

Thomas Littlewood [TL]: It's February 11, 2016, I'm Thomas Littlewood and I'm here with Sister Loretta Manzara at her home at 485 Windermere Road in London, Ontario. We're going to talk about St Joseph's School of Music today.

Good morning Sister Loretta.

Sister Loretta Manzara [LM]: Well good morning, Thomas.

TL: Can you describe your years teaching at the School of Music for us?

LM: Well I can describe my years teaching, but I can also describe my years as a student at the School of Music.

TL: Wonderful.

LM: So can I start back as a student?

TL: Sure, yeah!

LM: Okay.

Okay.

When I was nine years old, which was approximately around 1957, I started taking piano lessons at the Sacred Heart building on Dundas Street. There was still about maybe four or five Sisters teaching music there and one little corridor of that building was considered the music – the continuation of the music department which had begun there many, many years ago. And so I would trot up there once a week for piano lessons. Sr. St. Gregory Hall started me off and then she became ill at a certain point, so she passed me on to another Sister by the name of Sr. Josepha who taught me for a few years and then suggested that I needed to move on to Sr. Callistus Arnsby. So that was the progression for me.

The other point about remembering Sacred Heart Building was that my brother, Michael trotted along with me for a while to take some violin lessons until he purposely broke his arm [laughter]. Anyway, that was a cute little story to add in, he used to take his lessons from Sr. Immaculata and I remember one day, Sr. Immaculata came to me and she said, "Your brother's not practicing," [laughter] and I said, "I know that Sister, [laughter] but what can I do about it?" [more laughter] So—lots of little family stories there.

But then I continued taking piano lessons up at Mount St Joseph here on Richmond Street, until I graduated with an Associate Degree and that was when I was actually in Grade 12 at Catholic Central [High School]. And the years in Grade 13, I continued lessons with Sr. Callistus, so I had [that] connection for that whole span of my life as a growing up person. The other thing about

my memory of those years prior to becoming a Sister is that the Sisters were so attentive to every little facet of life. I used to have piano lessons at the Mount on a Monday after school and I had to take bus transportation at that time. So Sr. Callistus organized that Mr. Zadorsky-- that's Sr. Janet's father-- that he might be able to drive me home because it was too dark for me to be getting on the bus. She organized it that Janet's lesson followed mine and that I could have supper with the Sis – not with the Sisters – but at the convent. So all those little things are really formidable in remembering that time and also remembering the kindness of the Sisters who taught me.

So anyway, I entered the community in 1966. And at that time, I was a postulant and I was doing a little bit of formation around community life, but also attending Brescia for a couple of courses and still had time to be invited to continue my ministry at piano teaching, which I had begun when I was in Grade 13. I was given a little studio to share with one of the other Sisters and a few students for Saturdays and after school time. So that began my experience of really being on the staff at the School of Music and I taught there until the school closed. I think it was around '85, '84. I can't remember that exact date. But during that time we were at Mount St. Joseph, the School continued to grow and have a great reputation. We, at one point, recognized that we had enough studios that we could invite other lay people to come in and teach with us. So some of my colleagues from Western joined us: Dan Quasnica, and Marion Miller for a little bit of time, Cheryl Harrison taught voice, so it grew into quite a formidable school. And I remember the conversations we had when we had to make the decision to bring it to a close. Those of us who were younger Sisters at the time were asked if we could foresee taking over the leadership of the School as time went on and it was right at a time when the community was being asked to really consider what other types of ministries might we be involved in. So a lot of a discernment went into that whole process and in the end we came to a resolution that it would be better to close the school in the height of its successfulness than to see it kind of dwindle as people aged and couldn't continue on and may not have had the finances to support more lay staff so that was the kind of the time of decision making and I can still remember it brought great tears to my eyes as we face[d] into that question and thought "no, we've got to do this, we have to do this."

