

Oral History: Sr. Helen Lorch, History

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Helen Lorch: The reason I wanted to come [to USD] was just that I had been doing so much many club things in the city. That I thought that this would be a good excuse. So I was just going to take some history, or something. But I lacked a semester on my degree. But I never thought I would need it. Mother Rossi was dean at the time and said, "Well, why don't you complete your bachelor's" So that's what I did.

Tammy Lessler: So, you're from San Diego?

HL: Yes. Lived here and that was '54. We came to town, my husband and myself, in '39 because he was a physician and wanted to start a practice. So, we had been here about 15 years.

TL: So you came right during World War II.

HL: A little after.

TL: I mean to San Diego.

HL: We came in '39 before World War II.

TL: So, you saw the whole transition.

HL: Oh, yes, from a 150,000 [population] to almost a million now. Or maybe it is a million.

TL: So you came to USD as a student in '54? You were one of the first classes?

HL: No because you see . . . Well, yes maybe I was. But when do they say the first class was? Terri Whitcomb was the first.

TL: She was the first, 1952.

HL: Well, it wasn't very long after that.

TL: You were close. And you studied history?

HL: That was my major. So, I had Sr. McShane as a teacher, you see, and also Sr. Murphy.

TL: Now, Sr. Murphy is still here? Does she teach?

HL: No she is retired, and McShane is retired too. She is in San Francisco. When I came, I think Mother Parks was President. But her health failed her. At least, so she left. My chief recollection is of Mother Morris. Because she was during the merges you see.

TL: What were the classes like?

HL: Wonderful. I had been just to a university, the public schools were all that I ever had. And to hear these women be so knowledgeable in history, not just the facts of the matter but the whole story, the whole background.

Mother McShane got her PhD from Berkeley in 1932. So, she must of have been one of the first women to do that. Maybe one of the first nuns. But Reverend Mother Hill, who founded the College, believed that wherever you went where they had the college, your nuns who were going to teach, should go to the university that had the best reputation for which ever line it was in. And of course, Berkeley was the outstanding historian's place because of Dr. Bulton's *Rim of the World* and his *History of the Southwest*. So, that's then where Sr. McShane went.

Sr. Murphy, I think, got her degree in philosophy so she went to Catholic University. I believe that is where her degree is from. Sr. Bourrett's sister was a history professor in Lone Mountain, which was our college in San Francisco [*Note: now the site of the University of San Francisco*]. So, she would come down sometimes in the summer and teach. Sr. Miller, was another PhD. But then, they began to go to Stanford, some of the nuns. That is where Sr. Furay went. She had her degree from there.

So they really just stepped right in. They were asked to come here by Bishop Buddy because the Mothers' had prepared him for his first communion in St. Louis, Missouri. And so, when there was an opportunity and he wanted to build a Catholic College, it was the only one south of L.A. Rev. Mother Hill had been interested for a long time in founding another college on the coast. So, they came down to look at the place and situation over from San Francisco.

TL: Why did Bishop Buddy really want another Catholic university?

HL: Another? Well you see there wasn't any.

TL: Okay. Right.

HL: So, he wanted it. And he wanted the outstanding educators, as he knew them. He asked the Mothers to come. And he was delighted. He felt that was a wonderful advantage for the place because they were educators. So many orders at that time might have hospitals or some of those things. But they were just educators and so they knew their business. And that struck me, of course, with the classes. You see, you say, 'even though they were nuns, they knew. Well, that's the way we look at nuns often, 'even though.' It's not a good attitude. They could devote their entire life to the study and education of people. And he knew that to have a Catholic college would be a great advantage right here, because then the Catholics would have a college right in town and they wouldn't have to go out of town to go. So, he was very farsighted.

He and Rev. Mother Hill were very good friends, he was younger you see, but maybe not that much younger, now that I think about it, but it seemed that he was. So they talked often on the telephone, 'what should you do in this case?' and 'What would we do in that case?'

TL: Do you think he envisioned the university as it is today?

HL: I doubt if he envisioned a co-educational institution, because that was not the thing in their day. It was separate, because men and women were supposed to have different interests in the world and so they should be educated in those interests, but that has changed now. You see we have other schools that are co-ed too, Manhattanville is co-educational, so is Long Mountain. But I think we were the first as far as I know. They educated boys in the school in the lower grades, maybe until about third or fourth grade. And then they would have to transfer to some other school. But they had co-education there. And we had a little school here, you know for preschoolers, that Mother Guest ran in the first couple years. Then many of the mothers who sent their children here later were people who had been educated in that little-folks school.

