think so. I think they stayed until they were 18 probably. And then I suppose they were free to go at that time. Unless maybe something in their life would change and they would go to court and the judge would put them out. But there was not a lot - the 12 months I was here - people didn't come and go. They were here. One or two came into my classroom, were brought into....but I don't recall anybody leaving.

And you said you had a friend whose father was fishing in Alaska....

Yes. I was here in the very early 50's but I have a friend who told me that her aunt was left here and that would have been in the 20's, I think. The father became a widower and had to fish in Alaska and he just left his daughter here. But I understood he paid to have her stay here. But I would have to check that. Also, I do remember hearing and I think the statistics would back me up on this, that the Home of the Good Shepherd had a very high rate of success with their

girls when they left. They all did find work and they all became contributing members of society which is nice to hear. I think for many of them, this was the nicest home they'd had.

And the yearbook has a section about dorms.

"Each dorm was painted in pastel shades"....

And you never saw the dorms?

I don't think I ever saw them.

They had a gym?

Here's a picture of....

Did you see the gym?

Yes, I was in the gym.

Where was that gym?

Out there, maybe.

The south end?

Yes, I think so. And this then is the grotto.

There's the beauty parlor.

There's the beauty parlor. See now, those are their rooms. They were quite attractive. This must have been the girls' dining room. I don't think I ever was in there. Now that's kind of attractive. They all sat at round tables. And here is the ballroom. Is that the ballroom? Or is that the gym? Decorated for Christmas. The girls would do those decorations. That was always...

There's the chapel.

Looks like they're receiving communion there. And they had a yearbook.

And the girls put this together?

The girls put this together but those are the uniforms there. But then in the spring, they just wore cotton dresses. They were floral print dresses, I remember like we used to call house dresses in the old days that our mothers all wore. I thought this was interesting.

"Senior of St. Euphrasia High School wins third place in propellor club contest....." Oh, "national essay contest. The merchant marine, indispensable to

our freedom." And she was able to go to the banquet "accompanied by Miss Helen MacDonald."

Oh, yes.

Do you know who Miss Helen MacDonald was?

Yes, that's one of the names that comes back to me. She was a social worker. Very nice lady. And she was just here off and on. I can remember seeing her in the hall and speaking with her.

Well, that's nice. Do you have other memories or opinions about the convent that you would like to share?

No, I don't think so. Other than as I say, it was a very pleasant experience for me. And in talking about it later to some of my friends, they thought it was so strange that...they pictured it like a prison or something. And I was here for 12 months and I think the girls that were able to come here were really quite fortunate because the Mothers did exude a love and a kindness....they were strict with them. I don't mean that. But they were very loving to the girls and very kind to them and I think that was their mission -Sisters of the Good Shepherd did take care of what we used to call wayward girls or girls that had been in trouble for one reason or another were out of their home. And I think that was their training, to try and help these girls and make up for some of the emotional lack in their life. So that's all I have to say about that, I guess.

Well, thank you.

You're more than welcome.

END OF TRANSCRIPT.