

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ursuline High School Project

Student Experiences  
O. H. 18

MR. JOHN McCORMICK  
Interviewed  
by  
Donna DeBlasio  
on  
November 7, 1974

JOHN MCCORMICK

John McCormick was born on October 30, 1929 in Youngstown, Ohio, the son of Thomas and Mary McCormick. He first attended St. Dominic Catholic School, on Youngstown's South Side. In 1943, he attended Ursuline High School and graduated from there in 1947. From 1948 to 1950 he attended John Carroll University and then Duquesne University, from which he received a degree in pharmacy in 1953. He served in the U. S. Army for two years, from 1953 to 1955.

Mr. McCormick is currently employed by Revco Drugstores, Inc. He is married to the former Martina Finnerty and they have three children--Mary, Martina, and John, Jr. Mr. McCormick is a member of St. Joseph Church in Austintown and his special interests include economics, golf, and spectator sports.

DONNA DEBLASIO  
SEPTEMBER 28, 1976

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ursuline High School Project

INTERVIEWEE: JOHN McCORMICK  
INTERVIEWER: Donna DeBlasio  
SUBJECT: Student Experiences  
DATE: November 7, 1974

- D: This is an interview with Mr. John McCormick for the Youngstown State University Ursuline High School Project by Donna DeBlasio at Mr. McCormick's home on November 7, 1974, at 2:00 p.m.
- D: Mr. McCormick, would you tell me a little bit about your family background?
- M: Well, I was born in Youngstown in 1929. My father died when I was two years old and I was raised by my mother and sister. I attended St. Dominic's School. I graduated from there and went to Ursuline High School in 1943. I graduated in 1947.
- D. Why did you choose to go to Ursuline? Did your parents chose this school for you?
- M: As far as I'm concerned, there was no other high school in town. That's kind of a prejudice. As an Irish Catholic I considered it a privilege to go there and never knew a high school existed except Ursuline High School at the time.
- D: How large was the student body at Ursuline then?
- M: We had one hundred and ninety-three graduating, so there would have been approximately seven hundred to eight hundred students at the time.
- D: Can you describe the building for me?

- M: There were two buildings, the original building, which is now the old high school and the only building in existence for teaching, and then there was the Arts building, which was built in the early 1920s.
- D: What did the main building look like?
- M: The main building was a brick structure. It was three stories high and was rectangular. It was nothing fancy.
- D: From which areas did most of the students come?
- M: The students were, I think, equally distributed from all sides of town.
- D: What type of social and economic classes were there?
- M: They ranged from the very rich to the very poor.
- D: How could the very poor manage to go to Ursuline?
- M: Well, at the time, the tuition was sixty dollars a year. I think any student could earn that much and pay at least a portion of his tuition.
- D: Was there a method for students who wanted to go to Ursuline to work for their tuition?
- M: Not to my knowledge.
- D: Did you have to buy your books or did you rent them?
- M: We bought them. We bought most of them second hand from students who had them the previous year.
- D: How strict was the discipline?
- M: By today's standards, it was very strict.
- D: Were there many breaches of discipline by the students?
- M: No.
- D: If you did happen to do something wrong, what kind of punishment was there? Did you have detentions?
- M: Yes, primarily there were detentions for one hour after school, in the study hall.

- D: What kind of dress code was there?
- M: There was really no dress code, except that you had to be neat and clean.
- D: Did the girls wear uniforms then?
- M: No, the girls didn't wear uniforms at the time.
- D: Could you describe a typical day?
- M: A typical day started with getting the bus from your side of town or hitchhiking to school. Primarily I hitchhiked from the far South Side to Ursuline. On the days I didn't get a ride, I took the bus, transferred downtown, and got the bus to Ursuline. This consumed approximately forty-five minutes. As I recall, religion was usually the first class of the day. We had a study hall sometime during the day. There were three periods during the morning, then the lunch hour, and there were two periods in the afternoon. This was about the extent of the day.
- D: About what time were you in school?
- M: I was there from nine to three.
- D: What type of courses were offered?
- M: I took a straight academic course, with classes in basic English, religion, and sciences. They did offer, for the girls, home economics. They also offered a general business course.
- D: Were there any required subjects?
- M: Yes, religion and English.
- D: Were the classes coed?
- M: Yes. They were all coed.
- D: What classes did you enjoy the most?
- M: I very much enjoyed Father Gallagher's religion class for the freshmen boys. I had a very great respect for Father Gallagher. He was, unfortunately, killed during our sophomore year at Ursuline. He left an indelible impression from a single quote that he made to the incoming freshmen, which, as I recall, was "ne quid nimis," meaning "not too much of anything." I think that quote has developed my philosophy of life pretty well.

