

Oral History Interview with Ruth Lund Daddona
Interviewed by Julia Stringfellow
October 14, 2006

[Start: 00:00:00]

JS: This is oral history number 4 on October 14, 2006 for the Milwaukee-Downer Reunion. This is in Briggs Hall room 424. Can you please state your name?

RLD: My name is Ruth Lund Daddona.

JS: What year did you graduate from Milwaukee-Downer?

RLD: I graduated in 1956, the yellow class.

JS: What was your degree in?

RLD: I was in Bachelor of Science and then diploma in Occupational Therapy.

JS: Why did you choose to attend Milwaukee-Downer?

RLD: Because I knew nothing about Occupational Therapy and I didn't know what I wanted to do for my life and I took some personality testing in Milwaukee, an occupational school I would imagine. They said, "you should be an occupational therapist." I said, "what's that?" [laughs] And they said, "to find out, you should go to Milwaukee-Downer and they have a course there on it and they'll tell you about that." So I did and I said, "I like that," and went to school.

JS: What was the transition like going from high school to college?

RLD: Actually, I didn't. I had put in two years of college at La Crosse State. My mother wanted me to be an accountant for her business. So the first class in accounting, I came in with the first assignment, thinking ten cents off was really great. [laughs] And they said, "I don't think you understand what you're supposed to do here." And I said, "I disenroll from this class." So my sophomore year I took whatever I felt like taking and my mother said that's enough of that. She said, "why don't you go to Milwaukee for awhile and see what the world is like." So I did and did that personality test thing and enrolled at Milwaukee-Downer College. So there really wasn't a transition from high school, I came in as a sophomore. The classes I had taken in La Crosse were the only ones that applied to the Occupational Therapy degree, so it was written in the cards [laughs].

JS: Can you tell me about this box you are donating today?

RLD: As sophomores, the class wanted to make some money. Anne Bernhardt Oweis' father was in construction and I guess he did lots of woodworking for people. I'm not sure what the whole process was, but I found out at lunch today that he had made the boxes. As students, we shellacked them all and this box was to hold the memorabilia, so it's about 4 inches deep and the inside of the top is a scrapbook paper thing that you can put your pictures in, and the bottom would hold whatever else that you

wanted to save. Originally, I had things in there like corsages from the proms and things like that, but over the years all of that stuff went. Some of the girls didn't remember, or didn't buy them. I can't quite put it all together, but that was the sophomore year, because I came in as a sophomore and when talking at lunch today, Carol [?] said she had one and she left it at the end of the sophomore year, so it had to be sophomore year. And so here it is. If the Archives wants it, they can have it.

[00:04:30]

JS: Can you tell me about the Occupational Therapy program at Milwaukee-Downer?

RLD: It's too bad it didn't follow here to Lawrence. I was really fortunate in doing it. Henrietta McNary was in charge of it. She was the professor. The classes were great, they were small classes. We did a lot of crafts, but we did a lot of anatomy and biology and sciences. As a matter of fact, she used me as a guinea pig. Now I don't know whether it's in the Archives or not. I had enough credits for the BA as well as a BS. And she tried, but I don't know to whom. It's something you would have to look up, to get me both degrees, but they didn't. They, they in quotes. I don't know who "they" were. The program itself, she was really great. I did not have money for the final for the senior year and so she got a scholarship for me, so I was able to finish the senior year. That's what the letter is in there, that scholarship was gotten for me through vocational training of some kind. They don't know that it came from the college, but she did that for me, so I could finish. Oh, and you know, it was a very small class. All of the occupational therapists in training were really close and took all of the same courses.

JS: What was the fifth year program?

RLD: Well, once you had your coursework completed, then you had to take a year of training and you could decide what areas to take your training in. There were more than you could get in a year. So it was pediatrics, general orthopedics, psychiatric, I trained in a tuberculosis hospital. It must have been one of the last. I didn't have money for that either. So at the time, the services were looking for women in occupational therapy and physical therapy too, I believe. Because I didn't have any money I was commissioned as an [?] in the Navy and then I got a stipend all fifth year and I owed the Navy then I think two years. And so that's an occupational therapist in the Navy.

JS: And where were you stationed at while you were in the Navy?

RLD: I wanted to go to Bethesda, Maryland, which was the chief hospital at least on the east coast. And they sent me to St. Augustine Naval Hospital on Long Island. And that has since been turned into a Veterans' hospital and I think it had to be torn down, or converted into something else. And that's where I met my husband. So I never came back to the Midwest [laughs]. But the Navy got several girls through that year of training. After that year of training we came back to the school to study for a month, I believe it was four weeks. It was for intensive study, preparing the certification exam in occupational therapy. At the end of that time, we took the exam and then we were given our certificates for our diplomas in occupational therapy in that fifth year.

JS: Great, it sounds like a great program.

