

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ursuline Sisters Project

Ursuline Sisters - 1965 to Present

O. H. 74

Sister Mary Alyce Koval, O.S.U.

Interviewed

by

Donna DeBlasio

on

May 14, 1975

SISTER MARY ALYCE KOVAL, O.S.U.

Sister Mary Alyce Koval was born on October 6, 1947, in Campbell, Ohio, the oldest of four children of John and Margaret Koval.

She attended Ursuline High School from 1961 until 1965, when she first entered the Ursuline Community. Sister Mary Alyce received her degree in Education from Youngstown University in 1970, after attending classes at the convent. She did her graduate work in Elementary Education at the University of Dayton.

While in high school, she enjoyed the challenge of Math, and it was at that time that she knew she wanted to teach. Sister Alyce has instructed primary, intermediate and junior high levels since making her first vows. The contact with the nuns at Ursuline High School helped influence her in choosing vocations and she still keeps in close contact with her many friends there.

Sister Mary Alyce is employed by the Diocese of Youngstown and finds her work as a teacher in service to God's people the most rewarding and satisfying job she can be doing.

TERRY A. BELLOTO
January 8, 1979

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INTERVIEWEE: SISTER MARY ALYCE KOVAL, O.S.U.

INTERVIEWER: Donna DeBlasio

SUBJECT: Ursuline Sisters - 1965 to Present.

DATE: May 14, 1975

D: This is an interview with Sister Mary Alyce Koval for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project on the Ursuline Sisters, by Donna DeBlasio on May 14, 1975, at 3:20 p.m. at St. Luke's School.

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

K: Yes. I am one of four children and I'm the oldest. My sister just got married a month ago. My brother is doing graduate work at the University of Michigan and my other brother is a sophomore at Ohio University in pre-med. I went to grade school in Youngstown at Sts. Peter and Paul, which has since closed. I then went to Ursuline High School and received my degree in Education from Youngstown University in 1970.

D: What influenced you to enter the religious life?

K: Well, I don't know if I could really pinpoint one incident. I had thought about being a nun when I was younger, but I sort of always put it out of my mind and I really didn't decide until I was a junior or senior in high school. I guess the contact I had with the nuns at Ursuline sort of gave me some ideas about becoming a nun, plus the fact that my aunt is also a nun. She's an Ursuline Sister, too, and she taught at Ursuline and I used to see her quite a bit.

D: Why did you join the Ursuline Sisters?

K: Probably because I had them for twelve years in school and I really never knew any other order.

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

K: When I first entered the order the convent was just beginning to change. We're called postulants when we first enter the order. Our postulant year starts in September to the following August. I entered the September after I graduated from high school.

It was a normal routine of getting up in the morning with all the other sisters in the house. I lived out at the motherhouse in Canfield. We would go to prayers and attend Mass every morning, then we usually had a few little chores to do around the house, like dusting, mopping or dishes. We had a full college schedule the first year. We took sixteen or eighteen hours a quarter. The teachers came out to the convent to teach; we didn't go to the University. It wasn't until Youngstown University became a State University that the sisters started to go to the University for classes. The next two years when I was a novice, that's when we wear a white veil, we didn't have as heavy of a college schedule but we were still going to college. We had more emphasis on prayer and the spiritual formation and the history of our Ursuline order and our foundress, Saint Angela

When classes were over, usually about six, we had dinner, recreation for about an hour, and then it was study until we went to bed. Probably it was similar to the same kind of schedule that a college student would have now.

D: How would you say this has changed since you've been in the order?

K: Well, for one thing, we don't have a large novitiate anymore like we had when I entered. There were forty-seven in the novitiate then; now we have four or five girls and they aren't living at the motherhouse. They're living in a parish convent with the professed sisters who are teaching at the different schools, so they have more contact with the sisters who are actually engaged in the apostolate. When we entered, the novitiate was like a separate community and all of our activities took place just with the nuns and the postulants who were in the novitiate and in training. Now the girls who are in training have more free contact with the professed sisters. By professed sisters, I mean those who have already professed their vows.