TL: So, they started out here. And this is the Academy of the Sacred Heart you were speaking of?

HL: Well, it was all up here. You know, the Academy of the Sacred Heart started up here before they had their place in El Cajon. In fact, it was over in Dushane, the hall that is Dushane now. That is where the high school had its beginnings.

TL: When I was listening to Sr. McShane's tape she was saying that the Women's College had a much better reputation.

HL: Well, it did because people that had known us teaching in Chicago or Manhattanville or St. Louis, any of those places, they were so pleased that the Mothers were coming here that then they sent their children right away. Well the College for Men didn't have the reputation and we really weren't connected you see because we did our own building, paid for it. The land was given to us but it only cost \$50 an acre when they got it. So, that wasn't so much to give. We had been in the education business a long time and Bishop Buddy really hadn't, you know. So yes, it did have a much better reputation.

TL: She was saying that when they started to talk about a merger that the Women's College was the one who set down the rules.

HL: That's right.

TL: And she said that the students had voted on the merger.

HL: Now, I wasn't here, I don't think when they did that. What year was the vote?

TL: I am not sure which year they voted. I know that the merger started about '68.

HL: Yes, so probably before that. And I wasn't up here then.

TL: So, when did you start? You were a student here from '54 to '58 or '59.

HL: I just took a course or two you see. Then I finished my degree and then I was going on with a masters. Then my husband became ill. And so, I went home to take care of him so that was that interim time there you see.

TL: You have a masters in History.

HL: Yes.

TL: Well then how did you come to teach?

HL: After I got my bachelor's, there were some people here, some girls whose mothers had probably gone to our schools who had sent their daughter' up like from Mexico City to learn English, chiefly. And so, they asked me to teach them. It was really just kind of tutoring. And so I did. Sometimes we would go on overnight little expeditions because the nuns couldn't, because they did not leave campus. They were cloistered. Semi-cloistered, they called it. That's how I really got started. Then I taught for a while in American History, taught the nurses from Mercy. They would send them over here for their liberal arts classes. And so I taught several big classes in American History; that was kind of fun.

TL: How did you enter the sisterhood? Dr. Brandis said you entered it late.

HL: Yes, well you see when my husband died, both my children were grown and both had finished. Sherri, my daughter, had gone to Lone Mountain because I thought it was better for her to go to another school from where I was. I don't know how I got the idea of entering but I liked the way they taught. I liked the life they led of teaching and doing God's work through their teaching. And so, that's when I just thought, because I wasn't so very old then either, I was about 50 or so. I thought maybe the thing to do would be to enter.

I asked one of the Mothers, Mamere, a French nun, and she was a great friend of Archbishop Quinn but that was when he was just rector of the seminary and he would come and talk to her. So, I asked her one day, I said, 'in your knowledge,' because she was much older and had been a nun in France, 'did you ever know of anyone who had been married and entered?' And she said, yes she had. So, I saw that it was possible.

TL: And you have children? You have two children.

HL: Yes. And they are both teachers.

TL: So, you are a family of teachers.

HL: That's right.

TL: Today there is a lack of teachers. How do feel about that?

HL: You mean there are too few?

TL: Right.

HL: You know, I don't know where they get that idea. Because I know any number of very competent able people who are having trouble getting jobs. You see, my resident assistance that I am involved with every year, some of them are going to be teachers. They do not find it easy. And the city of San Diego here, they don't hire people until the middle of August. So, people don't want to wait that long. So, I don't think there are too many teachers now.

TL: Maybe just in the liberal arts type of field, rather than science teachers?

HL: Well yes, and math because many of them go on and work and then get their advanced degrees. But I am not so sure about that either. I don't think its that hard to get good teachers.

TL: Do you find that the students that are coming to school now are as well prepared?

HL: Better. I've noticed especially here in the last year or two. They are eager to work they are motivated to work. They're very interested in their grades, almost more interested than you'd like them. It's just every degree they can get of a higher grade. They are almost more interested in the grade than the knowledge. But I think they are better prepared. We get many students, of course, from Catholic high schools to the private schools and they come right in and settle right down, they get their work done.

TL: What would you say is the one of the biggest disadvantages of having public school versus private?

