

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ursuline High School Project

Student and Teaching Experiences

O. H. 40

SISTER ROSEMARY DEIBEL

Interviewed

by

Donna DeBlasio

on

December 5, 1974

SISTER ROSEMARY DEIBEL

Sister Rosemary Deibel, a member of the Ursuline Order, was born in Youngstown, Ohio, on August 10, 1904. Her parents were Christopher and Elizabeth Gallagher Deibel. She attended the Ursuline Academy grade school and then went to Ursuline High School. She went to New Rochelle College in New York from 1922 to 1923. She finished her bachelor's work at Catholic University of America in 1930 and received her MA from there in 1931. She entered the Ursuline Order of nuns in 1923. Sister Rosemary has also done graduate work at Northwestern University, Marguerite Bourgeoys College in Montreal, and Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

Sister Rosemary began her teaching career at Sacred Heart grade school and then at St Columba grade school. Later she taught French, Latin, English and Speech at Ursuline High School. Over the years she has taught drama and directed the plays put on by Ursuline High students. Among these plays have been "My Fair Lady," "King and I," "South Pacific," and "Hello Dolly." She is a member of the National Forensic League, Ohio High School Speech League, Ohio Speech Association, and the Modern Language Association. She has received a second Diamond award from the NFL and numerous awards for the Voice of Democracy contests. Her hobbies include theater, television, travel, and field trips to Statford in Ontario.

DONNA DEBLASIO
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INTERVIEWEE: SISTER ROSEMARY DEIBEL
INTERVIEWER: Donna DeBlasio
SUBJECT: Student and Teaching Experiences
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DD: This is an interview with Sister Rosemary Deibel for the Youngstown State University Ursuline High School Project by Donna DeBlasio at Ursuline High School on December 5, 1974, at 1:30 p.m.

DD: Sister Rosemary, please tell us something about your background.

RD: Well, I was born in Youngstown and I went to the Ursuline Academy Grade School and High School on Rayen Avenue. The high school was transferred to Wick Avenue after they purchased the new property and I was graduated from there in 1922. After that, I went to New Rochelle College for a year and a half, and then I entered the Ursuline Order in Youngstown. I continued my education at Catholic University in 1929, receiving a B.A. degree and then went on to study for my master's. I finished my education in 1931.

I've taken many courses at Northwestern University especially in drama, television, and radio. I studied French for two or three summers in Montreal at the Marguerite Bourgeoys College. I also did a lot of work in French at Western Reserve University. I almost have enough credits for a Ph.D., but I never went on for the Ph.D.

DD: Would you describe the Ursuline School building, when you went there?

RD: The building was located at the old convent on Rayen Avenue, and they used a few of the rooms of the convent

for the school. They used the community room, as they called it, for the high school. I spent two years there. Then, as I said, in 1921, the property on Wick Avenue was purchased and the high school was transferred to that property.

DD: How large was the school?

RD: I don't remember just exactly how large it was. In 1922 our graduating class had twelve students.

DD: Where did most of the students come from?

RD: They came from just around the area, the North Side and South Side.

DD: Was there any difference in social classes?

RD: I don't know. I don't think there was any class distinction.

DD: From which class were most of the students?

RD: Most of the students were from middle class families.

DD: How much was the tuition?

RD: I can't remember really. It was long ago. I think it was about five or ten dollars a month.

DD: Did you have to buy your books or did you rent them?

RD: We bought our books.

DD: Was there any way for students to pay their way through Ursuline if they could not afford the cost?

RD: Yes. They used to give a few scholarships to students who were not fortunate enough to be able to pay the tuition. I think somebody sponsored them or the convent just gave them free tuition. If there were three students in a family attending Ursuline, then two would pay tuition and the other one would go free.

DD: How strict was the discipline?

RD: It was a small girls' school, so the discipline didn't have to be very strict.

DD: Could you describe a typical day?

RD: We started school at about eight thirty and we got out at about twelve o'clock to go home for lunch. We had about an hour for lunch, then we'd return to school from one o'clock until about three thirty.

DD: What type of courses were offered?

RD: They were almost all academic courses, but, there were some commercial courses, too. When I graduated, there were two of us that followed the academic course and the other ten followed the commercial course.

DD: What classes did you enjoy the most?

RD: I liked Latin and French. I think I liked languages better than math and science. I took many courses in Latin so I majored in Latin for my bachelor's degree. I majored in French and minored in Latin for my master's degree.

DD: What type of extracurricular activities were sponsored by the school?

