

## Oral History

Janet Rugato Lehecka

### College Misericordia Class of 1968

My full name is Janet Rugato Lehecka and I grew up in Great Neck, located in Nassau County, New York. Great Neck borders on Queens County and is only a short train ride from New York City.

I graduated from College Misericordia in May 1968. I am proud to be a member of this class, not only because we were the largest class in the history of the College at that time, but also because we were instrumental in bringing about changes that reflected the changing times and the changing needs of students.

Having graduated from both Catholic grammar and high schools, I was comfortable with the idea of attending a small, Catholic women's college. The Sisters of Mercy taught me at the grammar school level while the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart educated me at the secondary school level. St. Mary's High school in Manhasset, New York was an all girls' school. It was a small school and by the time of graduation all of the class of 1964 knew each other. So, when it came time to pick a college, Misericordia was one of my top choices. It was small, reasonably priced, not too far from home and accepted a strong B student. Not everything was based on the SAT. This is still true today.

The class of 1968 was and is most fortunate to have been and remain a very nice class as was my high school class. My main circle of friends included: Bettsi Jaeger, who teased me to death!, Candy Winner, Maria Grilli, Susan Cronin, Patricia Makely, Rosie Murphy, Patricia Temprine, and Jane Pugsley. In addition to these ladies, two of my classmates from grammar school and high school attended CM with me, Maureen McGuire and Mary Guelpa. Bonnie Butler graduated St. Mary's with us and we were happy to have her at CM with us as well. It should be noted though and this writer stated it in the Memories of the class of 1968 that we all got along nicely. We could all chat with each other freely and sit with each other at meal times and enjoy each other's company. One of my dear friends from my major is Marybeth Garey Farrell. Although we don't get to see each other often we make the most of the times we spend together.

Besides the required courses need for the Bachelor of Arts degree, the majority of my courses were in the area of the Social Sciences with the biggest concentration in Sociology since that was my major. Related fields in Social Studies and Psychology dovetailed with courses required for the Sociology major. Many an hour was spent with Mary Farrell McCarthy, Elaine Fitzpatrick and Mary Jane Mesharer (2 dayhop students and fellow majors) studying for exams in our major.

Freshmen year found me in McGann Hall, which housed 49 freshmen in house 1 and house 2. Sophomore year, Alumnae Hall was my home. Junior year, I was on the first floor of McAuley Hall. Senior year was back in Alumnae Hall.

At the time I was a student at CM, dorm space was at a premium. There was McGann Hall, Alumnae Hall, and McAuley Hall on campus. The majority of Junior year students were housed in the Lake Street houses, Rosary, Carlow, and Mercy are the main ones I remember. The Home Economic students in Junior year, were out at Lake Louise with Sister Marion Joseph. At one point, sophomores from the class of 1967 were housed in House of Studies, which is now in its expanded form, Mercy Center. House of Studies was part of the Sisters of Mercy novitiate. However, since there were a number of rooms to spare, it was used as a dorm. Needless to say, the students who lived there were not happy campers and who could blame them. The rooms themselves were like cells.

McHale and Gildea Halls in addition to the Town Houses are now the main housing units in use. To my knowledge Alumnae Hall was not being used as a dorm, but this has changed. Rosary Hall on Lake Street has been home to the Women with Children's program. This is such a worthwhile and needed program and I am so proud that CM has invested in such an endeavor.

The campus was and remains beautiful. Banks Center was known as Merrick Hall and the snack bar was a favorite meeting spot for resident and dayhop students alike. Classes were held in then named, Hafey-Marion Science Hall, and the Administration Building. The music majors also had access to a small building that resembled a little house, Regina Hall later called the MacDonald Art Gallery), situated near the Administration Building (Mercy Hall).

The tennis courts that are now in use at CM are located in a different spot than those used from 1964-1968. The previous courts were located quite a distance from the back of the new beautiful library. The Anderson Sports Center significantly dwarfs the gymnasium that was situated below Walsh Auditorium. Small though it was, many an enjoyable basketball game was played and won there by the Highlanders. The Cougars now hold the standard for CM's stellar basketball teams.

For fun, we had the mixers with Kings College and Scranton University. We went to the movies, dated our boyfriends, and shopped in Wilkes-Barre.

Most of the teachers, who taught the Class of 1968 are either no longer alive or retired. Dr. Knapich (Biology), Drs. Manganzin and Hanlon (History), Dr. Wtulich and Mr. Fondi (Sociology), Mrs. Whealy (Psychology), Father Beeda (Theology), Mr. Fenstamacher (Philosophy), Sister Carmel McGarigle for music, and Sister Sharon Gallagher are some of the many teachers that come to mind. The English majors were treated to the late Sister Regina Kelly (Sister Maria del Rey as we knew her). Sister Regina and all the teachers at CM at the time challenged us to the utmost. When I took some graduate courses a few years after graduation I found that the education we were given was a cut above some of the more prestigious universities on Long Island.

Since I worked in the kitchen, as did many CM students, to help defray our room and board costs, I got a chance to know the staff of Saga foods. Joe, the baker, who prepared

the dough for me every morning, so I could make the donuts, could always be talked into switching the dessert menu to blondies or chocolate chip cookies! The chefs, Paul and Ray made me my eggs in the morning before I got started. Hazel, one of the servers told me that there were no calories in the bread once it was toasted. I like that one! Ruthie, made the salads and Michael helped with cooking and cleaning of the kitchen. The dish room, with the glasses, tray plates and silverware coming at you a mile a minute was a challenge. Many a Friday night Kathy Snyder, Grace Tierney and I would race through the chores and clean up so we could get back to the dorm, shower so we could either go out or relax in our rooms, the smoker or the snack bar.

To pick one memorable moment at CM is difficult for me. I had such a nice experience for my four years there that it is hard to make a choice. I think being well regarded by my peers and teachers was of great value to me.

Unfortunately, due to my schedule I was not able to participate in any extra curricular activities. However, since the school was small, there was always a sense of involvement in the life of the campus.

As previously mentioned the faculty held us to high standards. The Sisters not only taught us, but were our housemothers. Those of us who attended 12 years of Catholic school didn't seem to react negatively to this. The students who didn't have 12 years of parochial school accepted the situation but were clearly not thrilled. As Bettsi Jaeger has pointed out, more than once, if you got into trouble during the evening hours, after lights out, you had 10 minutes to save yourself because the nun could not come out of her room with her head uncovered. Pajamas with a robe and slippers were fine, but the veil had to be on! Most of the housemothers were reasonable about the 24 hours date permission rule. Some were not, so you had to be sure that you asked this group of Sisters permission to go on a date 24 hours before. I remember the lines on Wednesday and Thursday nights to secure the coveted okay. The rules about no smoking in the rooms and not sneaking into the smokers, and curfews were strictly enforced. Late lights could be requested and the time limit was 11pm. During the week at 10pm we stood in our doorways while the housemother said the evening prayer. Some of them sprinkled you with holy water or just sprayed it into the air.

Since graduating I have married, have 2 children, who are married and one grandchild. Having completed 32 ½ years in public service, 18 as a caseworker for Nassau County and then 14 ½ as a Probation Officer, I was fortunate enough to be able to retire in 2000. After 2000, I have worked at different intervals for the Nassau County Mental Health Assoc, and for Sanctuary East, a substance abuse treatment center.

Currently I am the president of the Long Island Reiki Connection and am certified as a Reiki Master Teacher and Magnified Healer. Before I retired, I received certification in Thought Field Therapy and maintain a small Reiki Practice. I am also available for stress reduction/relaxation presentations and workshops.

College Misericordia has a wonderful future. All the advantages of a University with the heart centered focus of a small college will appeal to many students and their parents. The ongoing focus on community and concern for the overall well being of the student is not a value that is available at many other colleges. There is also an openness to change and the knowledge that as the career market changes so must the schools that educate the people for them.

Dr. MacDowell, his staff and faculty, are highly invested in the continued success of CM. Thus, there is no doubt that the school will thrive and yet stay true to its mission statement and base its overall functioning on the standards of the Sisters of Mercy. Mercy, Service, Justice and Hospitality never go out of style.