

Interviewee: Michelle Vinoski

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Interviewer: Unknown

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Start of Interview:

(Interviewer) This is an interview with Michelle Vinoski who was born in 1966 and lived in Ironwood Michigan for most of her life. She is currently a student here at NMU. Today is March 20th 1989 and I am going to be speaking to Michelle about what it was like to attend a catholic school for twelve years. Ok first of all Michelle what schools did you attend?

(Michelle Vinoski) Well I attend Ironwood Catholic Grade School for grades one through seven and Ironwood Catholic High School for grades eight through twelve.

(I) Ok and what are some of the earliest recollections you have of the Catholic schools?

(MV) Um basically I remember it being a small class and I remember doing SRA.

(I) SRA? In reading?

(MV) The reading, what is it called... oh no I can't remember but it is SRA it is like a reading progress, you work your way up through all the different levels reading and answering questions on them. That's one of the first things I remembered. I remember going to library because only two of us got to go to the library at the beginning and I was one of them, I remember that.

(I) Ok what in your estimation were some of the advantages of attending a Catholic grade school and high school?

(MV) Well since the classes were a lot smaller the student-teacher ratio was pretty good. It was probably you know I don't have an estimation on it but you got a lot more attention than you would in a bigger class. Um the classes were a lot closer since the school was so small. You couldn't help but be friends with everybody and that made things a little bit more pleasant. You know you always had someone there to talk to or play with or whatever. Uh I just I guess that's the ones that I can think of right now off the top of my head.

(I) Ok can you think of any disadvantages of attending a Catholic school?

(MV) Well possibility because we were a small school they couldn't offer as many you know the curriculum wasn't as expanded as you would find in a public school. So a lot of the classes that you might get in a public school we weren't offered in the Catholic school. Although we did have the opportunity to take some classes at the public school although they weren't still as many as you would otherwise.

(I) Ok, what were your teachers like? Were they all religious, were they nuns and priests or were there also lay teachers?

(MV) Well we had nuns for the first year and then a lay teacher for the second, I would say it was about half and half pretty much until we got into the later high school that's when the religious order of nuns pulled out and we had all lay teachers.

(I) What were they like? Can you give any examples of some of your teachers? [Giggles]

(MV) Well I of course I remember my first grade teacher, Sister Dorothy Ann and I don't know she was, Sister Dorothy Ann. [Laughs] I don't know she was, I guess I enjoyed her but I can't really remember exactly anything positive or negative about her. I remember liking my second grade teacher just because she seemed really friendly. My third grade teacher sister Torsisious [Spelled Phonetically] was kind of strange I remember what day was that? When we got the leis that she put around our necks and kissed us, every single person in the class? That was kind of strange. But I remember my English teacher in seventh grade it was really particular about English and grammar.

(I) And what was her name?

(MV) Sister Percillia [Spelled Phonetically].

(I) Percillia

(MV) She um she was kind of odd she... really insisted on perfection and grammar and perfection and what you call it the sentences? Diagraming sentences!

(I) Oh ok!

(MV) She insisted on perfection on that and she insisted that you didn't drop your chalk too hard in the tray or didn't drop your pen on the floor. And if you did it was always you were trying to, you were doing it on purpose. Those are some of the nuns I really remember.

(I) How about in high school? Is there any one that you particularly remember?

(MV) [Chuckles] Well as far as lay teachers go Mr. Grin [Spelled Phonetically] was certainly was a little off the wall. He... you know he, I learned my biology when but it was kind of a different, I remember him giving us an ESP quiz one time where he said number one and then hit his fingers on his head concentrating and then said number two and the funny thing was I got an A on that quiz and it was probably the only A I ever got on one of his quizzes.

(I) Ok what were the attitudes of your peers from other grade schools and high schools about the Catholic schools? What did they think went on there?

(MV) Well when we were in grade school and high school we really didn't "fraternized" with them too much really it was just us. And there was almost a kind of um what's the word I am thinking of...you don't know.

(I) Uh...

(MV) Um...

(I) Animosity?

(MV) No I wouldn't say that it was kind of, we were both our separate.... You know... our separate schools. We kind of made it a point to make it that way it seemed. But then once I got out of high school and started meeting those people, you know now we get along really well. But it's funny because people like when I came to Northern said, "oh you went to a Catholic school!" and they told us even people from our area, who knew there was a Catholic school there, they thought we wore uniforms, which we didn't. And they thought we marched through the halls during you know when the bell rang to get to our next class we had to march in single file. And they were sure that we got our hands slapped by rulers, which I don't recall ever happening to me once. Um but there is a lot of misconceptions about what Catholic school is like, although there are Catholic schools where that happened. Our didn't seem to be one of those.

