

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ursuline Sisters

Life in the Ursuline Community

O.H. 47

SISTER EDNA MARIE BRINDLE

Interviewed

by

Donna DeBlasio

on

June 3, 1975

SISTER EDNA MARIE BRINDLE

Ursuline nun Sister Edna Marie Brindle was born in Youngstown, Ohio on May 24, 1906. Her parents were George and Mary McGunigal Brindle. She attended St. Columba School and Ursuline Academy. In 1937, she received her Bachelor of Science in Education degree and in 1942 her Master of Science in Education from St. John College in Cleveland. She has also done graduate work at Kent State University and the Catholic University of America.

As a member of the Ursuline order which she entered in 1927, Sister Edna Marie has been both a teacher and a principal within the Youngstown Diocese School System. She has taught at St. Cyril's, St. Anne's, and St. Nicholas, and was the principal of St. Columba and St. Patrick's. She has also been the community supervisor of the diocesan schools and Director of Education for the Ursuline community. In 1960, she became the Mother Superior of the order. It was during this time that the new Motherhouse was being built. She formed an advisory board to oversee the purchasing of the needed property on Shields Road. The Century Club was also formed to raise money to pay off the debt. By the time Sister Edna Marie left office in 1972, the entire Motherhouse was debt free.

Sister Edna Marie is retired from teaching, but still does tutoring. She resides at the Shields Road Motherhouse and her hobbies include reading and traveling.

DONNA DEBLASIO
June 28, 1977

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INTERVIEWEE: SISTER EDNA MARIE BRINDLE
INTERVIEWER: Donna DeBlasio
SUBJECT: Life in the Ursuline Community
DATE: June 3, 1975

D: This is an interview with Sister Edna Marie Brindle for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project on the Ursuline Sisters, by Donna DeBlasio on June 3, 1975, at 10:10 a. m. at the Ursuline Motherhouse on Shields Road.

D: Sister, could you tell us a little about your family background?

B: Yes. My parents were both born in Ireland, in Westport County and they came to the United States when they were very young. They came directly to Youngstown. The two families didn't know one another, but they probably came to Youngstown about the same time. My father was educated at St. Columba School and my mother was educated by the Humility of Mary Sisters in Villa Maria, Pennsylvania. I have three sisters and one brother. My father was an engineer for the United States Steel Company, practically all of his life. One of my sisters and my brother attended Kent State College for two years.

D: What about your educational background?

B: I graduated from St. Columba School and from Ursuline Academy, that was a girls' high school at that time. This was back in 1924. It was a very different school from what we have now at the high school; it was like a girls' finishing school. We had specialized courses in drama and needlework and girls' sports and dancing, besides the regular subjects. When I graduated from the Ursuline Academy I attended Kent State University

and I received a Bachelor Degree in Education and my Masters Degree in English at St. John College in Cleveland. I also did post graduate work at the Catholic University of America.

D: What influenced your decision to enter the Ursuline Order?

B: I think that possibly the faith of my parents and their appreciation of religious life as a vocation. Then, too, I had been educated by the Ursuline Sisters for twelve years, and I was interested in a life of service to God and to others. I knew that the Ursuline Sisters were instructors of the faith also, and realizing this I felt that leading a dedicated life as a religious I could possibly be most fulfilled in the Ursuline Order

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

B: I really thought that I was to give information concerning the Motherhouse since you have already a typical day described by other sisters; however, when I entered the convent we had a very structured life. Our life was one of prayer, study, work, recreation, and rest. We rose early in the morning and had morning prayer followed by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Then we had breakfast and went out to the different schools where we were teaching. At this time we all lived together in the one convent and we went to the different schools throughout the city. Today we have local houses that are close to the school. But in those days we all lived in the Rayen Avenue convent. Our work in the schools was directed by the principal and we had very large classes. After our day's teaching we returned to the convent and had prayers, we had dinner and then recreation together. This was a very fun time, because we all had so many things to talk about-- those things that had transpired during the day. Following recreation we had night prayers, then after study and preparing tomorrow's lessons, we retired.

D: How did you become Mother Superior?

B: I became Mother Superior in 1960. Before that time I had taught at St. Cyril's, St. Anne's and St. Nicholas Schools. I had been principal of St. Columba and St. Patrick's. I've also been community supervisor of our schools and the Director of Education for our community. During 1960 I was elected Mother Superior and I served two terms, 6 years each, and it was during that time that the motherhouse was built. Ursuline High School was taken over by the Diocese probably around 1955 and Bishop Walsh promised the Ursuline Sisters that in 1960 they could have

a drive for funds in the Diocese to build a new motherhouse. When I was elected Mother Superior in 1960 it seemed that my work was cut out for me, because we were to have this drive and the Motherhouse was to be built. When we started the drive we were permitted to have only half of the funds collected because the Diocese was having a drive for funds for a high school at that time. Our sisters participated in this drive. They solicited funds from their own people and from their friends. They also went to the homes of the people in this area. This was a little different, because up to this time we did not visit homes. This drive was very successful.