- D: What have your duties been with the order?
- K: Since I've made first vows I've been a teacher. I've taught for seven years and I enjoy it very much. I've had a variety of grades too. I've taught all levels too, primary, intermediate and junior high. If I really had to choose which area I liked best I don't think I could do it because I like teaching children.
- D: Could you describe a typical day for yourself as a teacher?
- K: All right. As a teacher I'm living at the motherhouse this year so we get up and pray together with the community and then we arrive at the school at eight o'clock. From eight o'clock until twelve fifteen it's teaching math, religion, reading and having a little milk break. In the afternoon, from one o'clock until a quarter to three we have the afternoon subjects like English and science. After school we have time to correct papers and do lesson plans. We go home and eat dinner and afterwards it's budgeting your own time. If you want to do lesson plans or watch television or go out for a walk or whatever, the time is your own.
- D: Could you perhaps describe special occasions and how they are celebrated among the sisters?
- K: Now or when I first entered the convent?
- D: Both.
- K: There has been a little change in the way holidays or special occasions are celebrated. When I first entered we were not permitted to visit our families, so big holidays were spent in the convent with the sisters and our families had to make the trip to the motherhouse or convent where we were living and visit us there. Now we have the freedom to spend part of the day with the sisters in our community and we can go home and celebrate the day with our families too. Going home, I think everyone would understand how this day would be spent with your family at home on Christmas, Easter, or Fourth of July. You would have a picnic or family get together or whatever; but in the convent our days always start with liturgy and on these special days the Mass is a special Mass. Everybody seems to participate more and put a lot more into the celebration.

The rest of the day is free. We have sisters in the infirmary and everyone makes a special effort to go and see them although we go on days during the week, too. We have a special meal and recreation. Like on the Fourth of July I know that occasionally, not every year and it's not a standing tradition, but somebody might decide to plan a couple of games out in the yard. One thing that sticks in my mind now is Halloween. We always have a masquerade, just at home in the convent. The nuns find costumes from anywhere and it's really hard to recognize them. You just wonder where they could get these costumes. Talk about creativity!

D: What do you remember about Ursuline High School when you went there?

K: I remember having a lot of fun. I was active in high school. I remember the nuns especially, because I had two or three nuns for teachers every year, which is unusual now because there aren't as many nuns to go along with the ratio of students. I remember the social occasions at Ursuline, the dances and parties. I remember assemblies and the regular routine of the day.

I really enjoyed my four years at Ursuline. There was always something going on. I lived close enough to the school too, so that if I had to walk home after school it was no problem.

D: What teachers do you remember as being particularly influential to you or memorable when you were at Ursuline?

K: I can remember one in particular. She was a nun. I had her for math my freshman and senior years. I really enjoyed her and I enjoyed math too, which is part of it. I enjoyed the challenge. In my sophomore and junior years, I had two different teachers, but I always sort of remembered what this one teacher used to tell us and how she used to make math really interesting. Then my senior year I finished my career at Ursuline with her, too. It seemed like I just got a real motivation from her, even to want to be a teacher and to want to teach like she did. Her method of teaching was discovery and that's what I appreciated. She really made you think and she didn't spoon feed it to you like a lot of teachers seem to do. I know when I taught eighth grade math, I used the same techniques that she did and I think my students really enjoyed the way I taught.

D: When you graduated, what kind of feelings did you have about leaving Ursuline?

K: My feelings were a little mixed, because when I graduated I knew I was going to enter the convent and I knew that I wanted to be a teacher since I was entering the Ursuline. We are primarily a teaching order. I thought that someday I might be back here teaching these kids. So I really left with a feeling of "Well, I'll leave for a while, but maybe in five or ten years I might be back." Since then, however, I've changed my mind about teaching high school and I like the little kids. I just enjoyed working with them. Whenever I go down to Ursuline High School or the convent down there, it just seems like it's automatic. Feelings come back to me of things that I did and things that happened to me, friends I've made. I still keep in contact with a lot of them. Many of my friends have moved out of the area and whenever we correspond, they'll ask how's Sister So-and-so and I feel like I have a close contact with them, too.

Plus, my Aunt is still teaching there so I do feel I have some contact with Ursuline.

D: What unique thing do you remember about the convents that you have lived in?