(I) Ok would you say your quality of education was better or worse than of the public schools and why do you think that way?

(MV) Well I... I have a belief that people who teach in Catholic schools don't do it for the money because they aren't usually paid as much. So I have a belief that the people that teach in those schools do it because they like teaching. So, I think that... not trying to be bias I think I had a better education. Although, I mean better education than some but I am sure that there are some people in public schools who had a better education than I did. But, I just think that a lot had to do with, although we didn't have all the courses open to us, the ones we did were well taught. And I know I learned a lot from them and judging from some of the scores people in our grade, some of their scores on the ACT just kind of shows that we must have learned a lot. Even though we didn't have that many courses the student-teacher ratio was so small that we had a lot of attention and if there was a problem we always had someone to turn to.

(I) You had help guidance counselor or was anyone available?

(MV) Well I mean besides I am talking about just academically but there was also a guidance counselor available for you know personal problems if you had any.

(I) Ok do you think the behavior of the students in the Catholic schools was better or worse than that of the public school students?

(MV) Well...

(I) I need you to be truthful I will take any examples.

(MV) [Laughs] Well I... I know... I think that public schools well when I walked by the public schools there would always be the you know the group outside smoking and something. And we had our own group although they weren't nearly as you know, I don't think as big as population there were only two or three out there. And I know for a fact that many of the people and I consider myself being in the one of the more bigger groups at the school. That there wasn't a lot of drinking there and as far as behavior in the school well...[Chuckles] we of course had our ups and downs with that kind of thing. I remember um having my Frisbee taken away for throwing it in the hallway just because it happened to kind of hook into the library and the librarian didn't think it was too funny. I remember hitting my tenth grade geometry teacher in-between the eyes with a rubber band, although it was totally accidental because it just kind of snapped off my hand. But I had to pull tape off the floor for about three house after school for that. Which got me a nice cold and you know there were a lot of other behaviors that were not acceptable I am sure.

(I) Well such as?

(MV) Well I remember when I was in eleventh grade we had one teacher who we seemed to like to pick on a bit more than any of the other just because she was kind of open to that kind thing. Her name was Sister... Mary Kathleen that's who it was. And she was older, probably in her 60s late 60s and so she was kind of a push over. And we took advantage of that and I remember one time very late in the school year, all of us girls and I think one guy possibly as a joke all wore bright red lip stick to class. Well it just so happen that that day Sister Mary Kathleen had decided she was no longer going to teach us that year and they sent Mr. Grinda [Spelled Phonetically] in to lecture us on our immaturity and here we were trying to make the point that we weren't immature, while we sat there with red lip stick on our lips. So you know the behavior that took place wasn't you know like there were no guns or anything, it was generally harmless behavior but it was more of a practical joke type thing all the time. It was a lot fun though and I have to admit I was probably in most of them.

(I) Kind of an instigator?

(MV) In fact that is what one teacher called me.

(I) He called you an instigator?

(MV) An instigator yes. And the thing he did call an instigator for I had nothing to do with! Although I did have my share of instigations.

(I) Ok um how about extra curricular activities? Did the schools either school offer anything was there anything outside of the school or maybe sports or something that you remember?

(MV) We didn't have a whole lot of sports just like we didn't have a whole lot of classes to pick from. Uh we had basketball, girls and boys' basketball and we had track, girls and boys' track as

well. But we that was about it but we did put a lot of work into those particular sports. Um there were a lot of groups, Student Council, we had a Christian Action Core.

(I) What did the Christian Action Core do?

(MV) Well we met every now and then, it might be every week, here I was president for two years and I can't even remember. We met every week I believe and just, we would... one thing I know we did was that at Thanksgiving we had a food collection in all the classes to see who can get the most canned food or whatever. And then we raised money, having coffee socials in the area churches and we bought turkeys and bread and milk and we made up as many baskets as we could and gave them to all the disadvantaged families in the area. Um Student Council functioned as normal Student Council would.

(I) Right.