- D: What other teachers were you impressed by?
- M: I was impressed by Sister Rosemary, who was and still is the speech and dramatics teacher. She was a very dedicated teacher.
- D: Who was the principal at the time?
- M: Originally, Father Gallagher was the principal and after his death, Sister Rosemary was the acting principal. Then we had Father Holbrook for principal.
- D: What type of extracurricular activities were there?
- M: There were intramural sports for the boys. They had a bowling team and a debate team. They had several specific clubs regarding science, English, and religion.
- D: Was there much competition between Ursuline and other schools in athletics?
- M: Yes. Ursuline was in the city series in football and basketball. During my years at Ursuline, they either won or were very close to the city series championship during the four years.
- D: Since Mooney wasn't around, who was the biggest rival?
- M: Probably Rayen was the biggest rival because both schools are on the North Side.
- D: How good was the attendance at football games?
- M: The attendance was very good at the time. We had almost sell-out crowds.
- D: Were dances held often?
- M: Yes, quite frequently. We had dances in the fall, and spring, and then the usual junior-senior prom.
- D: What do you think were the major topics of conversation among the students?
- M: Well, this was during World War II and there were a lot of jobs available to very young people. The war was a topic of conversation then.
- D: Do you think that World War II had any effect on the students?

- M: I don't think it had much effect because we were in an age group in which our parents normally weren't involved in active military service.
- D: Was there a large number of older students quitting school to enlist?
- M: No, it was not a large number. I would say about five percent of the class dropped out to enlist.
- D: Did the students have any specific gathering places?
- M: Not specifically. We'd usually just congregate outside the school building.
- D: Did the students express any dissatisfaction with the high school at the time?
- M: I don't recall any dissatisfaction with the school.
- D: What did you think of the teachers? Do you think they were dedicated?
- M: Very much so.
- D: What methods did they use in teaching?
- M: Well, there were mostly religious teachers, nuns and priests. There were very few lay teachers. As I recall in my math courses, we learned the logic necessary for figuring out problems. There was very little memorization work required. Basically it was the philosophy of every teacher to teach you how to learn, instead of just learning.
- D: How difficult were the classes?
- M: I don't think they were that difficult. Naturally, you have various types of intelligence among all groups. I think that I was of just average intelligence and I didn't find any particular course difficult.
- D: Do you think there was a great number of cliques among the students?
- M: Yes, there were many cliques. South Siders, North Siders, West Siders, and East Siders had their own cliques. You weren't broken up into parishes as it is today with Mooney and Ursuline. Even among those on different sides of town, there were cliques.

D: Do you think that Ursuline prepared you for life?

M: Yes, I think it did, primarily because of the philosophy that I mentioned before which Father Gallagher instilled into me that you should not have too much of anything. This includes work, play, and money.

D: Was Ursuline mostly geared to college training?

M: I think the academic courses were primarily geared to college training. The business course and subjects such as sociology and problems of democracy were geared to high school.

D: How many hours per night did you study?

M: I'd rather pass that question.

D: Did you hold any jobs when you were going to Ursuline?

M: Yes. During my freshman year, or prior to it, I was a dishwasher at the Elks Club. In my sophomore year, I had an evening job in an Isaly store. During my junior and senior years, I worked at Professional Pharmacy as a delivery boy and stock clerk.

D: Do you think there was a strong emphasis on religion?

M: I think that probably the strongest emphasis in the school was on religion.

D: How would you compare Ursuline with the other area schools?

M: I felt prejudicially that Ursuline was the best high school in the city. I had no idea what they taught at other schools. I was impressed by the fact that the other schools had wood working shops and mechanical shops but I couldn't see any good reason for these at the time, since I felt that high school didn't really teach you how to make a living or how to live.

D: Who were your closest friends when you were going to Ursuline?

M: My first cousin, Tom McGahagan, and Jack McAllen, Jerry Stanislaw and my first cousin, Bob Reardon who has since died, numbered my closest friends.



D: When you graduated, what type of feelings did you have about leaving the school?

M: I had mixed feelings. I was happy to be out, to be in a sense, free. When I got out of school, I went to work at Truscon with the idea of going to college later. I found that life in the work-a-day world was pretty dreary. Reporting for the same job every morning at the same time or every afternoon at the same time was dull. You went through a process of repetition that became almost mind boggling in its lack of interest.

D: What changes have you noticed between Ursuline when you went and Ursuline now?

M: The first big change, I think, is in the number of lay teachers and administrators that you have in the high schools now.

Second, I think the curriculum that is currently offered is much broader in its base. As I recall, our kids at Ursuline have the option of quite a number of courses that would not even be thought of when I went to high school.

I was impressed by some courses which were introduced in conjunction with Youngstown State University, Butler Art Institute, and Stambaugh Auditorium. These are more or less civic courses.

D: Do you think that the changes are for the better?

M: Yes, I do. I think the student gets more of a choice and a broader education in life in having these courses that are civic minded.

D: Do you think that the use of more lay faculty has helped the school?

M: No, I don't. I think the lay faculty in Catholic high schools, because of their lower pay, must necessarily have a greater degree of dedication than some teachers in public schools. I don't think that the lay faculty is dedicated to the same degree that the priests and nuns have been dedicated in their lives and in their education.

