



## TRANSCRIPTION COVER SHEET

**Date of Interview:** Month: June Date: 11<sup>th</sup> Year: 2022

**Interviewee(s):** JEAN RASMUSSEN

**Interviewer(s):** CHRISTOPHER ALLISON

Place & Address of Interview:

---

---

Recordist: [same as interviewer ] \_\_\_\_\_

Other People Present: \_\_\_\_\_

Transcription Equipment Used: Otter.ai (transcription software)

Transcribed by: Lina Ornelas

**Transcript Status:** Needs to be Edited  Final Transcript

Status As Of (date): 7/22/2024 Editor: Delena Obermaier

### Project Info

Project Name: INSTITUTIONAL LEGACY PROJECT

Project Abstract: \_\_\_\_\_

Forms: Release  Other  : \_\_\_\_\_ Form(s) Location: ZOTERO

Photograph Accompaniment: Yes  No  Photo Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Materials/Information:

This is an oral history interview with **JEAN RASMUSSEN**. It is being conducted on **JUNE 11<sup>th</sup> 2022** at **DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY** and concerns **Rasmussen's time of being a student at Rosary College (now Dominican University) she is class of 1970**. The interviewer is **CHRISTOPHER ALLISON**. This interview is a part of the **INSTITUTIONAL LEGACY PROJECT**. This interview has been **RELEASED**. Documentation of permissions is included in the **MCGREAL ZOTERO 'INSTITUTIONAL SAGA PROJECT' LIBRARY > ORAL HISTORIES** archival record.

# Jean Rasmussen Interview

Sat, Jun 11, 2022 4:40PM • 13:18

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

1960s, 1970s, Dominican Sisters, Halloween, university events, civil rights, anti-war movement, assassinations, student movements, the Consular Affair, class reunions, politics on college campuses

## SPEAKERS

Christopher Allison, Jean Rasmussen

**Jean Rasmussen** 00:00

—when I left. And different now, but I love it now, I love it then, I'm happy with the progression. I'm not one of those people that says, "It shouldn't be like it was for us 52 years ago." You know, I would not have liked it if people had said that to me in the 60s, you know?

**Christopher Allison** 00:21

Well, that's good perspective.

**Jean Rasmussen** 00:23

Well—

**Christopher Allison** 00:24

—yeah, it is—

**Jean Rasmussen** 00:24

—think about it. I was saying to someone that they used to have these—Sister Mary Painter, who was here when we were here—and they used to have these alumni luncheons during the school days called

Brick-a-brunch. And the alumni—hats, furs, white gloves—and we—our freshman class—we served luncheon and one of my classmates—who is still with us—I can still remember her saying, “I will never be this old.” [laughs] Well—

**Christopher Allison** 00:59

—give it some time.

[both laugh]

**Jean Rasmussen** 01:03

Okay.

**Christopher Allison** 01:04

Okay, so I'm Chris Allison. I am the director of the McGreal Center here at Dominican University. And I teach history here. And it is June 11th. And we are here with—

**Jean Rasmussen** 01:13

—Jean Rasmussen class of 1970. I arrived in August of 1966. We were met by the Sisters in a little garden, where they served tea and lemonade. And my mother looked at me and said, “Oh, someday you'll be a lady too.” I'm not kidding. So, I was so happy that I got this invitation to share my memory of being a student here. And I guess a lot of what I'm going to say is animated by my own 50th reunion, which was delayed one year by COVID. And then attending Glenna's— Glenna Templeton's [Temple's] inauguration. And the presentation was— that was given by, oh, I want to s— not Sister Mary Walters, perhaps at the last Caritas symposium, where she reviewed the history and dynamic of the last 400 years of the Dominican Order, particularly the Sinsinawas. And so perhaps it's my age, and these events sort of coming together, but I have this—and I expressed it at the meeting this morning with Glenna—that I don't want the—the memory of the Sinsinawas or our experience to be erased, to be forgotten. This place is so dynamic. Now I want to come back as a student, but then I remembered that we were doing important things for that time in the 1960s. And I've often described my experience—and maybe the experience of my classmates—as being on what I call “fissured ground,” with a foot here and a foot there. We lived in—I lived in the dorms in— with rules. We had to have the curtains closed at dark. And yes, they checked them. We had quiet hours, we proctored and answered payphones. We had a dress code, no slacks. And if you wanted to venture out, you had to wear a raincoat over them. In the dining hall, we had white linens on Sunday and Wednesday nights. You were never to eat off a tray. You took your plates and silverware and put it on the table. I loved my class. And we had so much fun. It was a time, again, this is sort of standing in two different worlds where—with all the dress codes and everything—we were a class that put on shows. We—we had a Sophomore— well it was called Sophomore Shenanigans, we had a Christmas show, and we sang at our 50th reunion. I don't know if anybody else has done that. We— we were— sung around the table at, usually dinner, if it was our birthday or if an older woman got engaged that you know...we had Ha!- wonderful Halloween costume parties. We had wonderful Christmas parties. It was it was a wonderful time. But at the same time, academics was really important for us. We were described in a book about Catholic education at the time as this— these girls are grinds, they're academic grinds. And I was gifted, blessed, to work with these wonderful nuns and lay teachers. But specifically, Sister Cyril, Sister Jeremy, Sister Gregory, Sister Jean Murray, Sister George, Dr. Liotta Hirsch. I had an amazing

opportunity—I still don't know how it happened to me—I think Sister Mary Brian got me in it. There wa— Hannah Arendt came to Rosary and had a seminar. And I was the only Freshman invited. I was paralyzed with fear, but I got to meet Hannah Arendt because those since Sinsinawa Dominicans knew everybody, they—

**Christopher Allison** 05:33

—yeah, they were connected—

**Jean Rasmussen** 05:34

—they were connected. But, you know, in terms of this “fissured ground” that I talk about, I think, you— we also have to recall that the 60s were, was— they were a time of change. And that's putting it sort of lightly. I mean, emblematic of the discourse, the—the difficulties that sometimes came up in the college, could be sort of looked at through the lens of the Halloween party of 1969, when I was a senior. And very often we came as groups. Well, my friends, we dressed up as the Pope Paul VI encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. And there was Mary Klein, she was in a convict outfit with a ball and chain and on the ball, it said, *Humana Vitae*, and she had this big, fake pregnant stomach. And then her husband was Judy Pasha [?] and he was Simon LaGritte [?] and then behind them—because you always had a parade at Halloween—were like 15 of us dressed as toddlers with wagons and hula hoops and all sorts of things. And we always paraded through the nuns dining room, the refectory, and, of course, the younger nuns thought we were hysterical. And the older ones just stared blankly at us. But it was also a time of assassinations. Bobby Kennedy was murdered. Dr. Martin Luther King was murdered. And I'll never forget that because I was sitting in the library, waiting for the stacks to open after dinner. And Sister Albertus Magnus came in and said, “Have you heard?” And the few of us were there said no. She said Dr. King was murdered— was assassinated day. And she was practically in tears. And she said, “And now you're going to see what's going to happen.” And there were tanks, army tanks going down North Avenue. I mean, we weren't allowed out. This was not like the blizzard of 1967 where we weren't allowed out, but we had fun in the snow. This is— we were locked in because it was it was very frightening. There was conversation...discourse about the Vietnam War. There were classmates who supported it—supported Nixon—and those of us who raged against the war. We had watched the lottery for, you know, our brothers, our friends to go into the army. Civil Rights was a big deal. We participated with Operation Breadbasket with— downtown. We had— we were— go places and feed the less privileged. It was a time of the murder of Fred Hampton, our senior year. And just before we graduated, the violence at Kent State hit and a lot of my friends, wore black armbands at graduation. I wanted to but decided to keep the family peace, since my father was a— was a Nixon fan. But I'll never forget Dr. Liotta Hirsch came into our American Lit class...came in— she was maybe five foot—tiny thing—PhD from the University of Iowa in American Studies. Brilliant. I loved her. She walked in, she got on the chair, and then she stood on the table and said, “Friends, Rosarians, and countrymen, I come not to praise Nixon, but to bury him.” And it was quite— it was quite the moment. But I think what hit hardest to understand that “fissured ground” was what happened just before graduation. Also in April of 1969, Student Government had invited William Kunstler—the attorney for the Chicago Seven—to speak at the school. And Sister Canada canceled it.

**Christopher Allison** 10:04

Uh-huh—The Consular Affair, they called it.

**Jean Rasmussen** 10:05

–The Consular Affair. And it was...it was very difficult. And...there was a great division in the school, just like there was in the country at that time. When I look back at what she did...we had meetings at midnight in one of the rooms on first floor Lewis, where we were talking about our– our sadness and our anger at this. And one of my classmates, Bridget Balthrop, who was very close to Sister Canada said, “Well, I’m going to call her. At midnight, she came down and explained it to us. There’s also a picture on the alumni page—that connection page—of Sister in that office—which is now being changed into a sort of a welcoming center—she’s sitting there and she’s surrounded by these girls on the floor. And I can see my classmates and the pictures and people are so serious and taking notes. But I don’t know—maybe it’s my advanced age and how you see things differently after many years—I think I’m still pretty much– a very left person. But you know, she—she just went out of her way to explain things to us. And I have done some research on the Consular Affair, and I have found out that many schools—including the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois in Champaign, and other places around the country—also cancelled Kunstler because they were afraid of—as Sister Canada said—the “outside element” coming in. That library was just going up and she was afraid that something awful– and she could not get insurance for under something like \$5 million, she explained to us. Which is a lot of money now, but it was astronomical–

**Christopher Allison** 11:47

–Oh, I’m sure–

**Jean Rasmussen** 11:48

–back then. So, you know, on May 23, 1970, we graduated and went our separate ways. But this place has stayed with me. There’s something...that’s immeasurable about this place. I’ve been to every reunion. I have not ever missed one. Now, there’s only two of us here today. But my class rallied last summer at the last minute, and came for our 50th. So...that’s my story. I love this place. I always will. I feel at home here. I feel connected to people from the 1920s. And the students who are here now and I wish I could know them because they sound pretty fabulous. So, thank you for inviting me.

**Christopher Allison** 12:57

–nice to come back– [inaudible] –better.

**Jean Rasmussen** 13:00

I would love to I would love to. So, thank you for inviting me. I wish they had done this 40 years ago. So– and thank you for not putting us on camera. I’m going to put that in.

**Christopher Allison** 13:11

You’re welcome!

**Jean Rasmussen** 13:13

So, I hope that was helpful to you.

**Christopher Allison** 13:15

Definitely, so, so helpful.