HL: I think that girls with Catholic backgrounds are not as competitive with the men as maybe they should be. And so, in an all-girl school, they get more chance to administer offices in the associated students. Things like that. They don't have that interest that much. You see, no one has to do it. And the boys will naturally take over. I think it is even more so here then a lot of places. No fault of theirs, that is just the way they want it.

TL: Can you talk a little about some of the other sisters or the president's of the College for Women? If you remember what about them made them such great leaders to have the vision and build USD to what it is now.

HL: It's sort of that faith that women have. It is a particular kind of faith, I think, that is different from the men's, in as much that they believe with God's help, they can do anything. And I think with that kind of philosophy in back of them they did do great things. They did great things in all orders and in ours and mine because they saw the work to be done and did it. They were very dedicated people. That was part of the philosophy that you absorbed becoming a teacher.

As a nun, you cared for people, because of that caring for people in the way that Christ taught us to love your neighbor as yourself. When you cared that much, you helped everybody to get the material, but also if they needed help in their own personal lives. Because of the confidence that was built up by the nuns in the classroom they would be glad to go to them and ask for their advice on more personal things, you see. And I think that was a very good thing to have a role model.

And yet, you didn't feel just because the nuns had never been married, it didn't mean that they didn't know a lot about life, because they saw it through their families. They usually came from large families and they had seen people struggle, how they met sorrow, how they coped with bad luck or losing money or any of that. The women were helpmates for husbands.

I think that was the thing I saw the most, the nun's complete selflessness and great interest in the lives of their students. Not only what they taught them or their degrees, but really because they knew life was not easy. Just because they were in the convent didn't mean that it was easy outside, as perhaps it might have appeared. They were just interested and always interested. You know after years you could go back to your college or to your school and the nuns that you knew would still be around. It is that continuity that is so nice and good that you could go back to those people that you respected so and say, 'Well, what would you do in this case?'

TL: Do you think that is why USD has such loyal alumnae?

HL: Yes. I think the women are very loyal. I think the men are too. I don't know why. In a state institution, only one part of you is involved in your respect for or liking the institution. That is only the information that you have been able to gather. Your appreciation of good teaching and so on, but there is nothing personal there. And there was nothing religious. And by religious, I mean, it was against the law, and still is. And for some strange reason they think that is a mixture of state and church. But you see, in the private schools they took advantage of the whole person, so that they were taught how to make a living, but also how to live as they made the living

TL: I went up to San Diego State today. I went to school at a state college. It reminded me of that very same thing. It has that very same sterile kind of feeling. Part of the beauty of USD is its landscaping and building.

HL: And that was on purpose, because Rev. Mother Hill was the one to say that people are attracted to beauty and that might be the first thing that would attract a person to the school. And I have heard many say that.

TL: Was it a plan? I mean was the landscaping one person's idea? Or a mixture?

HL: Yes. In fact, you see after they got the building up there, were certain mothers who were asked to take various patios and then, under their supervision, they get the thing done. I was kind of amused this morning because I was recalling, because those palm trees out there between the two buildings were planted as little tiny dates. I suppose by some mothers.

At one time, we had this children emeritus ideality that the graduates then belonged to. They met once a month on first Fridays and they said at the time that they needed those large gallon cans in order to start some of the trees or bushes or plants. That was one thing all the people could get. They finally had to yell, stop, stop because they dropped those gallon cans from Mercy. You know where they use all those in the restaurants and so on. But then the nuns would plant these little seeds in those cans and that's where those palm trees in the palm court came from.

TL: In listening to one of the other tapes, someone had mentioned that the owner of the nursery just down on Linda Vista had done a lot.

HL: Yes, he gave us a lot of plants and helped. And his daughter graduated from here. In fact his daughter is married to Dr., oh he is in science, or is he? Maybe he is in the art department? We ought to look that up. Because she graduated from here in art and then married one of the . . . and I see him every day but I can't think of his name. You know sometimes when you see people you don't say their names. And then they sold out. Do you remember the name?

TL: I don't. It was Japanese or something?

HL: That's right. But they always appreciated the mothers. And appreciated the concern that they showed for all the people. The workmen, the gardening, they were just as much interested in a tree being put out well, so that it would grow, as they were as in getting the buildings up, that kind of thing. It's a different attitude when

religious are involved in a work than when lay people are, because the ministry of the religious becomes almost part of their whole life. It is not just that you are doing that to make a living. It is a different attitude and that I suppose is why they are successful or have been in the past anyway. But we have been very fortunate here. God has been very good to this place to have a Sister Furay and to have a Dr. Hughes and to have a Tom Burke. All the people that are in leadership positions are outstanding.