In order to build the motherhouse, of course, we had to have property and in order to buy property I gathered together a group of people and an advisory board was formed, which was made up of some of the outstanding men of the city; Mr. Charles Cushwa, Jr., James Griffin, Dr. John McCann, P. Arthur D'Orazio, Dr. J. Scarnecchia, Jack Hutch, Sr., Attorney John Newman, Mr. William G. Lyden, Sr., Mr. Frederick Shutrump, Sr., and John Coakley. They set up an organization of about thirty men to solicit contributions to buy property for the motherhouse and in a very short time they had collected enough funds and purchased the property. The property is on Shields Road and bounded by Route 62 and Messerly Road on the other two sides. It was the old Lynn Estate and part of the Ranz estate. It consisted of about one hundred and thirty acres. The advisory board then wanted the council of the Sisters and myself to select a contractor and an architect. Mr. Fred Shutrump, Sr., was selected as contractor and P. Arthur D'Orazio was the architect. These two men, and all the workmen were the very finest people. They had a marvelous working relationship. We were very happy that our motherhouse was finally being built and we visited the building daily and were able to see it in its various stages of construction. We helped with the planning and the supervising. It was a very busy time for the sisters and we were delighted with the results. This excellent building which is very functional and cost over one million dollars would today cost three times that amount. The building was finished in December of 1963 and the arrangements were made to move there. There were four moving companies that donated their services to take care of this moving. At this time the sisters were living in the convent on Rayen Avenue and the one on Logan Avenue.

The Rayen Avenue Convent had been condemned as unsafe and the Logan Avenue Convent, even though it was a beautiful one, was inadequate for the sisters. So it was from these two buildings the moving companies brought the furnishings to the Motherhouse and they did it very efficiently in one day. The sisters were all at the Motherhouse by

December 16. In the meantime both the Rayen Avenue Convent and the Logan Avenue Convent were sold. The money from the sale of these convents was used to buy furnishings for the Motherhouse. Also there was a loan of about a half a million dollars negotiated at this time. Half of the loan was to be paid within ten years and at the end of that time it was to be refinanced. At this time the Century Club came into existence, using the present advisory board as the Executive Board of the Century Club. The purpose of this club was to solicit members who would donate a hundred dollars a year for the next ten years and in that way the balance of the loan could be paid off by the time that we would celebrate our centennial year in 1974. The entire loan was paid off before I left office in January of 1972, the entire Motherhouse was debt free and we had started a retirement fund for the retired sisters. God has been very good to the Ursuline Sisters, to have the advice and help of such fine men on the Advisory Board and also to have the help of the wonderful people of this Youngstown area who were so generous. They made the dream of our Motherhouse really come true. We can never be grateful enough to God and to these generous people.

D: What were your duties as the Mother Superior, besides taking care of the building of the Motherhouse?

B: The duty of any Mother Superior is to have first and foremost an interest in each individual sister in the order. She must see that her needs are taken care of; her problems and her difficulties listened to and solved, if possible, so that the sisters can lead a happy, fulfilled life in the religious state. The education, health, and welfare of the sisters is of utmost importance to a superior. She works at all times for the benefit of the community. The General Superior must see that the sisters have the help and assistance and the protection that they need in order that they can carry out the responsibilities that they assumed by the vows that they took. We all need help and guidance.

D: Could you describe a typical day as Mother Superior?

B: The Mother Superior follows the same program of the day as the other Sisters. She attends morning prayers and meditation, assists at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and after breakfast she usually sees the sisters who need some direction for that day. Then with her secretary she takes care of any correspondence for the community. She then takes care of business appointments. She goes over some directives that she might share with the rest of the community. After lunch she would probably visit the sick in the infirmary here and the retired sisters, also any in the hospital. She probably has some business

matters that she has to take care of with the treasurer. When the sisters report from school, she has appointments with them until prayer time. Supper is at six o'clock and then she concerns herself with the business of the community for the next day and any problems that might arise.

D: What changes occurred in the order while you were Mother Superior?

B: During the time that I was Mother Superior, from about 1965 on, was a period of great changes in society as well as in the Church. Much of the structure of religious life was changed. The Mass was being said now in English and shortened forms of the prayers were being used. Up to this time the Office of the Blessed Virgin was said in Latin by the sisters. We now use the Prayer of Christians which includes many of the prayers of the early days of the Church. Another change occurred in our dining room. We had been served seated at long tables, family style. Now we have a buffet set up and are seated at the tables for four or six sisters. We used to have spiritual reading read during part of the meal but that has been done away with and we can talk the entire meal. The silence has been reduced a great deal from when we first entered. We have less periods of silence. We weren't permitted to go home for visits; we only went home in case of serious illness or death. Now we may go home and stay overnight once a month with our families. We also have two weeks vacation. That was not so in the early days. There were many more changes but these are some of the main ones.

D: What unique things do you recall about any of the convents that you have lived at?