RD: We had a few plays. Really, there weren't very many extracurricular activities in those days. Most of us were interested in basketball. That is the best example, of an extracurricular activity that I can give.

DD: Did they have publications?

RD: Yes. We were the first class to put out a yearbook in 1922. It was called the Ursulinian. We still have copies of it in our library. I was always glad that I didn't know how to type in those days because all the girls who could type had jobs after school until all hours.

DD: Did the students have any special gathering places on school grounds?

RD: Our only meeting place was an auditorium, which was formerly a barn. It is still standing today on the property. Today the band and some religion classes are held in this building. That was where we used to play basketball.

DD: What did you think about the teachers at Ursuline?

RD: I always had good teachers, especially Mother Agnes, Mother Vincent, Sister Mary Louise and Sister Winifred. Sister was our English teacher. Sister Mary Louise taught us French and some science. I never found fault with teachers. We always revered them and thought they were okay.

DD: What type of teaching methods did they use?

RD: I don't know just exactly what methods were used.

DD: Do you think there was a fear of the teachers?

RD: No, I don't think so. I don't remember being afraid of any teachers. I always got along with them. As I said before, Ursuline was a girls' school and going to an all-girl school makes a big difference. There aren't as many discipline problems as there are in a coeducational school.

DD: Were there any cliques among the students?

RD: No, there weren't too many because there were only about twelve students in a class. We were all one group. I don't think we had any trouble with cliques.

DD: Were newcomers resented?

RD: No. I remember a girl coming in her junior year and she was well received by the entire group. There was no difficulty.

DD: Do you think that Ursuline prepared you for college training?

RD: Definitely, I do. I had a very good background in Latin. I took Latin for four years and I took French for two years in high school. I really studied. I felt when I went to college that I was well prepared.

DD: About how many hours did you study each night?

RD: I think I studied for at least two hours, sometimes three. If I had to read long passages of Virgil, it took me longer than two hours.

DD: Do you feel that Ursuline influenced your decision for a religious vocation?

RD: Oh yes, very definitely. I really thought a lot of the different teachers that I had. I was very close to them and I know they had some influence on my decision. When I went to New Rochelle, I lived with the Ursuline nuns there for a year and a half. I still wanted to be back home so I entered the Ursuline Order here in Youngstown.

DD: Who were some of your close friends at Ursuline?

RD: I just heard from a very dear friend that I haven't heard from in about forty years. Now her name is Mrs. Mear but

I knew her as Mary Gormon. Margaret Parilla and Jane Donnelly were two other very dear friends.

DD: What type of feelings did you have when you graduated?

RD: I was very proud to be finished with high school, and I was looking forward to college.

DD: Do you think there was a feeling of superiority among the students who were going to Ursuline rather than to a public school?

RD: No, I don't think so. I don't think we were in contact very much with students from other schools. We were a closely-knit group. We used to go to the Rayen-South football games. We looked forward to that game every Thanksgiving. It was a big event in Youngstown.

DD: Looking back at Ursuline, what types of changes would you have made within the school when you were there?

RD: I don't think I would have made any changes, I think we have had a very, very good school. We had a very fine academic training and I think I was very satisfied. I felt very well equipped when I went to college. I knew how to study. I had been taught to make good use of my time.

DD: What changes have you noticed in Ursuline since the time you went there?

RD: There have been many changes over the years, thousands of them. The school is much larger. There is a greater number on the faculty. There used to be just nuns on the faculty; now there are secular teachers along with the sisters and priests. There are many more students. Right now, we have a student enrollment of about fifteen hundred and forty.

DD: Are there any other comments you'd like to make about being a student at Ursuline?

RD: I was always glad I had the opportunity to go to a Catholic high school.

DD: Did you ask to be appointed a teacher at Ursuline or were you just told to teach there?

RD: I began my teaching career at Sacred Heart Grade School. I was there for two years and then I went to St. Columba's. They decided that I should go and study for my second degree. The next year I returned to Catholic University to get my master's degree. I had majored in French so I was sent to Ursuline to teach French.

DD: When you first came to Ursuline about how many hours per week did you teach?

RD: I had an ordinary schedule, and taught for about six hours. I taught five subjects or five classes and I had a study period or preparative period.

DD: What subjects have you taught at Ursuline?

RD: I have taught Latin, English, and French. Right now, I'm teaching Speech and Drama. I have two classes in Speech and one in Drama. Next semester I'll have two in Drama and one in Speech.

DD: What type of methods do you use in teaching?

RD: Well, in French I used a direct method most of the time. I did a lot of work with grammar because I realized that some students didn't have the foundation that they needed. They didn't even know English grammar. I always said that when you teach them French, they learn English, and this is true.

