

HOME OF GOOD SHEPHERD PROJECT

SISTER _____

TAPE NO. 12 S 1/1

Interviewer: Toby Harris

Location: Sisters of the Good Shepherd Convent, St. Paul, Minnesota

Date of Interview: May 7, 1999

TRANSCRIPT

12 S 1/1

SIDE A

I'll be interviewing Sister _____. Today is May 7, 1999. We're at the Sisters of the Good Shepherd Convent in St. Paul, Minnesota. Sr. _____ will be talking about her years of service at the Seattle Home of the Good Shepherd.

Tell me when you first knew that you had a calling to become a nun and why you chose the Good Shepherd Order.

I first knew about it or felt that I knew about it when I went with a friend on a tour of the Good Shepherd Home in St. Paul, Minnesota. And from then on I began to think about it and naturally, the Good Shepherd came to mind, not that I knew much about it, but I liked the idea of the cloister at that time and the contemplative life. We still need a contemplative attitude, at least, in order to be an active Good Shepherd Sister. So we combine the two. And that was in 1939, exactly 60 years ago.

You were at the Seattle Home from about 1961 to '64.

Right.

And it looks like you had a few different roles during those years. Tell me about those.

Yes. I came just about the time when they were changing from the large group of 100 girls in one large section, and then they decided to make smaller groups. So they divided the two large dormitories into two groups which included dormitories but also a kitchen or kitchenette and living quarters in each one of those groups. And I was in one group with another Sister who was in charge and I was second in charge of that one group.

So there were two large dorms and there became four smaller.....did they do some building?

They had to make some adjustments, yes. Knock down some walls and things.

I have some floor plans here. I'm wondering if you remember where they were in the building.

There's one on the third floor and one on the second floor - one large dormitory on the top floor and one on the second floor.

There was one large one-

They were both large.

Were they both at the same end of the building?

Yes.

Was that the school end or the laundry end?

More like the laundry end.

And then when they divided them up, those were still where the girls' dormitories were - it's just that they put walls between them?

Right.

And they added kitchenettes?

Yes.

There was a room with a kitchen on the second floor in the front of the building, right above the front entrance. That room had a kitchenette in it, was that a dormitory? Do you know what room that was?

On the second floor?

I don't know if you like looking at maps or floor plans....

I don't mind looking but I don't know if I can remember that much. It was a long time ago.

This would have been a room that was on the second floor and here's the front, so this is Sunnyside and there's the two stairways. The front entrance was under here and there was a big room above it and it had a sink and some other kitchen things down on this end. And I guess this was a girls' dormitory here.

That sounds like it. Maybe I'm mistaken. Maybe we had only three groups. Only one on the second floor, two on the top. I know there were two on the top.

Two next to the chapel?

Yes.

This floor plan is really not what was there. It's what is here now. So it's not really accurate except that the chapel is still here....

I thought that we had two groups on the top floor.

You might have. And then there was the attic above the chapel.

That was just for storage.

You were in charge of one of the small groups?

I was second.

Second.

We always had a first and second.

What did you do as the second mistress? Was it the second mistress?

I would relieve the first mistress so she could get her meals and her prayers said. At night, I would oversee one of the dormitories.

So you slept right next to it? In your room?

It was so long ago, as I say, it may have been only one group, because the first in charge had her room on the same side as I was when she took care of one group and I took care of the other, at night. So altogether, perhaps it was only one group, I'm not sure. Did the other Sisters say anything about that?

People were there at different times - the Sisters seem to have been there at different times and remember different things.

Were you also a teacher?

Yes.

What did you teach?

I taught typing and shorthand and religion. Also at that time, not long before I came, they added to the school a new section for home ec, and I believe, science. Then again, I'm not sure if it was science, but I think it was.

Do you remember about how many girls were in your classes?

Quite large, about 20.

Were the girls ever disruptive in class?

Not that bad because school is something... a little more of a diversion for them, I think, from all their troubles and their homes, upset homes. They kind of enjoyed school, I think.

Tell me more about the girls, some memories that you have teaching or as second mistress.