B: Mostly I remember the St. Patrick's Convent. There were about sixteen to twenty sisters living there. It was a very happy, very wonderful group of sisters and we were very close to one another; we enjoyed the convent and being there together. The convent was provided by the parish and it was very close to the church and the school. Christmas was one of the very happy times there. The house was decorated just beautifully; we had a Christmas tree in every room and the sisters loved to sing the carols and prepare the Christmas meals and goodies of all kinds. We were a very happy group of sisters and these were memorable times for me.

D: What years as a nun stand out in your memory and why?

B: Well, I suppose the years that I was called upon to face a great deal of responsibility, that was during the time that I was Mother Superior during which time I was respon-

sible for raising the money to build the Motherhouse and see to its planning.

D: What do you remember about the Ursuline Academy?

B: Well, there were only about seventy or eighty girls there at that time. It was a very well taught school. It was taught by the teachers, sisters, who had been wonderfully educated. They set an example of what the religious life was and the value of doing things for others. The girls really enjoyed it. We went to school from about 8 a.m. to about 4 p.m. All secular subjects were taught. Besides, we had a special speech teacher and a special vocal teacher and one who taught physical education, dancing, and a special teacher who taught etiquette and everything that made life most enjoyable for the girls. All the lovely things that a young lady should know we were taught. There were so few of us in class, possibly about twenty, that it was very easy for us to become close to the sisters and very easy for the girls to become close to one another. Out of twenty girls, eleven became teachers. I was the only one from our class who went into a religious order. Some of the girls are still teachers throughout the city and are raising a family. They very often come back to visit. In fact, we had our fiftieth graduation anniversary in 1974. Some of them I hadn't seen for twenty years or thirty years and they came and brought some candy and some lovely books which they knew that I'd enjoy. It was an outstanding school. We felt bad that it was necessary to make it coeducational. It was the only Catholic High School in this area so this was necessary. We felt that we were privileged to have attended the Ursuline Academy.

D: What sisters stand out in your memory and why?

B: The sister I had in the fourth grade was Sister Mary Angela and she is now deceased. She had the most beautiful handwriting that I have ever seen and she had her diploma framed on the wall and we would look at it and think it was the greatest thing that we had ever seen. We also tried to emulate her, the way she'd fold her hands at prayer time and all those different things. Then I think of the sisters I had in high school: Mother Agnes, Mother Bernard, Sister Mary Louise, and Mother Vincent. They were all beautiful women of extraordinary qualities. They had such beautiful characters that one felt, "if only I could be like them when I am older and if only I can do the things that they are doing for others, the way they are teaching them and guiding them." The principal of the elementary school at St. Columba, Sister Holy Angels, is one that I remember and she had been a public school

teacher before she had entered. She had a way of taking care of the unruly boys that were in the school, with just the softest voice. Many of them were there for a lot of things other than education. Some of them stayed until they were sixteen. The softest words would take care of them. I could go on naming these very wonderful sisters and teachers. There are so many others that really I look back and feel happy to have had the opportunity to have had them near me in the days while I was going to school.

D: What was memorable about any of the mother superiors?

B: There were many of them. Mother Vincent was one of them. She came to me one day and said, "I know how many times you've said that you would like to enter the religious life," and in her own sweet way, she said, "How long are you going to wait? Make up your mind." I had wanted to be a sister since I was a small child. So, I entered the Ursuline Order on December 8, 1927. All the sisters were important in my new life, but I remember Mother Vincent's kindness in the first few months of adjustment after I entered the community, especially since we were so cut off from our families, except for once a month when they were permitted to come to the convent. She was very kind and considerate. Mother Blanche was a general superior and is still living. She is an excellent person who did a great deal of work for our community. I received most of my assignments to teach from Mother Blanche and she was very considerate about where she placed each sister. The convent on Logan Road was purchased when Mother Paul was the superior. We loved Mother Paul. She was a very interesting person and it was she who assigned me to teach at St. Patrick and be principal there. She was a woman of great understanding and I think that she was far ahead of her own time because she had many ideas that are just now being used.

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

B: That is a problem, but I think it is becoming easier. I think the modern woman sees and understands that a religious life is an interior life. It involves intensification of the spirit, and a balanced acceptance of the difficulties in life, and all lives have difficulties, and an unchangeable consecration to God. She sees that religious life is not a worldly one. It's not a life that introduces secular customs and ideas and she sees the readiness of the sisters to sacrifice themselves to the power of the principal idea, that is, service to God. Then that young woman would be attracted to a solid and deep rooted piety of a religious life. It's when she doesn't see that there are sisters who really follow these things, then there are difficulties.

- D: What would you say is the future direction of the Ursuline Order?
- B: If our community continues to work earnestly through our spiritual attitude, and if we basically maintain and fulfill our proper activities, such as continuing instruction, and relate adjustments of these activities according to the needs of time and place, and if we omit whatever activities that are less in keeping with the spirit of our community, then we'll experience a growing future and a richer harvest and bring salvation to those responsible in the future.
- D: Do you have any other comments that you would like to make?
- B: No, thank you very much.
- D: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW