

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ursuline Sisters

Life in the Ursuline Community

O.H. 21

SISTER REGINA ROGERS

Interviewed

by

Donna DeBlasio

on

March 24, 1975

## SISTER REGINA ROGERS

A member of the Ursuline community, Sr. Regina Rogers was born in Youngstown on September 8, 1949. She is the daughter of Philip E. and Carolyn Delisio Rogers and is one of five children. She attended St. Nicholas grade school in Struthers, Ohio and in 1967, graduated from Poland High School.

Sr. Regina entered the Ursuline order in 1967. Since the Ursulines are mainly a teaching order, she was sent to Youngstown State University, where she received her Bachelor of Science in Education degree in 1972. In the fall of 1975, she began graduate work at LaSalle College in Philadelphia. Sr. Regina has taught at St. Patrick grade school from 1971 until 1973 and is currently assigned to Ursuline High School, where she teaches religion.

Sr. Regina is a member of the National Education Association and the National Catholic Education Association. Her special interests include traveling, knitting, and reading.

DONNA DEBLASIO  
July 6, 1977

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INTERVIEWEE: SISTER REGINA ROGERS  
INTERVIEWER: Donna DeBlasio  
SUBJECT: Life in the Ursuline Community  
DATE: March 24, 1975

D: This is an interview with Sister Regina Rogers by Donna DeBlasio for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Ursuline Sisters. It is March 24, 1975 and it is 1:40 p.m. We are at the Ursuline High School Convent.

D: Sister Regina, could you tell us a little bit about your family background and your educational background?

R: Yes. I come from a family of five children. I have an older sister, a younger sister, and two younger brothers. My mom and dad were raised in Lowellville, Ohio. I spent the first five years of my life in Lowellville and then my family moved to Poland, where I went to St. Nicholas School in Struthers, and Holy Family in Poland. I graduated in 1967 from Poland High School.

My dad presently works at Youngstown State University. He's the assistant administrator in financial affairs. My mom works for anesthesiologists in Fifth Street. My older sister works at Mahoning Bank. My younger brother is studying for the priesthood. I had one brother who died a year ago today of bone cancer.

I entered the Ursuline community in September of 1967. I graduated from Youngstown State University in the summer of 1972. This coming summer I will attend graduate school at LaSalle College in Philadelphia for a degree in religious education.

D: What influenced your decision to enter a religious life?

R: I'm not really sure. I was always fascinated by nuns. I would never have said that I was close to nuns, but I always was fascinated by them. I was lucky to have had some very fine nuns in grade school and I think they deeply influenced me. By the time I was in high school and thinking of what I would like to do, I always had, in the back of my mind, the thought of becoming a nun. This decision was nothing vocalized or formal until the summer before I entered the convent. That was when I, for the first time, admitted that I wanted to become a nun.

D: Why did you join the Ursulines?

R: That was the only community that I really knew. I had had Ursuline nuns both at St. Nicholas and at Holy Family. They were my only contact with nuns and I liked them very much. I was very pleased with these generous, warm people.

D: Could you describe a typical day when you first entered?

R: During the first year I entered the convent, we were still, very much, living the traditional life of a nun, the kind you sometimes see on television. We got up very early in the morning; I suppose it was about five thirty. We had prayers and Mass. Then at about eight thirty we started college classes. The day consisted predominately of college work, house cleaning and some recreation. It was very routine.

We went to class from eight thirty to ten thirty. We then had a break until about a quarter to eleven until a quarter to twelve. We had lunch, then had some recreation until about three. We studied from two or three until about four thirty, then we had another class until supper. After supper, we had more recreation and we had study time at the end of the day. We were in bed by nine thirty which was a big relief because the day was kind of long.

D: How has it changed?

R: Well, probably the biggest change is in the regimentation, which is no longer present. Our time is no longer scheduled. My only scheduled time is when I am at school. After that, my time is my own. During my first year in

the convent, all of my time was scheduled for me with college work and housework. That's no longer true. All nuns now are much more on their own than they were five or six years ago.

D: What have your duties been as a nun?

R: Well, so far the only thing that I have ever had to do is teach. This is my fourth year teaching. I taught two years at St. Patrick school in Youngstown and this is my second year at Ursuline High School.

D: What are you teaching at Ursuline?

R: I teach religion. I have mostly sophomore religion classes.

D: Could you describe a typical day at Ursuline?

R: A typical day at Ursuline begins, for me, at about six o'clock when I get up. At six thirty we have prayers and Mass. I like to be over at school early, so I try to get there at about a quarter to eight. School officially begins at eight fifteen and lasts until three fifteen. I teach five classes and supervise a study hall. Then I have my own preparation period. I usually stay at school until at least four or four thirty to get work done. I don't like to bring work home. I would prefer to come home and have no school work to do, so I usually stay until four or four thirty. We have dinner here at the convent at five fifteen, then my evenings are my own.

D: About how many hours per week do you put into your teaching and planning for your classes?

R: On the average, I would say that I spend about two or three hours per day planning lessons. Since I'm relatively new, I spend a lot of time on it. If I don't do it after school, I'll spend a whole Sunday afternoon working on plans for the week.

D: What methods do you use in teaching?

R: I use a process which involves a lot of group work and activity with the kids. The kids seem to enjoy it, although it's much more difficult than lecturing. I think this method is very effective in teaching religion.

D: Are there any particular discipline problems with the

students?

R: No. No, I have had none. I have not had a severe discipline problem in my two years.

D: Are there any special rules or codes that a teacher has to follow at Ursuline?

R: The biggest rule or code that has to be followed is accountability--trying to be accountable for what you're doing in the classroom with the students. I think it's important that a teacher be accountable. I don't think that is unique to Ursuline, but it is certainly stressed at Ursuline and so is the fact that Ursuline is a Catholic school and should have a Christian dimension in its education.

D: What type of relationship is there between the faculty and the administration?

R: This year I have found a pretty healthy working relationship. I'm speaking mainly from the religion department point of view because those are the people that I deal with most. The religion department seems to get along very well with the administration. There is a healthy kind of working relationship. Nothing is ever always right and nothing is ever always wrong. There's a real balance. Our principal is a very intelligent man, who is extremely concerned about the students in the school. I find that that makes for a good working relationship.

D: What is the faculty-student relationship like?

R: Generally, I find that the teachers tend to be concerned about their students. Not only are they interested in what they're doing academically, but they are also interested in their problems. If a teacher notices a problem with a certain student he talks to the other faculty members about it to see if anybody else has noticed anything and then, ultimately, he refers the student to a counselor or a dean. It seems that the faculty carries an overall interest in the student body.

D: Would you say there is some competition among the teachers themselves?

R: I would imagine there is. I don't notice it that much. I think I tend to stick to my own classroom and my own department during the day. I deal predominately with

those people so I really would have a hard time in answering that. I would presume there would be some competition. I think you could find that in most any school.

D: How would you say the administration handles the school? Is it handled in a liberal or conservative manner?

R: I would tend to say that it's middle-conservative. It's tending over to the conservative side now. When you're dealing with a student body of over fifteen hundred, I think it would have to be that way.

We are leaning towards the liberal aspect in the scheduling of the students and the classes. With individual students however, we still abide by dress codes and gum chewing rules that are still in effect here.

D: What would you say about the quality of the education? Do you think it prepares the students to face the outside world?

R: That's a tough one. I think we'd like to say we are preparing them. We are an academic school and we are training our college-bound students very well. I worry about the students who have no intentions of going to college. I wonder about our preparation for them for the outside world. Hopefully, we are giving them a good foundation to meet the challenges in the future. Again, I worry about the non-academic student and what he is receiving at Ursuline.

D: Who are some of your outstanding colleagues at Ursuline?

R: The first one that I would mention is the head of the religion department, Father Daniel Venglarik, who is a very intelligent man and a very capable leader in the department. Ursuline has some very fine teachers such as Mr. Terry Grimm in the English department, Mr. Anthony Costarella in the Math department, and Mrs. Von Schulick in the English department. These people have been at Ursuline for a while and have a great involvement with the students.

D: Do you have any other comments about Ursuline High School?

R: I think Ursuline High School is a fine school and I feel honored to be there.

D: Could you describe special occasions like Christmas and Easter among the Ursuline sisters and how they were celebrated?

R: Well, all of our special occasions always center around a community. Christmas and Easter have always been my favorite times, simply because of the emphasis on community. There's always a liturgical celebration, which is emphasized a lot. We have Mass and prayers together which are also always emphasized a great deal. Then there are little things that the nuns themselves do. At Christmas, there is always a party and presents and things like that which make it an exciting time. It is a time that you look forward to and not just a common day. Christmas and Easter have always been my favorite times.

D: What years of your religious life stand out and why?

R: My third year in the convent stands out in my mind. That was the year that I went to Walsh College to study philosophy and theology. That's all I took. I remember that year because that was the year that I was getting ready to take my first vows. I liked the courses. I decided to teach religion because I loved the courses in religion at Walsh. Before that, I always wanted to be a history teacher and I think I would like to try that some day, too. I had an exciting time there because I lived in anticipation of August when I would profess my vows. That is a momentous occasion in the life of any nun. The nuns in the community displayed that excitement and thus, engendered that same excitement in me.