We also had a swimming pool. You've perhaps heard about that. I used to supervise the girls when they were out there. And when they wanted to really upset us, they would jump in the pool with all their clothes on. [laughter] That was a big thing but otherwise, they enjoyed being outdoors and I don't remember that we had an awful lot of discipline or problems.

What would happen after they jumped in with their clothes on?

That I don't remember. I don't know how they were disciplined.

Did they swim only in the summer?

Yes, it was open all the time as far as I know.

All year round?

Yes. But I don't know if they used it all year round.

Here, I can move this closer so that you don't have to talk as loud.

Thank you.

Many of the girls were hostile when they first arrived and maybe later - were you ever frightened?

Not in Seattle that I recall. Another thing I had to do was keep track of their demerits, we called them. If they did something they shouldn't do, they got a demerit. And I was the one who had to add up all their demerits and if they had a certain amount, they couldn't see a movie, or....they were punished in some way.

What were some of the rules and privileges that they had?

To have company in the parlors. We called them "parlors". They didn't go out at all so their families had to come in and see them. They went out when we took them out which we did occasionally. I remember taking the whole group, myself and the other Sisters, up in the northern part of Washington state, I'm not sure where.

To the mountains?

It was in the wintertime because we had a ride on the dogs.

With the dogs?

We had a dogsled ride. We took the girls up there and I don't remember that we lost any on that occasion. Sometimes when we went places, they would run away.

What were the procedures when you went on an outing? You went on a bus?

Usually.

How many sisters were there, about how many girls were you in charge of?

As I recall, we had around 100 girls at a time. Also, we had laywomen helping us, especially one I remember, she was from Hawaii. She used to take care of half the dining room and I'd take care of the other half. That would give us each about 50 girls to supervise.

What about for outings?

Well, I know there were some sisters, or women, adults.

How did you keep track of the girls? Were there certain girls that were more likely to run than others?

Yes, we had certain girls that we thought we could sometimes trust to help us. So that was helpful.

Can you describe a typical day? Maybe a typical weekday and a typical Saturday or Sunday? Whatever you remember of the day.

I remember especially being with the girls out in the yard with the swimming pool and all. And we had a large summer porch and we had picnics and things like that. Of course, that wasn't every day; that would be more on a Saturday or Sunday.

I have some pictures of the swimming pool - you might be in one of these.

You do?

I do. I think they're too far away though. You probably wouldn't be able to tell. Here's another one.

That could be me standing at the side there. Could be. [laughter] Can't tell.

Do you remember these umbrellas?

Sort of. I remember that the summerhouse was really nice.

Was the summerhouse enclosed or was it open?

No, it was open. I have a little picture here. It's just the outside of.....we're standing just on the outside of it but you can see that it's not enclosed.

This girl looks so young. Do you remember her?

This one? I remember this one, she was not one of our girls. She was helping us. She was a volunteer.

Did they have to wear uniforms? Doesn't look like they have on uniforms.

Not there. But in school, as I recall, they had uniforms. So this would perhaps be on Saturday or Sunday.

Was this a special occasion here?

Yes, we were celebrating something, I can't remember what that was. I think, I don't have a picture of this other woman, she was from Hawaii, I think we were celebrating something of hers, a birthday or something.

And how long was she there?

She was there all the time I was there.

Did she live there?

Yes. This is a picture of what we called the classroom - you perhaps didn't notice the large room - since then, they had dancing, a dance company in there.

The dance company is not there anymore. Was that-

That was the recreation room for the girls.

And where was that?

On the first floor.

The assembly room?

The assembly room, yes. We had two grand pianos given us and I was teaching there.

You were teaching piano?

Yes.

I have another, a different photograph of, some people around a piano - I don't know if you were there. It might have been earlier.

What are you going to do with all of this?

This is earlier, so you wouldn't be in that one.

Very well. No, I'm not there. She was the principal of the school and this Sister was in charge of the laundry.

Is that while you were there?

I think so, it could've been because she was the principal of the school while I was a teacher there. And he was the chaplain.

Oh, could've been. I thought this was earlier than the 60's but maybe it was ...

I don't know how long she was the principal there. She could've been there at the same time.

He was the chaplain? Where was he from?

I don't know. He was an order priest but I'm not sure which order he was. You want to see these pictures now?

Yes.

This is one of the graduation classes.