K: I have lived in three. I remember the motherhouse most I think, because I spent my first three years there and now the last two years I've lived there. It was a new building when I first entered and it was exploring all the nooks and crannies that took our time. I just remember the bigness of it; it was just like a big school. That's what I remember most about the motherhouse, I think. I lived at St. Nicholas and I remember the physical arrangements of that convent, because it's very conducive to study and prayer and recreation. St. Rose was a unique experience too, because it's on top of the school. So whenever you went home you had to walk through the empty halls of the school and sometimes it made you glad that you didn't have to go to school that day and other times, like in the summer, when the halls are just empty you think, "oh the kids should be filling these halls," and you miss them.

The most unique thing about each of these houses were

the people. I lived with different sisters in each house and each sister is a unique individual.

D: What sisters stand out in your memory and why since you've been in the Ursuline Order?

K: I think I remember the sister that was in charge of us when we first entered. Her name was Sister Mary Alice, too, but they call her senior, I'm junior. She was just a beautiful person in forming us and training us - trying to instill in us the qualities of an Ursuline Sister. I really appreciate everything she did. Then I remember some of the old sisters. Some of them have since died, but they just used to seem so gentle to me and they always had so many stories to tell. They really liked us; they were like grandmothers to us. They used to sneak us candy and things like that - just the simple things. Then I remember the principals at the schools where I taught. I have a yearning to be a principal someday. From the three principals of the schools where I taught, I've learned a lot as far as leadership qualities and also some things that I should avoid if I am ever appointed principal of a school. Then I think another person I really admire is the Superior of our order. There have been two since I was in the convent. Mother Edna Marie was Superior for about five years and now Sister Mary, and I think the responsibility that those women carry is just tremendous. I admire their strength and courage and everything else they do.

D: What years in the order stand out and why?

K: I think the years that I've been teaching. Every year has just been a different experience and so is every day that you meet these kids in the classroom. Right here I have thirty-nine desks in front of me. Each one of these children is unique. To meet each one of them everyday, to make them smile or make them happy or tell them that they read a page so nicely; I think these are the things that really make my day and if I didn't have the kids in front and everyday I had to do something where I couldn't meet people, I just can't imagine how my life could be as interesting.

D: What changes have you noticed in the order until now since you've entered?

K: Changes in our community?

D: Yes,

K: I think the biggest change that I've noticed is more emphasis on personal responsibility. Up until a few years ago everything we did was written down or dictated to us and we had to do it this way and we had to do it that way. There was a conformity with all the sisters in the community and now there's more of an opportunity of personal decision making and just an opportunity to grow yourself; to come to a realization of why you're in the convent and what you want to do, what your idea of religious life is and how you're going to live it the best way you can. I think the sisters that we have in our community now are really interested in the work of spreading God's kingdom, no matter what their job is. Before, we all used to be teachers and when you entered you knew you were going to be assigned to a school in three or four years and you would be teaching. Now many of the sisters who have been teaching for a while are getting into different apostolates, which is good, too, because they have given many good, fruitful and profitable years to teaching and now their interests are changing to serve God's kingdom and people in different ways. To me it seems that if you're in a situation and your heart's not there, and you're really not interested in what you're doing, I don't think you'll do a good job. You really have to want to do it and be fully committed to it to do a good job.

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

K: With all of the changes that have come about, I don't just think for girls entering the convent, but for young people making any decision, I think it's just that they have a really hard time making a decision. Things change so rapidly, even from year to year and for some girls, anybody really, to say that for the rest of my life I'm going to be doing this, I think that it's something that they're just unable to do. I've often thought of that too, because when I entered, there were twenty-one girls that entered with me. They were in my class. Now many of them have gone; they have realized that this just isn't the kind of life for them to live. We have some girls who are living with us and finding out what it is like. God knows if they'll enter and become sisters. I just think that there are so many changes. You just have to make that commitment for your-

self and know what you want to give and what you hope to receive from the community and you just have to work together to get it.

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

K: I think our main direction is service to God's people and as I said earlier, this used to be done solely through teaching. Now our idea of service is changing and I think we're going to be serving in more capacities than just teaching. I can't think of any other job that I'd like to do that I would be happy and satisfied in, but I think we have a more broad view of how God's people need us and we're answering that call too.

D: Do you have any other comments to make?

K: No, I can't think of any. I enjoyed the interview.

D: Thank you for doing the interview.

K: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW