

**Misericordia University Faculty Oral History Project**  
**Interview with Professor Betty Porzuczek, Fine Arts Department and**  
**Professor Don Skiff, Business Department - Excerpts**  
**04/12/2006**

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**Don Skiff:** I came in 1979.

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**David Wright:** Who hired you?

**Don Skiff:** Father Hill was the President; I think Sister Carolyn Burgholzer was the Academic Dean. I interviewed with them and I interviewed with three nuns and two members of the Business Department. They were looking for someone to teach computers. As I toured the college when I had the interview I said, 'but you don't have any computers. Who's teaching it and how do you do it?' One of the Sisters picked up the book that they were using and said 'we hold it up and look at the pictures.' I thought 'this is going to be a real challenging job.'

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**Don Skiff:** When I came, Father Hill was gone and the Dean was gone so no one that I interviewed with was here.

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**Harrison Wick:** Who was President then?

**Don Skiff:** Joe Fink had taken over as President and one of the other Sisters was Academic Dean, Sister Marie Dolores Moore.

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**David Wright:** Do you remember what the highest salary would have been?

**Don Skiff:** It was somewhere around \$24,000. I know for a time, before we switched the pay structure, I was pretty highly paid for business faculty, of course then you negotiated your own pay.

**Betty Porzuczek:** I'll give you some figures to laugh at since I came 11 years before you did Don. I remember the first year's pay I got was \$7,000 which was a \$500 pay cut from my first teaching job in Nebraska, so that's an idea of what inflation will do.

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**Don Skiff:** Back then we were a little more liberal than we are now, so if you brought your kids to work with you there was no big deal. I taught night classes and my office was on the third floor in the old chaplain's quarters, the part with the full bathroom and

showers with sliding doors, and I would bring my kids in when I had night classes and they would sit in the tub and take a bath while I was teaching my night class, and that was fine with everybody.

**Betty Porzuczek:** The Sisters were wonderful with working around family concerns because I ended up having three children and I never took a maternity leave. They were willing to adjust the schedule.

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**Paul Fetzer:** Now in the years that you've been here how has the Back Mountain changed?

**Betty Porzuczek:** The Back Mountain has so many more businesses and so much more traffic.

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**Betty Porzuczek:** I know when I came here, Dallas was described to me as a rural area, and now we wouldn't call it rural, we would probably call it suburban.

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**Betty Porzuczek:** But just in Dallas itself.... in the early 1970's I expect that it would have been Fino's Drugstore, that's always been there, and the bank which has undergone several changes, it used to be Miner's Bank and then United Penn Bank, but the building itself was always there, and then the Acme Market, which is where the family practice and shopping center is now. Tiny little thing, but I used to shop in there.

**Don Skiff:** As I recall all of the grocery stores were smaller then.

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**David Wright:** Did you go up to Harvey's Lake?

**Don Skiff:** Yes, I used to go up to Harvey's Lake a lot. We used to go to Frances Slocum. We would go to Moon Lake, a lot of that kind of thing with the kids. We did a lot of bike riding. We would ride from Plymouth down to the square, and go to Boscov's and ride the escalators. We used to love bike riding and that kind of thing. Back in the Joe Fink days we used to have fireworks on campus, we used to have big bands playing out in the yards, and students dancing to great party nights in the cafeteria where they had bands; drinking was allowed back then with limitations, but everybody came with an ice chest. I used to go because I wasn't married. I used to volunteer to chaperone, but I liked to dance and my kids loved to dance even when they were little. There was just the one movie theater and it wasn't like the movie theaters that there is now, nothing like that.

**Harrison Wick:** Which one, the Gateway Cinema in Edwardsville?

**Don Skiff:** Gateway was the one we used of course.

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**David Wright:** Do you remember when you were first here, were there any specific things you would do for entertainment on campus?

**Betty Porzuczek:** Not that I can think of, but Don is correct about the big explosive fun kind of things, it seems that I remember a lot more activities that were like department picnics and faculty softball games, and things like that.

**Don Skiff:** Yes, I did not mention that, but yes there were a lot more of those.

**Betty Porzuczek:** But you're really making an interesting point that a lot of the activities may have been more family oriented because when I look at the list of student activities today it really is more geared toward the students, and that's not necessarily a bad thing, but it's just a little different.

**Don Skiff:** Not like the cookout type where they would just say let's move dinner outside for the students tonight and whoever wants to come can come, and sometimes you would even go in the cafeteria and get food and bring it out. I remember we brought blankets and we'd lay on the lawns out here. I remember doing that with my kids, and everybody gathering, students and faculty, and we would have a grand time. They would have some games and those types of things if you were interested in that. I remember for years at the very beginning of every semester there used to be that little patio when you go out of the Cougar's Den.

**Betty Porzuczek:** That big concrete slab.

**Don Skiff:** Yes, the big slab, I used to go over and we would bring the round table sets and we would put table cloths on them. I brought kerosene oil lamps and we would put them on every table. I strung white lights in the trees and all around it, so we made it like a café festive; we had a cocktail party with food. We had a line with just finger food, and we invited all the business students, new and existing, and everybody dressed up, the girls came in heels, and we invited the President and Deans and they would always show up even if they didn't stay long, and we had cases of wine. No one ever got drunk, no one ever left drunk, and it was more like a business cocktail party. Everybody would sit, the President would go from table to table with the Vice President and visit with the students.

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**Harrison Wick:** You were saying that you were pretty much in charge of the IT department?

**Don Skiff:** When I came here there were no computers, and I bought our first computer at Radio Shack for the Business Department so that we could use it in teaching, and students could come in our office to do homework actually. As we started buying more computers, I was the one who did all of the purchasing and recommended what they should get and when they came I installed them in every office.

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**Don Skiff:** There was nobody, we had no IT person on this campus. I did it all for many years, and the first mainframe that we got for the Registrar's office and the Business office, I did the prep work for that and recommended who we hired and had it put in.

**David Wright:** So you're saying that before or sometime in the 1980's all the registration was by hand?

**Don Skiff:** Everything was by hand. There was literally not a single computer of any type on this campus.

**Betty Porzuczek:** Right.

**Betty Porzuczek:** We didn't even all have phones in our offices. We had shared phones, there was no voice mail, and there were no message machines.

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**Betty Porzuczek:** There was a time though when all of the faculty mailboxes were in one room, including the boxes for the people in the science building.

**Don Skiff:** That's right, I remember that.

**Betty Porzuczek:** So they had to come over to what used to be called the Administration Building, now Mercy Hall.

**Don Skiff:** They were in the lounge for a while where we had the donuts. Everybody went there to check their mail.

**Betty Porzuczek:** Everybody had to go there for their mail.

**Don Skiff:** And to get a coffee and a donut. That's why we had so much gabbing and everything when we saw each other.

**Betty Porzuczek:** You would see each other all of the time.

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**Don Skiff:** The first thirteen years I taught year round, summers too. I'll just say that wasn't too smart.

**David Wright:** Were you on a twelve month contract?

**Don Skiff:** No, I was on a normal nine months at first and I was off for the summer, but there was one semester that the whole business department was Mary Carden and I. People had laughed that we hadn't done any hiring and we were the only two, and I used to laugh at my classes because I would go from finance to whatever I could finish up and the finance that I couldn't quite get done in the one class in the next because the same people would follow me to the class, literally, and then we all go to our next class.

**David Wright:** You and the class would just change rooms.

**Don Skiff:** Yes, really we could have stayed in the same room. It would have been easier; it was a little red schoolhouse kind of thing. That class fortunately didn't last for too long and then we hired some faculty and that helped out, but we were always short-handed for the summer.

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**Don Skiff:** Then I finally took a summer off, and I realized that part of why I liked teaching was to have those summers off, and so I haven't taught a summer class since.

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**Suzanne Pierce:** What are some memorable moments or anecdotes you have of Misericordia?

**Don Skiff:** I think getting my tenure was a memorable moment for me. Joe Fink was the President and at one of our meetings he announced that everyone who came in 1979 had gotten their tenure.

**David Wright:** What year would this be?

**Don Skiff:** It would be 1984 or 1985, possibly 1986, and I didn't say anything or think anything of it in the next year as I ran into him. He used to be at most meals in the cafeteria and he visited with us, and I just happened to mention to him one time "you know you were wrong, I didn't get my tenure." I came in 1979, but I hadn't applied for it either, and three days later I got a letter in the mail from the President granting me tenure retroactive a year and I never even applied. I was Chair of the department, ....I was Chair for many years. That was memorable.

**David Wright:** Does that mean there wasn't a faculty committee at that time?

**Betty Porzuczek:** No, there was not.

Tenure was granted directly at the whim of the President. Presumably we had to have proven that we were worth something.

**Don Skiff:** Right, but if he liked you it was granted to you, and he liked me I'll admit it.

**Betty Porzuczek:** There was no formal paperwork or going through the committee process that we're accustomed to now.

**David Wright:** You could just go to him and say, "I'd like to be considered for tenure," and he'd give it to you.

**Don Skiff:** Sometimes you didn't even have to do that.

**Betty Porzuczek:** They could grant you tenure without you even requesting it.

**Don Skiff:** I got it, I never requested it, and I didn't apply.

**David Wright:** Did you know people that didn't get it?

**Betty Porzuczek:** Yes, many.

**Don Skiff:** Yes.

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**Don Skiff:** .... we were a small enough college then that everybody just knew. The students talked, the faculty talked, you knew, the President knew, and the Dean knew that you were a good teacher. They knew and they didn't have to do an evaluation. If you were on a bunch of committees everybody knew it. If you were active, the President would know. Whereas today, to some degree I think that's true, but they still want the documentation. It was a lot different then.

**Betty Porzuczek:** One of my fond memories is related to the Agnes Flood of 1972 because Misericordia was a regional evacuation center and there were literally hundreds of people staying here who had lost their homes. The way the college family pitched in to help with that was just wonderful. It was just by sheer coincidence that McHale Hall was under construction at that time, and they had lost some of their heavy equipment with the electricity outages. I don't know exactly what the problem was, but they brought in draft horses to work some machinery and I remember coming up just to watch those horses at work helping to build this brand new ultra modern building with the help of draft horses.

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**Betty Porzuczek:** I think that we have to mention Sister Eloise McGinty.

**Don Skiff:** Yes.

**Betty Porzuczek:** Sister Eloise was the Registrar. Literally everyone on campus, including the President, was afraid of Sister Eloise. You toed the mark with Sister Eloise.

**Harrison Wick:** Why?

**Betty Porzuczek:** If you were one minute late turning your grades in she'd call you. She called me at home once and rounded me up one side and down the other.

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**Don Skiff:** I found with her that if you finally bit the bullet and really stood up to her once, after that she was your best buddy. I did it.

**Betty Porzuczek:** I was afraid to try it.

**Don Skiff:** One time I thought I was right and I stood up to her and after that when she saw me she'd smile and she'd still tell me if I did something wrong, but she was a different person, very pleasant. I think it was her way of testing people.

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**David Wright:** Can you tell us anything about Sister Carmel; was she here when you arrived?

**Betty Porzuczek:** She was the head of the Music department when I arrived; she was the one who hired me. The Dean at the time was Sister Regina Kelly, and the President was Sister Miriam Theresa O'Donnell. I remember interviewing with Sister Carmel and also with Sister Regina, I was very young at the time, but I still remember. I wasn't that much older than the students, but I remember sitting across from Sister Regina Kelly and when she was finished asking all her questions she asked "May I ask you how old you are?" That was the final thing she wanted to know. I guess she thought I was old enough to be a teacher. She was Department chair person and when she got really burned out from being Department Chairperson the Music Department Chairperson was Sister Marie Dolores Moore. She's a person who's really genuinely interested in the history of the college and preserving it.

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**Betty Porzuczek:** And sometimes it's the silliest little things you remember, like Olney Craft. I remember over the years being on several committees he was also on, and his trademark was that he carried around this big briefcase all the time; it went everywhere. When he came into the committee meeting it was a ritual. He would very slowly put the briefcase down on the table, unlatch the side, unlatch the other side, slowly open it up, and everybody at the table just waited with bated breath. He had an unbelievable collection of pens and pencils in that briefcase. They were all organized, catalogued, and every color you could possibly imagine. He even had a pencil sharpener. He would go

through this five to ten minute ritual at the beginning of every committee meeting, and we couldn't start until he was all set. That's what I remember about Olney Craft.

**Don Skiff:** I remember every time it got the least bit cool, out came those big rubber boots with the buckles and that heavy coat, and he'd wear that hat with the...

**Betty Porzuczek:** Black leather with the sheepskin flaps.

**Don Skiff:** With those flaps that would come down that you tie under your chin, and he'd tie them under his chin sometimes.

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**Suzanne Pierce:** You mentioned what departments you worked in; can you tell us something about some of the people that were in your departments?

**Don Skiff:** Imelda Brislin always comes to my mind. She was such a sweet lady; impeccable dress. She must have been Mary Carden's sister I think, because every day she had blazers and matched completely. She taught the secretarial type program and she was going one day to teach them how to use the duplicating machine. Only she said, how did she say it in front of the class? "Today I'm going to teach you how to..."

**Betty Porzuczek:** Reproduce. And she didn't have a clue why the class just broke up, she had to come and ask us and we had to tell her. She did not have a clue, because we often called it reproducing when you had to do something on the old machines.

**David Wright:** When was she here?

**Don Skiff:** She was here when I came, and I believe she left whenever it was that we terminated that program.

**Betty Porzuczek:** It wasn't long.

**Harrison Wick:** In the early 1980s.

**Don Skiff:** Yes, it was the early 1980s when we ended that program. That ground floor room used to be a typewriter room and we taught typing on the old typewriters.

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**Harrison Wick:** What courses did you teach?

**Betty Porzuczek:** In the Music Department days I was a piano teacher. I taught all of the piano majors, so I was involved in preparing for recitals and that sort of thing, because there was a recital requirement for graduation. No, actually there were other teachers that taught piano, because there were piano minors and other students who just needed to get basic skills done and that would get done with other teachers. I also taught the junior level theory courses, once in awhile I'd do a sophomore level called 'Ear training and sight singing'.

**Harrison Wick:** What do you teach now?

**Betty Porzuczek:** Now I teach in the core in the Fine Arts Department, we devised a course that replaced the old fashioned 'Music Appreciation' and 'Art Appreciation' and the two are sort of rolled into one now. It's an integrated approach to the Arts, because in addition to music and art we do some architecture and, as time allows, theater and dance. It's a bit of a history-based course; it's very interesting to teach.

**Don Skiff:** Back then we were smaller. So other than accounting, which I could never stand, everything that ever was taught in business you had to be able to teach.

**Harrison Wick:** A real generalist.

**Don Skiff:** Yes, I mean, you had your favorite areas, but it was just that we had so many courses and there weren't enough faculty.

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**Harrison Wick:** Were you involved in any campus activities outside the classroom, Faculty Follies, that kind of stuff?

**Don Skiff:** No, I never did the Faculty Follies.

**Betty Porzuczek:** I did the Faculty Follies.

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**Betty Porzuczek:** I did it a couple of times, but the one that was memorable was when I borrowed a pink rabbit costume, with big tall ears, and stuffed a pillow in it so it was very fat, and I played a serious piece of music, Mozart actually. And of course I never lived that down; students thought that was really funny. Those Faculty Follies were really fun.

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**Harrison Wick:** You were on the first faculty senate, correct?

**Don Skiff:** Yes, we had an all-college senate, faculty senate. We went back and forth.

**Harrison Wick:** There was an all staff?

**Don Skiff:** It was an all college senate, we voted on academic issues along with the maintenance people. They voted on academic issues; we voted on what kind of trees should be planted. That was under Dr. Fink.

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**David Wright:** Tell me about any special events that happened on campus, or speakers. I know that you mentioned the time of the flood, but any other notable people or events?

**Don Skiff:** I always thought graduation under the tent was a really big event. Not everybody agreed, but I always thought that was a spectacular event when we had graduation under the tent in the yard. It was just so beautiful up here that I always thought that was great.

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**David Wright:** Were there aspects of the 1960s that were out in the rest of the country, here on the campus? In what ways would you say that these events happened on campus?

**Betty Porzuczek:** Yes, they did. I can speak of them in two levels, the larger level first. In the 1960s, and remember we were still an all-girls college, was when there was probably the largest amount of political activism going on around campus that I've seen. On a personal level, for the first couple of years that I was here young students would relate to me easily because I was a young female too. I can't even tell you how many times I've had one of those students in my offices sobbing her eyes out because either her

boyfriend or her fiancée just got drafted. Those girls were just in anguish over it, and so were their boyfriends. There was a lot of controversy about the draft. A lot of young men were doing things to avoid the draft, like staying in school for no good reason, or going to Canada. And yes, we saw some of that first hand. And I could relate to it on a personal level also because my own husband was a Vietnam veteran. That was a tough time, a very tough time.

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**David Wright:** Can you describe any of the college Presidents or Administrators that you remember, in particular interactions, notable characters, conflicts, things that come to your mind that are out of the ordinary?

**Don Skiff:** Joseph Fink stands out always in my mind. He was the President when I came, but not when I interviewed. I just think that it was so easy to talk to him, just walk into his office anytime and gab. For a few years he and I and about 4 or 5 more of us had the 'beard clubs' and we all grew beards and moustaches including the President. He would have lots of social events.

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**Betty Porzuczek:** I remember Father Bill when he was interim President; I had been invited to give a presentation at the University of Scranton. At that time they were having a new type of cultural event series, so I was invited to do one of those. I prepared for it and I went and did it, drove up there by myself, even had to cancel a couple of classes to do it. I looked out in the audience, and there was Father Bill, he'd made a special trip up. I never told him about the event, I never invited him to come, and he just showed up. He was the only person from Misericordia who did come. And I was very touched by that. So yes, he was very involved.

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**Paul Fetzer:** Talking about the Presidents changing, and with what the college is going through now with the University status, were there changes in the college's identity over the years?

**Don Skiff:** We've always been trying to get over the 'girl's school on the hill' mentality and also the health science/nursing identity. For so long we were so big in nursing, so everybody thought it was a girls nursing school on the hill. So it's taken a long time, and I don't know if we've done it yet.

**Betty Porzuczek:** No, I don't think we've completely done it yet. It's a change of image. But I think it will happen.

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**Don Skiff:** Getting the new buildings and so on, I think, has helped our image a great deal. On campus it's kind of like did the community we live in grow up? This campus has changed from when we came. I don't know if there were changes from when you

and I came here, but obviously this library wasn't here and there was a maintenance shack here. Literally that's what it was, a little shed. And with the dorms, the one dorm out here wasn't here, the townhouses weren't here, the tennis courts, none of that.

**Harrison Wick:** You had two buildings.

**Don Skiff:** Yes, we really had lots of grass. We had big lawns, lots of big lawns.

**Harrison Wick:** St Joseph's cottage is gone and McGann Hall.

**Don Skiff:** Even the renovations, I mean, the administration building prior to the renovations had gorgeous wood, but lots of cubbyholes all over the place with lots of tiny offices.

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**Suzanne Pierce:** When do you first remember male students on campus?

**Betty Porzuczek:** I remember a couple of males in our department, maybe as early as 1971. That probably was before the college officially became co-ed, because we were an all-female school and King's was an all-male school, we started a program with them that if we were offering courses they weren't, they could send students out here and vice versa. So the first male students we had weren't actually our students, they were King's students that came here to take some courses. We had a couple of music majors that fell in under that program because you couldn't, and you still can't, major in music at Kings so they would come out here. Then when Misericordia officially went co-ed, if you had a class of 25 people, it'd be unusual if you had more than 1 or 2 guys and some classes would have no men. The change-over has happened very gradually, I noticed it really exploding more in the past 5 years.

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**David Wright:** When you first had males on campus, did you ever talk with them to get a sense of what it was like?

**Betty Porzuczek:** Yes, I did. It was difficult for them. It took a lot of courage for a guy to come to an all-female perceived campus. And sometimes the girls didn't do much to make the guys feel comfortable. If you have a class with 19 girls and 1 guy, the guy gets embarrassed and the girls spend a lot of time giggling. They just didn't know how to cope with a guy in the room. I think it was very, very difficult.

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**Suzanne Pierce:** When did you notice the college was having financial difficulties, and how did it affect you?

**Betty Porzuczek:** Well if you go six years without a raise I think you know something's wrong.

**David Wright:** Was that in the early 1980s?

**Betty Porzuczek:** Yes, and I think that early to mid-1980s was when a lot of programs were being closed. That's a pretty good clue also. And contingent with that, when programs close, some faculty members have to be let go. A lot of people lost their jobs.

**Don Skiff:** That was tough.

**Betty Porzuczek:** Yes, it was.

**Harrison Wick:** There was property sold too, wasn't there?

**Betty Porzuczek:** There was property sold, yes, a farm. Wasn't that a farm across the road that was sold?

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**David Wright:** When would you say this changed?

**Betty Porzuczek:** The late 1980s. It's been steadily better ever since.

**Don Skiff:** There were 2 or 3 years under Joe Fink that we got a 10% raise every year because we were so far behind.

**Betty Porzuczek:** Yes, we had to play catch-up.