They had a regular graduation with the rest of the Catholic schools?

No, right in our school. The girls at that time were almost as cloistered as we were. We didn't let them go anyplace unless we went with them.

Were they released right after graduation?

Many of them were, yes.

What if someone was 18 but didn't graduate?

Some of them stayed longer than graduation. Maybe worked in the laundry, I really don't know what they did. I wanted to say, this one girl here, died when she was quite young. She died when I was there. She had a congenital heart condition and you know St. Mary Euphrasia, you've heard about our foundress?

Yes.

She learned alot about St. Mary Euphrasia and she just loved her. And she said "I want to die on the Feast of St. Mary Euphrasia" and she did. I think she was very holy -

Was she sick?

Heart. She didn't have much of a home life.

[looking at her photograph] This is our Sisters' dining room. We had about 16 Sisters at that time. We were celebrating, I think, it's Christmas there.

The tables were always set up like this?

For feast days. That was a feast day. Otherwise, it was just long tables on either side. They weren't connected like that.

I've noticed some references to St. Joseph's gym. Does that sound familiar to you?

I don't remember a gym. We must have had one though. Maybe in the new section of the school but I don't think so.

Did you work in other Good Shepherd Homes?

I did.

How was Seattle different?

We didn't always have a swimming pool. Another nice thing about Seattle, as far as the Sisters were concerned, we had a lovely orchard with all different kinds of fruit, fruit trees. That was in the back and I guess, after we left, it wasn't taken care of so I don't know what's left of it now.

A little bit, some fruit trees left. What were some of your favorite places in the building or on the grounds?

We used to go behind the home ec department and the Mother Superior at the time liked to play, what do you call that, where they have a mallet....

Croquet?

Croquet. So we'd have a good game of croquet back there. That was fun.

So you had your own private yard. What times of day did you have a chance to go out there?

We had recreation twice a day, at noontime and the evening.

The Sisters-

The Sisters.

And who watched the girls then?

The Sisters in charge of the girls rarely came to recreation. That was maybe not too good because it was too much of a strain on them, on the Sisters in charge - although we relieved them but it was really.....

[Showing photograph] I think this statue and pond were in the Sisters' yard in the corner there. Does that look familiar? I was trying to determine if these were girls or Sisters.

Do you know when this was taken?

No, I don't.

Before about 1970, we all wore habits.

So that was probably girls. Were you still semi-cloistered then, during the years you were there?

Yes.

You didn't go off on any outings or go-

Except with the girls.

You did not interact with the community or other businesses during those years?

The only one who did that would be the Sister in charge.

The Superior?

No, first charge of the girls. The First Mistress used to go out, when I was there, shopping for the girls. We were starting to, especially after Vatican II, I don't know if you know about our religion, but after Vatican II, we started to go out more. In fact, we were given a choice. We either had to be all cloistered or not. We chose not to be cloistered. So since then, we are not cloistered except for our contemplatives.

But still only the first mistress would go out?

And the Superior. With responsibilities, you had to go out on occasion. And we were allowed to go out to doctors and dentists.

Were there other things that changed after Vatican II Council? In the way the Home was operated?

I don't recall very much as far as the Home was concerned, how we dealt with the girls, that didn't change a great deal until....dividing into groups came before Vatican II. That was because of society, the social work that was going on at that time. They didn't want institutions. They were getting rid of institutions. And so [unintelligible] we had group homes but in our old institutions, we tried to make the best of what we had.

Did you feel that the needs of the girls had changed?

No. I just felt that they were getting more of their needs fulfilled, taken care of, with a smaller group. We did what we could at the time but we see now that we have to give them more individual help.

The surrounding community believed for many years, and many still do, that it was a home for unwed mothers. Why is that?

Isn't that strange? I don't know why. I guess they must have just picked up the fact if they saw a girl in an institution, they just figured they were unwed mothers, I don't know. Because we never have been that.

Was there anything you didn't like about that building, the grounds or quirks that you remember?

Can't remember any. Our rooms were not the best. They were very large, alot of empty space because we only had a few things.

Which rooms are you referring to?

The Sisters' individual rooms.

The cells? I've learned that they're called cells. [laughter]. They were large but there wasn't very much in them? What was in them?