RLD: It really was. I don't know if they do that anymore, but it was a terrific way of getting through our education. And because of that, much later, I had Veteran's benefits and so I got my master's in education.

[00:09:15]

JS: What were some activities that you were a part of while you were at Milwaukee-Downer?

RLD: I was in a lot. I was a junior Co-Chairman. The girls kept voting me into this stuff, and I'm going, "I wasn't even here for half!" As a junior, I kind of got on the committee that welcomed the in-coming freshmen. I was on the newspaper, *The Snapshot*. I was editor for that for a year. I was junior class vice president and senior class president. And I was in the occupational therapy club. I did crew, so that was a lot of fun. I remember running through Downer Woods to the river to get the shells. Of course, we competed against the classes, because we couldn't compete against another school. So all of our competition was between the classes. It was a really great way to get everybody to know everybody. My class was about 34, so it was very small. So you kind of really knew almost everybody in the school. I was a city-stayer. I was not in the dorms.

JS: What were some of the professors that really influenced your life in Milwaukee-Downer?

RLD: I think Henrietta McNary first, because she really pushed and she really encouraged and said you were great, you can do this. I think you got that from a lot of the professors at Downer. They would tell you how great you were and how far you could go and you just went flying. The other one was President Johnson. He had a critical thinking class and he would come down to the Union and talk. I don't know if it was all of the years he was there, but he would invite all of his students to his home and have discussions about some record that he had or book we read. But I remember going to his house and joining these discussions and the critical thinking class. And it was terrific. I think it was those two probably had the most influence, but that's what I had the most confidence with.

JS: What was the overall relationship like between the administration and the faculty and the students?

RLD: Overall, the women in the office were great. I don't remember, I was really concerned with getting my credits in occupational therapy. I'm sure I was in the office, but I don't remember their names. I don't know. And the faculty were terrific, they were there to help.

JS: What were the benefits of being an all women's college and how did that continue to influence you after you graduated?

RLD: I was sorry to see all of the all women's colleges go into disfavor. I don't know, I was raised in a family where my mother and father were separated and my grandfather was dead. So I was raised with all women. So I may have been just comfortable in the atmosphere. But you didn't have to worry. I had come from a state school that was co-ed. You didn't have to worry in class about the boys [laughs]. You just had to worry about getting a date for prom. The atmosphere was that women can do this, and I was raised that way too in an all female household, so it fit really well with how I was brought up. But even

so, I came in as kind of shy, “what am I doing here?” And you just became someone. You became self-confident, so that carried through going into the Navy, and it’s funny now. I always think my husband was head of the household, but my kids tell me not [laughs]. So evidently it carried over, even though I might not have been aware of it. And I worked. I got my degree in teaching, because at the time, there weren’t a lot of occupational therapists in the school systems like there are now. Most of the OTs had gone into education to get a degree so they could teach learning-disabled kids, and I didn’t particularly care to do that. So I just got my degree in teaching and what I did was I majored with young kids. So I ended up teaching in schools with all kinds of kids.

[00:15:26]

JS: During vacations away, when Milwaukee-Downer school wasn’t in session, did you do any traveling?

RLD: Actually, I was a city student, although my family was in La Crosse, Wisconsin. And because my mother said to go to Milwaukee and see the world, I hooked up with a bunch of women. At that time they had women boarding houses. So I started out in a women’s boarding house, made friends, and we moved into an apartment. So I was not a part of the dorm life, so I didn’t go home necessarily. If I went home, it was just for a couple of weeks and then I would come back to be with the women. And I did part time, I worked part time, so there is an article in here that says I had an arrangement on television [laughs], when I was working part time, but there’s no picture of it. So I was pretty much independent and I was two years older than most of the kids in my class, because I had those other two years at the state college. It didn’t make much of a difference, but I graduated when I was about 25. I remember talking to one of the green class and was like, “oh my God, a quarter of a century!” at 25 [laughs].

JS: We’re almost out of time. Are there any stories that you would like to add, or any memories, like a favorite memory from Milwaukee-Downer?

RLD: Probably, but you know, it’s such...I don’t know. Just to come up with one...

JS: Did you participate in Lantern Light or the Christmas plays?

RLD: Yeah, I did. I do remember one thing that was really neat. I guess the dorm students had more occasions to have dinners together, but there was Christmas dinner with the boars, the real boar’s head that got walked around. I mean, it was carried on the platter and what’s the song? No, it’s a Christmas song when they carried the boar’s head around and we were all there in our formal dress. It was very, very exciting. I think the actor’s name was [?] who wanted the Christmas dinner. It must be in the *Cumtux*. We were all sitting around, listening to him. It was very formal and lovely. So that’s one memory.

The anatomy class where we dissected the cat, that stands out [laughs]. You know, I’m drawing a blank.

JS: Okay, well if there’s nothing you can think of to add, then this is going to conclude the interview.

[End: 00:19:10]