We were great friends with the Western Ontario Conservatory at the time and a wonderful relationship had been established between Sr. Callistus and the various principals of the Conservatory. So we made the decision, we closed our school and all of our students and staff who wished to could become part of Western Ontario Conservatory of Music. People sometimes get that confused with the university program, but it was the feeder school. So most of us went over, a few of the lay teachers chose not to, but all of the Sisters brought our students over and we got set up in a pre-fab building on the top of the hill between University Hospital and the Science building was behind us – I think it's the Robarts Research Centre now that's on that particular property. So we taught in that building for a number of years, got to know more staff, had very interesting conversations because the experience of all of the musicians who were teaching was so wide at that time. So you know, [a] move brings on good things, it also allows you to let go of some of the old. Lots of wonderful piano students went through our School and continued through the Conservatory.

One who was about my age, Tina Yanchus is presently teaching as a faculty member over at Western. She had a wonderful career. Sr. Callistus encouraged her to go on to Julliard and she graduated from Julliard, met her husband there, I believe it was there, and so the two of them became duo pianists. Tina Yanchus and Jim Hibbard, and they occasionally will perform still in the city. Marvellous, marvellous performers, and just so proud of seeing, you know, people I have grown up with whose gifts were exceptional being, you know, able to really offer that gift of beauty and sound to the world through their performances and knowing that Sr. Callistus was part of that and all the other teachers who helped with their – her formation.

Another student that Sr. Janet and I met during that time, we were all around the same level of movements through the Conservatory courses at the time, was Karen Kieser. Now Karen ended up working for the CBC and did some programming for them. So again, all these wonderful little experiences of seeing people really move forward.

Oh, of course, another one would be someone I never knew personally, but we always speak fondly of the Lombardo family taking lessons here at the original school on Dundas Street. And Guy Lombardo. And here in London we have the Guy Lombardo Bridge. Yeah, so lots of, lots of wonderful memories. We used to have recitals in Mount St. Joseph in what was called John Vianney Hall. It had a low ceiling so it wasn't the best for the acoustic[s], but a large enough room and a large enough stage that we had two grand pianos and they were both [hesitation]... I think they were nine foot both of them. Anyway, just wonderful. It gave us the opportunity to do a lot of work with the students as for two piano compositions. I have this memory of when I was a child. Each year, November or October, there would be an awards program and that's when we would receive our certificate for the exam we passed the previous year and any awards or bursaries that had been won. But this one year, the program highlighted compositions that could be done with two pianos and as many hands as possible. So there were duo pianists, and then there were quartet, and we moved in a couple of upright pianos as well. So I think at one point there were even four pianos, maybe even six, because we moved them from the studios into the great big gym which was part of the boarding school. That was fascinating just working with the children to be able to do things like that you know. Really wonderful.

Yeah.

TL: In your years teaching at the School of Music, did a lot change? Was it a pretty constant...

LM: Well, one of the things that happened in our School...early on, Sr. Callistus, Sr. Elaine Flood, and a couple of the other Sisters attended a conference where they heard Frances Clarke. They heard her speak about a method of teaching piano that she was finding really productive. And so a number of us went off to do courses on the Frances Clarke Method and for primary teaching that was the method that we started using. It was a method that brought a lot of ... a number of children into a classroom to work together on basic things and then they'd have a private lesson as well so it kind of stimulated a keen interest in practice because you [laughter]

were working in a classroom situation. That kind of was the stabilizing program that we used for most of the children who were coming. And they had some wonderful, wonderful manuals and books that could be used, teachers' manuals and things to be helpful. It's interesting because when I graduated from Western, I graduated with a degree in piano performance and I had some pedagogy courses; however, no one ever taught me how to teach piano which is typical of any academic degree, so being able to work through this program was really, really helpful because it gave you a clear direction as to how to gradually work with children and draw their interest out, musically, and to support them in it in a formative way. So I was very very grateful for that.

[pause]

I would say that that program probably was used within the school for most of the time that I was I was among as teaching staff. We didn't veer away from that because it brought such success for beginning students. [pause] Changes... Well every time the Conservatory would change its repertoire or its expectations for exams we would have to, you know, go along with that. Sr. Caroline Bering was very instrumental in creating an ear training and theory booklet to help with the requirements for the Conservatory exams, so that was another change that came in for us. What else? [pause] Just change in the expectations of what we might be teaching. I started off with a little bit of teaching of basic theory and then had to move into history and harmony and counterpoint and all of those things, which was to be expected but that would be a personal change for me. The Conservatory requirements both for Western and Toronto – because we used both Conservatories – they were kind of the guiding force that would help us recognize whether changes needed to be made. Unless something drastic happened with those programs, then our course of direction was pretty straightforward.