A bed and a chest of drawers, a chair.

Did you spend very much time there?

No, not really. Of course, now we consider our rooms too small. [laughter].

Was it cold there?

No. We did have some natural disasters when I was there. One time we had a high wind - I guess it was like the end of a hurricane - or what do they call those?

A wind storm?

Strong winds, over 100 mph and two of our largest, most beautiful trees in the front yard went down. So you can see how strong the wind was.

Was that one of the monkey puzzle trees?

Might have been. I know there were two beautiful trees that went down in the front yard. Then we also had an earthquake when I was there.

Tell me about that.

That was very brief but we got all the girls in the chapel. No, the girls were in the chapel, it was at Mass time, that was it. And it only lasted so many seconds but I remember noticing how the ceiling of the sanctuary, the chapel, just started to crack.

It started to crack?

It would've fallen, I think, in just a few more seconds. But it didn't, fortunately. But that was kind of scary. Nothing happened, really but it was just that it was scary.

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SIDE B

You said some of the girls would run when you went on outings - were there other instances of girls running away?

Yes.

How often did that happen?

In Seattle?

In Seattle. How often did that happen?

I don't know really. I don't remember too many runaways from Seattle but I do remember in other homes some. In Spokane when I was there, we took them out to the lake one time and about a whole busload decided to go off. I suppose we got some of them back but we never got all of them back, I don't think. I just don't recall any in Seattle.

What do you remember about the girls?

That one girl that I was talking about was in the Seattle class, the Seattle group, that still corresponds with me. She and this other girl were pretty good friends but somehow or other I became closer to the other girl. But she was very deceptive, I found out later. She wasn't what she seemed to be. And this other girl was really true, a good friend. And so she has corresponded ever since.

How did you know that -

She told me about it - this other girl told me about it.

That you had been deceived?

See, the only one who really knew about the girls a great deal was the one in charge, first mistress. She had access to their backgrounds. Most of us didn't. So it's just what we picked up from what they said to us.

Did they talk to you very much?

Yes, certain girls. Not a whole lot of girls.

What about at night?

Well, then, I wasn't with - except in the dormitories, of course. And then they had to be quiet. One or two might want to talk to me individually but otherwise, you had to be sure that they'd get quiet and went to sleep.

Are there any funny moments that you remember? I know you told me they used to jump into the swimming pool with their clothes on.

Yes, that was the funniest!

Did they push each other too?

Oh, yes.

Did any Sisters ever go in the swimming pool?

No. Not in that one. The one in Oregon, we did, after school, after the girls were gone, we used to go into the swimming pool in Portland. But that was a later time also, I believe.

How do you think the school compared to other schools in the area?

We were always accredited like any other school in Seattle. I can only speak for myself. I was not as strict as other teachers perhaps because I was aware that they had failed many times and I wanted them to succeed if at all possible. By the time I was a teacher, I had had a degree in Education. Before about 1940, we did not have a complete high school. About around the middle of the 1940's, our Superiors had us get a college education. We got our education from the College of St. Thomas in Minneapolis. We didn't go out to them. They came in to us at that time. I got a degree in education in Spokane. I was principal for 10 years before I went to Seattle. So I had quite a bit of experience.

You taught typing? I have a picture in here of the typing room. I don't know when it was but there's some of the recreation. Here's a picture of the dormitories. Now here's two different versions of the classroom, might not be the same classroom but it looks like one is earlier and one is a more modern classroom.

In fact, this, perhaps, is one of the Sisters here.

That might be Mrs. _____? Was Mrs. _____ there when you were there? A lay teacher?

Yes. It could be Mrs. _____. This looks like the Chaplain. They definitely have uniforms. They have uniforms here but not here. They must have done away with the uniforms.

They don't have on uniforms here?

Doesn't look like it, the girls. .

Here we go. [looking at photograph of typing room] When do you think that was?

It might have been about the time I was teaching. 1961-65.

Oh, that one has the date on it - 1957. So a little bit before. Did you have those same typewriters when you were there?

I think so. I still like a real typewriter. I tried to learn the computer but.....

Did you have any other memories you'd like to share?

I think I pretty well covered what I remember.

Okay, thank you.

END OF TRANSCRIPT.