In Speech I teach the fundamentals first and then apply those fundamentals in rhetorical and oral practice. Right now, we're doing oral interpretations. In the Drama classes, we're doing scenes from plays.

DD: Would you say that teachers, on the whole, were more dedicated when you first started teaching?

RD: No. No, I think a teacher is almost always dedicated. I notice they work very, very hard. I don't think there's much difference in the dedication of the nuns today and the dedication of the nuns a few years ago. Teaching is their life. That is dedication, in a real sense.

DD: Is the lay faculty a very dedicated group?

RD: I think most of our lay faculty is very dedicated. I think any teacher must be dedicated because it's hard work.

DD: Regarding the pay scale, are men and women paid the same or has it changed through the years?

RD: It depends.

DD: As a religious teacher do you receive your salary directly?

RD: No, we never get paid directly. A check is sent to the superior. We never see the pay check.

DD: Are there any special rules or codes that a teacher has to follow?

RD: Oh definitely, there are many, many rules. We have a handbook with all kinds of rules in it. We also have rules that we have to comply with from the Ohio Department of Education, and from the North Central Association. Last week we had an evaluation from the North Central Association. About forty-two supervisors went through the school for two days. They evaluate our school every seven years. They examine the school and offer suggestions for improvement. When they return in seven years they really look for those improvements.

DD: Have these rules been in effect ever since you started teaching?

RD: Yes. They add new rules almost every year, but most of them remain the same.

DD: What type of relationship has there been between the faculty and the administration?

RD: I think it's a very amicable relationship. The faculty doesn't always agree with the administration, but they never come to blows or anything like that. There is a friendly atmosphere, I'd say. If people have complaints, they take them right to the principal and he deals with them.

DD: What type of relationship is there between the faculty and the students?

RD: I would say on the whole, it's a good relationship. I think most students get along with the teachers. They don't like us all the time, but most of the time they think we are all right. I hope they think we are anyway.

DD: Do you feel that there is any competition or jealousy among the teachers?

RD: No, I don't think so.

DD: Do you think that the administration handles the school from a liberal or conservative aspect?

RD: I would say the school is more conservative than liberal. We tried a liberal program two or three years ago. There were some ideas that didn't work out too well because we thought that we were being too liberal. The parents didn't like it. They thought we were giving the students too much freedom. So we went back to a more conservative approach. The next year we changed the schedule. We went back to having supervision of study halls, instead of a free study.

DD: Has there been any family dynasty at Ursuline? Have there been many students from one family?

RD: We've had many, many people from one family. We've had people who have graduated from Ursuline and then have sent their children and then their children send their children. We've had many families like that. I couldn't begin to mention any particular ones. I know I have taught many students who were the children of my former students. I just hope I won't be here when their grandchildren attend Ursuline.

DD: Can you compare and contrast the students today to when you began your career. Would you say that there was more expected of students when you first started teaching or is more expected of them now?

RD: I really think we got more out of them a few years ago than we get out of them now because right now, they have many more interests. Many of the students, especially seniors, work after school. You can see that their interest is not in their school work but is in their jobs. That's what I find among the juniors and seniors. With the freshmen and sophomores, I think it is different. I don't think they have as many interests

DD: Could you compare the overall quality of education at Ursuline from when it first started to now? Would you say it's better now?

RD: Well, the quality of education is probably better now because we have more to offer. We have many, many more courses in many different fields that we didn't have when I went to school. Then we just had a purely academic curriculum and a few commercial courses like shorthand and typing. I think we offer many more courses today.

DD: Do you think there are any problems caused by building the new school?

RD: No, I don't think so because we were very, very crowded and we were glad to have an addition. At one time we had students coming in at eight o'clock and finishing at two and then another group coming in at ten and finishing at four. Each group was in classes for six hours. We were so crowded that we couldn't even walk through the halls comfortably from ten o'clock until two.

DD: How long have you been directing the senior plays?

RD: For about thirty years. That's a long time.

DD: What type of plays do you like to do?

RD: I like to do musicals. I like drama better than comedy, but I find that if you do a musical, you can have many more students in the cast.

DD: What type of students usually tried out for parts? Were there many talented students?

RD: Well, in musicals, many students who had some sort of a voice and some experience in dancing tried out. When we take girls for dancing, we have tryouts and assume that they have had some training in dancing. We do the same with the voice. We have to find voices that are suitable before we do anything else.