TL: Sr. Furay is the director for students?

HL: No, she is provost and that means that she is dean of the liberal arts part of the school, but also has the academic welfare of the school particularly in her hands. While Dr. Hughes has that too, but is interested in the promotion of the school and its growth and it being a success. Well, Sr. Furay is too, but there is a division in their fields.

TL: I know Dr. Hughes has been with the university since the merger. Has Sr. Furay?

HL: Yes. She was dean of the liberal arts school, which is a very important work almost more important than a president, really. Because of their deep involvement in the academics, you see that will make the place go and last. She was dean when Dr. Hughes came I remember, when he applied and was hired.

TL: He must be a doing a good job then.

HL: That's right. Marvelous. It is so great to have men of his abilities and his fidelity everything for the school.

TL: It seems that he has a vision, just from reading some of the president's reports that he has a strategy and goes about achieving it.

HL: That's right. That's right.

TL: Where you here when it went from a two school presidency to one president?

HL: Yes, I was, because I don't remember if I was here as a nun or a lay person. The whole thing was done wisely. They didn't do it all at once. For instance, the first thing they did, you see because we didn't have joint classes, but the associated students, that is the leaders in each side, went together first. So, they put together the student body and the governing of that first. And then pretty much started the classes.

TL: How did you feel teaching co-ed classes?

HL: I didn't make any difference.

TL: I listened to the tapes. It seems we have more tapes of the sisters on the early years.

HL: Yes. Well you see that is continuity again. But now let me think who was here. Now, have you gotten the tapes of Irving Parker? He was hired on the men's side first. So was Dr. Otto and so was Ernie Moron, but of course Moron is retired, so it is well that you are doing these now because a lot of the people are getting ready to retire. But there are just not as many because, it was not an order that started the men's school, therefore it doesn't have that continuity.

TL: How do you feel that the school now has fewer and fewer sisters as teachers?

HL: Oh, I am sorry. But if that is what God wants then we'll get along. Because there are fewer and throughout the world there are fewer all of a sudden, there isn't that interest in complete dedication to God and his work. I am sorry because I think they have a great tradition in all orders of teaching. There seems to be more orders of men getting along perhaps better. No, I guess I should change that because they don't have vocations either. But maybe there will have to be enough lay people to replace them.

TL: Can you think of any students or people in the community who were students here who are in positions of leadership in San Diego?

HL: Well you know Maureen O'Connor used to go here. But I don't know much in the alumni work so that I don't know. You know John Trifiletti? He could tell you probably more of those people who are successful because he is the alumni director. He knows those people, and John has been here, I think he graduated in '76 so that is 13 or 14 years, so he knows a lot of people who have [graduated from USD].

TL: Do you find a lot of alumni have children here?

HL: Yes, some do, some don't. I have a theory about Catholic education: I think it is every other generation. Because one generation will come and think they would like to have gone to state schools. So, then they'll send their children to the state schools

and then those children will see what their parents had that closeness, that feeling of community that is built up, and they'll want to send theirs to the smaller school again.

TL: Is there anything else you can think of?

HL: Well of course I am very pleased and proud to be a part of a school and its beginnings and through its growth. You know, [I'm] so glad, so happy that it has been such a success. And is so high through all of those things, you know you are just so happy about them. All of the nuns, people who, for instance, like Sr. McShane and some of the others who have retired and maybe gone to San Francisco and Mother Danz, who was president of the College for Women when we merged, all of those great people are still just as much interested in the college as they ever were.

TL: Do you think that the students have an interest or knowledge of how the university came about?

HL: No. They don't. It doesn't occur to young people; something wasn't always there. But then after they get into a little bit, then yes, they are glad to hear about its younger days and struggles. My daughter-in-law was a graduate here. And so, they are always glad to come back up to the dormitory even, because it brings back memories to them of the good times they enjoyed and the friends they had, so all of those things are a good thing.

TL: In Mother McShane's interview she was talking about the social life of the students and how they met military officers.

HL: Because there were so many. During the war, there were so many in the city and their mothers would say, the mothers of the officers, 'Go up to the college for women. You will find some nice girls up there.' And so they did and a lot of them married.

TL: That is what she was saying. That she had introduced a lot of them.

HL: Yes, yes she did.

TL: Well I thank you very much.