Unless you had something in mind that you found in the files?

TL: No no. I just, we just wanted to know about the transition of, or the change that happens over time.

LM: Yeah, yeah.

[pause] No. Probably, other changes that would have occurred, when we moved over to the Conservatory, we still had the auditorium that we used for recitals so at that time that room was rented out for anyone who wanted to use it for recitals, so that was a little change in the house... sometimes was used for the Festival, Kiwanis Festival; and, sometimes used for ORMTA, Ontario Registered Music Teachers Association gatherings and meetings and workshops that they were promoting, so. I can't think of other changes musically.

TL: And then at a certain point it moved to the Western Conservatory. Can you talk a little bit more about that and how that was?

LM: Yeah, yeah.

Well I was in a studio which was one that had the piano I used here at Mount St Joseph, so I felt quite at home in that studio. It was a pre-fab building, but a large enough room that I could have my books and everything established. So that was good. It was a good transition for us. Our music library went over as well, so we knew what was available in that library plus what had accumulated with the Conservatory. And there was a staff room, so we got to meet more of the other teachers...the recitals that occurred there... most of us would schedule recital time back over at our former house for that recital place. [pause]

One of... one of the opportunities that came up, this is for one of the other Sisters, Sr. Joanna Kiersten, while she was teaching piano there, and-- I'm trying to think—Mr. Duggan, Carl Duggan, recognized that Joanna had a lovely voice and he offered to give her vocal lessons. So that was... that was kind of a stretching of experiences. So Joanna took up those vocal lessons and began [to] give little concerts too, and then he felt she was strong enough ahead that she could do a little bit of teaching of vocal students. So it was an expansion of her gifts at that time.

The pre-fab building, it had a little bit of a strange feeling. The walls weren't as sound proof as we had liked them to be, but eventually the conservatory was able to have enough funding behind it that it was able to move off campus and build a new building down here on Windermere which is now a medical centre. And it had a lovely, lovely recital hall, sound proof studios... I think there might even have been an organ studio in there. I never taught in that building because I left music teaching in 1987 to go off to do some work in Ottawa, so I didn't have the experience of being over at that building here on Windermere.

The Conservatory had its own annual awards program and passing of certificates that was sometimes held in churches in downtown area. Yeah. That's about all that's coming to me right now.

TL: Yeah, and did the Conservatory at some point move to Western? Is that...

LM: The Conservatory actually was at Western when it began.

TL: But then did they amalgamate as one institution?

LM: No

TL: No

LM: No. The Conservatory, I don't know the year that it actually began, but it was in existence when I was a child and Clifford von Kuster at that time was the Principal of the Conservatory. It was two rooms in the old Silverwood Building on Epworth, housed within what was called the Faculty of Music at the time as part of Western, but it was just two rooms. And what they did was organized an examination system and did some private teaching for people hoping that they

would go on to university. Then when the Faculty of Music was invited to move on main campus with its brand new building, that's when the Conservatory shifted over to the pre-fab building that I described, so they functioned there. Their next move was over here to Windermere, and during that time, for whatever reasons, they gradually stopped having many studios and a much smaller staff. They continued to hold all the examinations by inviting music teachers who were recognized throughout Canada to move around Canada do the examinations. And then the last I heard, when that building closed, I think the Conservatory ended up with an office downtown somewhere. And I... right now I'm not aware of the address of it. It's still in existence, but it... it moved from, you know, just a two-office structure to a big school, to a smaller school and then back to just an office facility. So yeah...

TL: Well that's wonderful, that's really, that's really what we...

LM: Was that helpful?

TL: Yeah! That's really what we wanted to know. So thank you very much, Sister.

LM: Oh, you're very very welcome. Okay.