D: Would you have made any changes while you were going there?

M: None that I can think of right off hand.

- D: Was there a feeling of great pride in going to Ursuline?
- M: Yes, there was. I think we had more school pride than any other school in the city. As I said, I was born and raised an Irish Catholic and at the time, I considered it a privilege to be able to go to a Catholic high school. At the same time, it was also an obligation. This was instilled in us from our religion classes from grade one through grade twelve. I think this is one of the major changes from the time I went to school to the current day. I don't think that Catholic education today could support all of those who would be entered in a Catholic high school under an obligatory procedure.
- D: Do you think that going to a Catholic school gives you less of a background than in a public school since most students at Ursuline were Catholic.
- M: No, at Ursuline you have just as wide a diversity among students. There are the very rich families, the very poor families, the families who are from each side of town, and the families from different parishes. I think they give you the diversity that you would get in a public school with students of different religions.
- D: Was there a large number of non-Catholics at Ursuline?
- M: No. I don't know of any non-Catholics and if there were, the number was very, very small.
- D: What type of publications did Ursuline have when you went?
- M: They had a school paper whose name I can't recall and the annual, which, at that time was The Ursulinian. Those were the only publications.
- D: Who were some of your other notable classmates whom people around here would know?
- M: Well, I think probably one of the most notable would be Father Summers, pastor of Immaculate Conception. There were a few other priests who had been in the graduating class with me that have since left the priesthood. One of my very good friends is a prominent surgeon in Warren, Jerry Stanislaw. One man, Jim French, works in the educational system in the high schools handling federal aid to education. Other than those, I think most of us are common folks.

- D: Were you involved in many extracurricular activities?
- M: I was primarily involved in intramural basketball. I was involved in the senior play, when I was a senior, if we can call this an extracurricular activity. This I very much enjoyed under Sister Rosemary's tutelage.
- D: What play did you do?
- M: Oh you're putting me on. I can't recall the name of it. I do recall a couple of plays in which I was behind the scenes. This was before I was a senior. One was "Brewster's Millions" and another was "Ramona" which we did during my freshman year. I don't recall the name of the play we did in my senior year.
- D: Did the students have a fear of the teachers? Were they very domineering?
- M: I think as regards authority, they would have been considered domineering, but reasonable. By today's standards, I would have considered them very, very strict disciplinarians and I did fear them merely because of their authority. I think one of today's great lacks among youth is the lack of fear of authority.
- D: Do you think going to Ursuline left you a great deal of leisure time for yourself and time to go out with your friends?
- M: I didn't have a whole lot of leisure time since I was employed all during my four years in high school. I really had very little leisure time. I worked, naturally, after school. During the junior and senior years I worked from about four to six in the afternoons. I worked all day on Saturdays. During the sophomore year, I had a job at an Isaly store working from 3:30 to 11:00, six days a week, which was pretty time consuming. During that period of time, I had very, very little leisure time.
- D: Did the school receive a lot of support from the parents?
- M: It didn't receive nearly as much as it does today from what I can see. I think that the parent-teacher meetings today are much better attended than they were during my day.
- D: Do you think there was more school spirit when you attended Ursuline or is there more now?

M: No, I think that it was on an equal basis. From what I can see, from our kids who went to Ursuline, there is an even greater degree of spirit because of the rivalry with Mooney.

There was a great deal of school spirit at the time that I went there, too. The city series rivalry, during the football season probably was responsible for the greatest degree of spirit. I think the religious atmosphere at the school, too, contributed to a feeling that was more than just spirit as such. I think all the students had a deeper inner appreciation to go along with their school spirit.

D: Were there a lot of rallies held when you went?

M: Yes, for every game they had a rally. I think it is much the same as it is today.

D: What were the rallies like?

M: The coach would, naturally, predict his victory. If you were the underdog, he was assured that the spirit of the fighting Irish would come through as they do at Notre Dame. Each of the players would, in his turn, give a little talk to boost the students. I think essentially they were the same then as they are now.

D: Did they have a large band at the time?

M: No, they didn't. I'd have to say the band was very, very small by comparison to today's standards. With approximately seven hundred students in the school, I would guess that less than one-fourth could play a musical instrument. Most of those who did belonged to the band.

D: Do you recall who the band director was?

M: No, I don't.

D: When newcomers came into the school, were they accepted or were they kind of resented by the other students?

M: The only newcomers that would be admitted were from St. Edward's Junior High. They would come from the ninth grade at St. Ed's to the sophomore year at Ursuline. These students were readily accepted. I don't recall any transfer students at all from other schools other than those at St. Ed's. There was no harassment of any kind. They were just very well accepted.

- D: Did the students from St. Edward's tend to stick together?
- M: Not to my recollection they didn't. They mixed very well with most of the students.
- D: To your knowledge, would you say that students from various grade schools and junior high schools who enter Ursuline stick together?
- M: I can't honestly answer that question.
- D: Are there any other comments you'd like to make about Ursuline?
- M: No, not really.
- D: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW