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Sister of Providence

Interview date: January 5th, 2010

(Please state your name and tell me where you went to school and when you graduated.)

I'm a Sister of Providence. I went to St. Luke's Hospital School of Nursing in Pittsfield, MA and I graduated in 1948.

(What brought you into nursing?)

I wanted to be a nurse. I wanted to be a nurse. And we had a couple of neighbors who were nurses and I was very impressed with them: <Names withheld Privacy>We lived between them and when I was a senior in high school my father was operated on and I went to the hospital; it was V.J. Day and I wanted to be a nurse. He was impressed with the students there. God rest him.

(Could you tell me a little about the program and some memories of the program?)

It was run by the Sisters of Providence. And a very memorable sister there was Sister Mary R. She was an excellent nurse and an excellent sister. She was wonderful to our students. And the other thing too, was we bonded together... we were cadet nurses. I was in the last class of cadet nurses. We didn't have the uniform. But it was a great experience and I think a main thing is we still meet. I'm very friendly with the students in my class in training. We meet once a month. They go out for dinner. They used to meet at Toni's home and have coffee Tuesday mornings, but now that we're all getting older they go for lunch. And sometimes there's 20 there. And then the whole alumni; there's maybe 70 or 80 that go to Christmas parties, and it's always wonderful to go back and reminisce. It's like we never left. One of the very interesting things in the program was the affiliations. We went to Shiners' Hospital for a month in Springfield. we went to Metropolitan State Hospital for psyche in Waltham and we went to Boston City Hospital for

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communicable. And those were all very good experiences. We met students from other diploma programs from all over. And it was fun.

(When you first went in, was there a difference between the cadet core program and the regular diploma program?)

No it was the same. I'm sure the program met the criteria for the cadets but it wasn't separate. In fact there were only two students in the class who weren't cadets. In the first three months, all the hospitals' schools of nursing of the Sisters of Providence -- that would be St. Luke's. that would be Providence, it would be Mercy and it would be St. Vincent's in Worcester -- We all went to the Elms College for three months. And we got A & P there, and sociology. That was a great experience too.

(Did you get college credit for it?)

No I don't think so. It didn't mean anything at that time.

(The first three months you went to the college, did you go through any clinical at that time?)

Nope. It was just college.

(Was there a probationary period?)

Yes, after that there was a probationary period. It meant you were going to make it or you didn't.

(What criteria did she use and what experiences did you have that told her you would make it?)

We were working on the floors and we'd get rotated on the floors.

(When you were on the floors, what did you do?)_

Giving baths, feeding patients, passing meals, and eventually we got to give medications and do treatments. But we had a lot of role models. The sisters were wonderful role models.

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(So you weren't jst the students on the floors.)

Oh no. The sisters... there was a sister that ran every floor. They kept us in line but we learned a lot. We were closely supervised.

(And did you have a test or final exam at the end of the probationary period?)

I'm sure there was an evaluation, but it was so long ago it escapes me.

But we were very happy when we got our cap.

(What did the cap look like?)

It was a very traditional one. It had one narrow velvet band on it and every year you got another band so by the time you're ready to graduate you had three bands. And you could lose a band for disciplinary measures. They were black velvet - a very pretty cap.

(I'm accustomed to seeing the cap the first year is one and... by the time you got three you were at the end...)

Uh huh. they only took that much space; they were narrow. And when you graduated you got a wide band. We had the wide band on our cap.

(Different schools had different caps.)

They did. They did. Ours was more traditional. We used to have it starched at the Chinese laundry. He had to fold it and three pleats and... It was a bid deal to have a cap.

(And the capping ceremony...)

It was and beautiful. We got the Florence Nightingale lamp. It was lovely.

(Tell me more after you finished your probationary period and at that point... how... that was the end of your first year?)

We were implementing what more we were doing in class. We had clinical instructors on the floor too. So the clinical instructors would help us with the treatments' and the medications. There was a lot of penicillin given in that day and it was given like every four hours and the syringes, some of the syringes were plastic. We used save them. We'd say this is my first injection and it had the plastic

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(laughs)l and that was a big deal. You never gave your first injections alone. The clinical instructor was there; she was on the floor with you. And we had to boil the water to test the urine. We had to prep people for surgery. And before we started to shave people, we'd have to shave each other. We had to give an abdominal prep and it itched after. And we gave injections to each other too. I jumped and was black and blue. It was good. It was a great experience. I had a great time with training. It was hard. It was very strict and difficult. when I entered he novitiate, it wasn't that big a deal because I was used to the strict schedule and I didn't mind the novitiate at all it was easy.

(When you finished school, what was your first job?)

I worked on the second floor - med-surg.

(Did you feel at that time that you were completely prepared for what you were doing?)

I felt very prepared for what I was doing. Sister Mary Eileen was on the floor. I worked on second floor with Sandra S., and there were students on the floor too. And every afternoon at three o'clock she made us sit down in the kitchen and watched the lights on the floor. It was wonderful.

(When you were in training, at school, did you work on the different shifts; evening and...)

Yes. We did. And there was a night sister on; she was on from seven to seven.

(At any time were you basically left alone and not had... were used as staff...)

No. Well, we were, but there always was supervision. The sisters were always around. I kind of miss it in the hospital now.

(I know that you've gone on and in addition to the nuns, you've gone on as far as education for yourself and you also taught. Could you kind of go through your experiences...?)

I worked a year after I graduated and then I entered the community. And after I got out of the novitiate, I worked at Brightside with the children. And I loved that. I was there just about two months and a set of twins came with measles. We didn't

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know [*they were*] going to get measles, but they did and they gave it to everybody: all the toddlers. I remember having to give injections to children and I just loved them; I loved the children. At that time they were building Brightside; the new Brightside building and they were taking pictures and we were washing the children's hands for dinner and all the kids were there washing their hands and they were sitting down and the photographer came in and I was holding Jackie so she took my picture and the students stood up and they were grabbing on to my beads. And that was the picture! And my brother; he was two years older than me -- Frank, God bless him, said it was so embarrassing. Your sister goes to a convent and her picture is in every saloon! He didn't think it was so funny. When he was dying we laughed and talked about it. I took care of him and we talked a lot about it. He was so embarrassed. (laughs). (some comments) I was holding Jackie and one day... we used to put the children together like we had small card tables and we had brothers and sisters together. And we had Sheila, and Sheila was about three and Joseph probably was about ? and Joseph used to pick up his food and throw it and she would be watching us. We'd pretend we didn't see her and when she thought we weren't looking, she'd run and pick up the food so he wouldn't get hurt. She was so darling. We had one of the refrigerators in the basement overheated or something; there was an odor and we were afraid there was going to be a fire which there wasn't. We called the children over from.... the boys were there too. we had up to three year old boys and girls. And the girls went to Mt. St. Vincent and the boys went across the street to ? And we called them over, they ran right over to the cribs and got their siblings. I could never forget that.

(Let's continue on because I know you had more education and...)

After that I worked at Mercy Hospital. I did med-surg until it was time to come in for my final vows. You're out five years so it was about three years in the nursing. After I made my final vows, I went to Boston College. What we did, when we were juniors, and we were working, we took extension courses at the Mercy, we had teachers from... Pat A. from BC.[*Boston College*] She was quite a character. She was

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a good teacher. She taught us a lot about interpersonal relationships and we had some of the faculty from the Elms. So we got enough courses so we only had to stay a year. We had a house of studies and all of our sisters.... we had two houses right across from BC and we lived there. We just had to walk across the street to go to school. It was a great education. One thing I learned there that was invaluable is Eric Ericson's theories. We had that and that was a wonderful experience; I just loved it. When I graduated, Robert Kennedy was there. Robert Frost used to come and recite poems and he used to come.... He came many times during the year. He was at graduation, and Marion Anderson sang and Robert Kennedy was there. So my next step after I graduated from there, the Reverend Mother had said to me I was very taken up by Helen Manix's (?) course and she said would you like to go and go into psych and before I even thought I said I'd love it. And I got sent to Catholic U (?) That was the days when you got grants and IMH gave grants? So I had a grant to go to Catholic U and Mary Redman, she influenced my thinking considerably in psychiatric ? nursing. She was wonderful. She was unbelievable. While we were at Catholic U, we went to that Washington Hospital where Hinckley is; the one who shot... that's where we went. And there were priests and religious from all over. And Khrushchev came that day during that time and we were told we couldn't go out in our habits; we couldn't be seen in our habits that day. Khrushchev was there from Russia and things. Things were tough in that day. So anyway that was great and one thing that I remember saying to Elizabeth, we used to fly the Indians in from all the reservations and I felt so bad for them because they couldn't have company - they were so far away. And they used to wear government issue sneakers and they didn't have any company and I thought it was so sad. While I was there I went to St. Vincent's in Maryland for the summer for clinical and that was a great experience. That was a private Catholic psychiatric hospital where they people in from al over the country. Students were there from all over; it was a great experience. I loved that.

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When I graduated, graduation was just like a.... when I was there, Kennedy was inaugurated and we went to his inauguration; it was wonderful; it was great. And it was just like the BC graduation. Robert Frost was there, Robert Kennedy was there, Marion Anderson sang, Cardinal Cushing said the blessing, it was just like at BC. So that was good.

I loved Catholic U. We used to go to the Library of Congress and you'd sit in those carrels and the pages would bring up what we were looking for; we'd write out what we were looking for. It was great. I was sorry when that got moved out of Washington. And Mary Redman was unbelievable; she was wonderful. At BC we had Maria S She was good. We had her for med-surg. She was good. So when I graduated from Catholic U, mother superior... they were taking now about testing candidates and she thought my preparation was closest so she asked me if I wanted to go to St. Louis University and I got a Masters in psychology and then I tested the people who were entering our community for awhile. You had a choice there: you could either take a research degree or a language. And I took a research degree. And my sister said the problem with my education is that I haven't had French. (laughs)

So then when I graduated from St. Louis University, she sent me... a Mother Loretta told me to go over to Marillac College in Normandy. It's the next town to St. Louis. And they had a sister ? college there. Sisters came from all over the world. We had a lot from South America, the Philippians, It was wonderful I just loved Marillac. I was there six years. I taught psychiatric mental health nursing. I went to see the president of the college who was sister Madeline, and she was asking me for my preparation and I just graduated from Catholic U in psych nursing and she needed someone in psych nursing 'cause sister Mary John graduated from Catholic U in psych and she left to run it was like Brightside, it was on the grounds. So she said well, I'd like to have you teach here. So I said I'd ask my Reverend Mother and she said will you call her (laughs). At that time you didn't choose where you went, you got sent. So anyway I called her up and she said Well! I have to take this to the

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council. And she called me back and she told me I could stay and I could come back and... first of all I had to stay a week. I didn't want to go to graduation because I'd been to school so much I couldn't wait to get home. But she said you stay and go to graduation and then she said during that time go up to Marillac and get some information. Which I did and she hired me. And then my father came for graduation and of course I was thrilled; my mother had just died and I was thrilled to see my father. So he came to graduation which I was delighted. Then because I was going to come back and teach, they gave me the test to bring home to test our sisters. Because the way it was set up was their salary would be their tuition. I got room and board and we had six sisters and it would be their tuition. It was full.... everybody to be taught there was either a priest or a sister and they all had Masters or Doctorates. It was wonderful. And you'd go to staff meetings and they were talking about the curriculum and the philosophy and the theology which I just loved. When I got to Holyoke Community they were taking about other things (laughs) It was wonderful. It was really good.

And at the time too, it was the time of Vatican II and we'd go into St. Louis University and you'd get all the readings right out of Vatican II, They'd be in the library at St. Louis University. And then the other thing too, was at that time we weren't swimming, but right across from... when I was at St. Louis University, there was a pool so I could swim. I had a great time swimming. And it was great staying there. I taught for six years and I came home and they needed someone for psych. Dr. Frost hired me at Holyoke Community and I was there 25 years and I absolutely loved it; the school of nursing. I loved the students.

(You're not there anymore...)

No I retired but when I flunked retirement, I was there. I did quite a few clinicals after that. But it's wonderful to go into any hospital and see all our graduates. I went down the other night at 10 o'clock to pick up a sister at a blood transfusion and the one at the door with her was one of my students. And she told me she's getting her baccalaureate online. So it's wonderful to see our graduates.

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(You did get your Doctorate. When was that?)

That was when I was teaching at HCC. My philosophy of teaching is, "Poor is the student who doesn't surpass the teacher." I got that at Catholic U from Loretta Z. "Poor is the student who doesn't surpass the teacher," and I've seen so many of my students surpass me. It's wonderful. It's wonderful. It's a great feeling.

So while I was there, Charlotte R... she got her Doctorate from UMass and she was working on the community colleges. She had four of the community colleges around here and she was upgrading the faculty so they were making Doctoral programs for the community colleges and it would be held at the different colleges. We'd go to UMass for some things, but it was held at the different colleges and it was held like from two to eight on Fridays so you could still work and go. And so I went. I took the courses that way. Sinclair was wonderful up there. I got an awful lot in curriculum from Sinclair; Doctor Sinclair. He was excellent. And that was great because you met faculty from the other colleges and we were in class together and there were people ahead of me and behind me and we were always helping each other. It was ideal. A great experience.

And then instead of taking a sabbatical to do my dissertation, I wanted to do the students and I had access to the students I was teaching so it would be easier. So what I did I got reduced work load. All I had to do was teach. I didn't have to go to committees, I didn't have to go to meetings. And I just had reduced work load. And I did it in summers. It was wonderful.

(Now when you did your doctoral dissertation, can you go into what it was and...)

I think the stress was so high with the students and I was into Selye's theory then - he had a great theory - I taught that in class. And when I was going to the Doctoral program... I think I took two independent studies and I kept developing the concept of what I wanted to do and that was my dissertation. And I had a a questionnaire that I gave them and I interviewed them and I had a video that I had some of the students make and it was how to handle it. And I think one of the most interesting things was.... I can't think of the psychologist's name that did it, but if you take

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your three most stressful and your three most satisfying... I had them write them down: what's your three most stressful things and what's your three most satisfying and they're the same. And that was a big awakening for the students. The other thing to reduce stress is exercise and I used to have them to that before class. I had a student who was like a trainer and I used to have her stand up there and do the exercises (laughs). It helped their tests... it helped their tests. It really did. It was good.

*(I know at this point there is quite a bit of interest in how to bring people with diverse backgrounds into nursing. Did you have when you were teaching was that... i know the community colleges were trying to **(drops microphone or recorder)** I'm thinking of the stress that your doctoral program was on and I'm thinking of getting the diverse students who may need a little bit of individualized help. Can you enlarge on that?)*

I found it extremely helpful to teach at Marillac because we had students who were very diverse. So when I came to Holyoke Community I had all that six years experience. We had a lot of Hispanics from South America. We had some Hispanics, but we had a student success program at HCC. Pat T. developed it. And that was extremely helpful for the students. And then also because of the when they take a test they have to translate it and translate it back, we allowed time for that. And my door was always open. One thing I did, every graduate class I had the class pictures on the wall -- I had 25 of them. And a kid would come in that was having trouble, we'd go over her test. If her picture was on my wall, you made it. And they'll come in and say Oh I know her, she made it. My picture's going to be there. So that was good. And I spent a lot of time too with the test taking skills with stress. And also you mentioned about relating my own experience. I'm athletically inclined and I swam. I always swam. And that helped me tremendous with my stress. It's a tremendous help to swim. And I still swim.

(At this particular point, I still have a couple of questions. And they're sort of a little bit out of the... and it has to do with clinical competence. I'm trying to figure out

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what this term really means. Could you help me and tell me what clinical competence means to you?)

We had clinical evaluation tool and we spent hours... extremely clear clinical objectives. And then if the student was having trouble, all we had to do... Pat Triggs did this. All you had to do was point to the objective and that's what you're going to work on. And then we had a faculty meeting and there was Pat and the other instructors. And the student would come with her description of how she was going to meet that objective. And then we would discuss that and I can't tell you how many students were able to pass because of that method. It was very clear what they had to do. And then we'd give them all the help we could to help meet those objectives. Many students got through the program because of that.

(You talked about clinical skills.)

I am.

(Such skills as...?)

What I taught was interviewing skills. One summer when I was a Marillac, I got sent out to San Francisco. We had a great program at Marillac. One year... many years we were tops in all the specialties. and every year one of us would have a grant. Marlene Kramer was out there then and she was directing our director's dissertation and I went to the psych one, they went to the PE one, they went to the med-surg one, they went to the OB one... and when I went to the psych one oh, it was wonderful. The method we used, they put us in groups... we were in groups of four and what we had to do we had to write down, we had to interview patients and we had to write down what the patients said. And when you came back to the seminar you had to read them back. And you'd get all the input from everybody. So when I went back to HCC I had the students do that. I had my clinical group I have half of them be interviewing; the other half be listening. and I'd have the skito, I had the personality disorder I had the manic bipolar, I had the post traumatic stress, I had the diction problems. And they would read them back and the interviewer observers would be listening. And then we would discuss them so I got

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immediate feedback on how they were doing. And I used to keep track of the principles. I could tell them how many principles that they used or I could tell them what they needed to do or I could make suggestions at the right time. And that was an extremely successful way to teach psych. And then the interview observers would do it and the ones who interviewed would listen and the interview observers did so much better because they were through it. And that was my method of teaching. It was wonderful. And the veterans were wonderful. You had to get permission from them. And one of the veterans came up to me and said to me, sister, are you the sister who's got students that writes down what people say? and I He said I want one (laughs).

In addition to the principles, they could see the difference in the diagnosis. The depressed person would be silence and the kid would think she's a failure. But we'd point out the dynamics.

So that's what I learned in San Francisco. From the convent I had to wait for the bus at the corner of Haight and Ashbury. This was in the early sixties. I used to wear my glasses on a chain then. I didn't have them off for two weeks. I'd miss busses. It was something. But I learned so much there.

We also had family therapy. And I always used the theory that they used in that which was very helpful. It was a great run.

(Thank you very much. Is there anything else that you'd like to say before we close?)

I'm just very grateful for my education. I'm very grateful to the Sisters of Providence. I don't think I would be this highly educated...

(I'm sure you contributed much more)

I loved Holyoke Community, I loved Marillac. The students are great. It's always wonderful to see the students and I see them all the time. Thank you very much. I enjoyed your interview.

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