In 1970, when we were thinking of doing "The Student Prince" we found Don Ronci, a very beautiful tenor. He has a degree in music from the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and now he has a fellowship, at Catholic University in Washington.

DD: What would you say was your most successful production?

RD: I don't know. I like everything that I've done. I've often wondered which was the best. People tell me that "The King and I," which is my first musical, was the best. I really can't say. I liked "My Fair Lady." I think it depends on the students that you have and how close you get to them. I liked "Oklahoma" and the students in it. I also think of "Camelot" as one of my favorites. I enjoyed "The Sound of Music". I really can't decide which one I like the best.

DD: How successful in attendance were the plays?

RD: I think all the musicals were really successful. Really we play to crowd audiences. People come to our musicals year after year, and the crowd gets bigger every year. Many of the same people see the plays through the years. We really have a following now.

DD: What type of problems and difficulties did you have in the production of a musical?

RD: There aren't many problems. There are always a few problems, but I don't think we have too many. Right now, we usually rent the back drops, so you don't have to do all that scenery building, and this facilitates the staging of the play. I always like to do a costume play. We haven't had too much trouble with any production.

It's hard work directing a play. You've got to get into shape and be ready at a certain date. There are so many loose ends to a musical.

DD: Do you think it's more difficult to direct a musical than a straight drama?

RD: Definitely. There are more things to think about in directing a musical. You have to think of a million angles. The entire production is the director's responsibility. A musical requires more rehearsal time and more planning because you have to consult with the choreographer, the music director and the technical director for lighting, costuming and sound effects.

DD: Is there any specific play that you would have liked to cast just because you liked the play, the book or the music?

RD: I always liked "The King and I" and I loved the music in that. I like the music in "My Fair Lady", too. When I select a play, I have to like it before I spend six or eight weeks doing it. I love the music in "Brigadoon" and I always wanted to do it, but I never did until last year. I don't think I ever want to repeat any plays. People ask me to do the "King and I" again but it doesn't thrill me to do a play twice.

DD: Who have been some of your outstanding students over the years?

RD: Well, there's Pat McCartan, a lawyer in Cleveland. He received an outstanding award when he played the warden in "The Valiant," a one-act play he did for a contest in Columbus.

Then Bob Cessna went on in drama. He's still in New York. I don't know what he is doing right now.

George Mansour got his first taste of drama in "South Pacific" which we did in his senior year at Ursuline. Then he went to the Playhouse and after that to New York. I think he played for a few months in "Jesus Christ Superstar" on Broadway.

Another talented student is Joanne Kaschak, who is now Mrs. Scarvelle. Joanne does quite a bit of work at the playhouse. She was one of my outstanding drama students.

I've had many fine student actors. I can't think of any more right now.

DD: Who have been some of your outstanding colleagues over the years?

RD: I've taught with Sister Kathleen, Sister Juliana and Sister Winifred. I taught with Mother Blanche for many

years also. Sister Alice Marie, who is our art teacher is a valuable assistant with the plays. She helps me with the costuming and staging of the entire production.

DD: Are there any other comments you'd like to make as a teacher at Ursuline?

RD: I've enjoyed my years here. I have had very good health during the time I've been at Ursuline. I don't think I've missed very many days and I haven't missed putting on a play in the last thirty years. I've really enjoyed it and I still enjoy it today. I always liked to work with children, especially high school students. It's really interesting and I hope I can keep that interest until I retire.

DD: During what year were you principal at Ursuline?

RD: I was a sort of principal for a year in 1946, when Father Gallagher met with that terrible fatal accident. That was in March. Father Holdbrook was assigned to Ursuline as principal. Father didn't have his master's degree, so that year he went to Catholic University to get his master's degree. While he was there I was holding the rein at Ursuline

I spent the whole year being principal. I had to take care of all the business angles of athletics. I think I even taught two classes in Speech at that time. I also took care of all the office work, and the administration. I was very glad when that year was over and Father Holdbrook was back.

DD: Did you apply for the position of principal or did they ask you to take it?

RD: They just told me to take it. I think Mother Blanche asked me. She thought it would be just for a month, until somebody was appointed in Father's place while he got his degree.

DD: What type of special difficulties did you face during that year?

RD: I had a little discipline problem with the boys. I don't think the boys liked to have a woman in charge of them, especially the senior boys. I had some difficulty, but I had much support from the men on the faculty, and also from the other teachers. I don't think I had too much trouble, but I was glad when it was over.

DD: Are there any other comments you'd like to make?

RD: No, I don't think so. I feel as though I've covered all the major points concerning the history of my years at Ursuline High School.