The year before I came to Ursuline stands out in my mind also simply because I was a nervous wreck then. I wasn't really sure I wanted to do this, but in the end, things worked out.

D: When a girl takes her vows, is there any special celebration?

R: At the Motherhouse, it's always a very public thing. There's a Mass with the bishop present and the girl's family and all of the sisters gather that day. Then there's a reception afterwards. It's a time of support and acceptance for a young nun in the community because even the older sisters who might not know her will send her little notes and cards of congratulations. You really feel, probably, then more so than any other time, a member in the community.



D: Could you describe the ceremony?

R: My ceremony began, first of all, with a procession headed by the bishop, Bishop Malone. The Mass proceeded. A novice wears a white veil so at the beginning of the ceremony I exchanged my white veil for a black veil, the sign of profession. A candle is always given to the novice, signifying the light of Christ as the light of her life. The Mass proceeds, then after the homily, the nun goes forward in front of the whole congregation and pronounces her first vows. Then the Mass continues. The Mass is planned by the nuns themselves, the musicians that day are the nuns themselves, and the choir is made up of nuns, too, so it becomes a real community affair.

D: What things do you remember about the superiors or the superior whom you worked under?

R: Well I'm serving under my second one now. Mother Edna Marie was the mother superior when I first entered. She was the one I signed up under to come into the Ursuline community. She was so patient and she had such a very feminine way about her. She called us "darling" and "dear" and was very concerned that we understood what we were doing and that everything was fine. I always felt kind of daughterly to her.

Our present mother superior, Sister Mary Conroy, is the nun in the community that I respect and admire the most. She was my English teacher during my whole first year in the Ursuline community. I respect her not only for her intelligence, but for her dealings with me. She was part of the formation team, the team that gets young nuns ready to take the vows. I always felt a very special closeness with her, so I'm really pleased to see her as our mother superior.

D: What other sisters do you know who are outstanding?

R: Well, the sister that I love is Sister Imelda. She has been in the community for about forty-eight years now. She was always so kind to me when I lived at the Motherhouse. She always said a pleasant word, or gave a little gift, or a little note, so that you knew she was thinking about you.

One of the nuns that I live with now, Sister Mary Ann Coz, a member of the department of religious education, is an outstanding person, and a truly dedicated person.

One of my good friends is Sister Margaret Mary Minghetti, from St. Patrick's. She and I are very close and I respect her for being such a principled person and a very kind, loving, caring person.

D: What unique things do you remember about the convents in which you lived?

R: The only convent that was really unique was St. Patrick's on Oak Hill. The convent was three houses put together. There were little ramps up and the floors were uneven physically. There were only five of us in the house, so it became a real home. The five of us got along very well. It was a very pleasant experience being at St. Patrick's. That is one community house that I enjoyed living in very much during my two years there.

D: What changes have you noted within the order from when you first entered to now?

R: Well, probably the most obvious change is in clothes. When I entered, the nuns were still very much covered. They wore long habits and head pieces that cover all the hair. Physically, that's the most impressive change.

I think there is an entirely different attitude these days too. In the past, I think nuns respected the rank. If a nun had been in for twenty-five years or thirty then she wouldn't do any more housework. Now, because of the lack of nuns, it has become much more unified and the nuns are working together. Everyone in the house does something now simply because there aren't that many nuns to do everything that needs to be done. Everybody contributes. That's a major change that I've noticed. People don't feel that they can just sit back and watch others work.

In the past, when a nun reached a certain age, she retired. Now, nuns are going on as much as they're physically able to. I think the spirit of service and dedication, at least to me, seems much more prevalent than it had been in the past.

D: Why do you think it is difficult to get modern women to enter a religious life?

R: I think one of the reasons is that the women are committing themselves at a later age. Some women wait until they are twenty-four, twenty-five, or twenty-six

to commit themselves to something life long. Once the girls leave high school they lose contact with the nuns. This is also a factor which reduces the number of girls coming into religious life.

The changes and the turmoil that religious life has faced in the last ten years is very frightening for some nuns. They see nuns leaving and they read about nuns doing all kinds of things. It is very frightening for them because they're used to seeing nuns as the secure group, the group that will always be a certain way. Now that things are changing, the nuns too are changing. That can be frightening for them.

D: What do you think is the future direction of the Ursuline order?

R: The Ursuline order will still maintain their unique interest in education, but I see that education will branch out into all areas. No longer will education only mean classroom education. The service that the Ursuline nuns give, although it isn't much simply because of the small numbers, will be quite noticeable within the community, in Catholic circles. The Ursuline nuns will be known in the community as professional women, educated women, women who have something to contribute to mankind.

D: Do you have any other comments on the Ursuline order?

R: None.

END OF INTERVIEW