(MV) And there were other opportunities like a Biking club, Pep club, Yearbook staff I was involved with that. Uh that was about it for extracurricular, some actives though that the school did, every year we had fundraiser it was called Larosa's Sunday, apparently the first year they had it Larosa's which is the pasta company if you well. Donated all the spaghetti for it, it's a big spaghetti feed and there was three Catholic churches in Ironwood and we had the feed from I think it was maybe like 11am till 6pm on a particular Sunday. Usually the first one in February and for the few days before that they had the big day where they made all the sauce and I remember the big day we made all the meatballs when we were seniors. They had all the seniors girls go down and roll meatballs and I remember distinctly we made 9722 meatballs and we rolled a good portion of those. And then on Sunday we all worked at the big spaghetti feed and it used earn us you know several thousand dollars we used to make quite a bit off usually, five to seven thousand dollars off of it.

(I) And what did they use the money for?

(MV) Just... well it was just another fundraiser since Catholic schools aren't publicly financed as a public school would be with government funding or anything. You know part of it was tuition where the parents, our parents had to pay tuition to send us there. Although our was not nearly as much as you'd find in like a bigger city Catholic school. And there were other fundraisers like a typical bingo, in fact my parents ran, still run to this day the Ironwood Catholic Bingo every Monday night. And that earns us about 25000 dollars a year and the Larosa's was a big fundraiser and they had car raffles and just a lot of things to you know raise to run the school. Eventually we couldn't raise enough money and that is why four years ago it closed and that was it.

(I) I see. How about dances or anything, did the school ever have dances? I have heard before that sometimes Catholic schools they don't like to have those kind of things where you mix boys and girls.

(MV) Uh no uh no. no no no we had our shares of dances. We typically had a Halloween dance, Homecoming dance, we didn't... they used to have proms there when my older brothers and sisters went but now, when we were there it was just the Homecoming dance which was in January or February for basketball, crown the king and queen. And they were pretty much typical of public school dances, you know.

(I) Did the public school students attend the dances? Or was it usually just from the Catholic schools?

(MV) I would say mostly the Catholic schools but you know some people dated people from the public schools and they came along. Or some people who had friends from the public schools, especially the Halloween one we always the non-Catholic school people would always try to dress up so nobody would recognize them. And you know the parents of which ever class was putting on the dance would chaperon and just your typical high school dance I guess. There isn't really anything that separated a Catholic school, our Catholic school high school dance from a regular one.

(I) Ok so how did you get along with or everyone I should say... your peers who were in the catholic school. Did everyone get along? Were there any fights between the students in the school or between the students and the teachers or were there any animosity between people?

(MV) I never really seemed to find any. I remember um I was giving a tour to a new senior when I was a senior and they came up and asked me if I would give a tour to these two new students coming in. and I was like five to nine and our class ended at 9:03 or 9:04 and so I thought you know I told my principle well try to get me out of the next class so I can really do this tour. Well actually it only took me about six minutes to take them though the whole school because it wasn't a very large facility. And I remember they were both shocked at how many people I knew. Well the thing was I knew everybody in the school so there weren't a lot of arguments you know, of course you are going to find some because you know you are working with people. There is going to be arguments but there never seemed to be anything too uh too much, too many fights or I don't know.

(I) Ok um since it was a Catholic what about religious actives I mean were you supposed to attend mass every day or something?

(MV) No I know a lot of Catholic schools require you attended mass every morning but I know we did attend mass during the Holy Days and sometimes we usually have uh a mass... a class would sponsor a mass and wed do the readings during the mass but it wasn't a whole lot. I mean it wasn't really often, maybe once a month that we had a mass. A lot of times I know when we were in I think it was tenth grade we, they'd asked to sing a lot for the funerals we were, although there were three churches in Ironwood, our school was right next door to one of them. And everything they'd have a funeral, not every time but a lot of the times they would always ask our class to sing for the funeral.

(I) Oh that must have been a lot of fun. [Laughs]

(MV) Well I'm, it was something. It got us out of class!

(I) It got you out of class! Ok do you have any regrets about attending Catholic school?

(MV) Well I guess I would have liked to have the opportunity to take a lot more classes that I didn't have the opportunity to take. But I think overall I appreciate it a lot first off because my parents took the time to pay the money to send me there and they thought it was worthwhile enough to send me there obviously or they wouldn't have, wouldn't have sent me. Uh I enjoyed the closeness you know with all the students, in fact most of the kids in my class I am still always hanging around with. You know on any given day you'll go out somewhere and find half of your graduating class out you know? So here you are having this reunion without even trying. I guess what else.... I enjoyed the closeness with the teachers and that of the opportunities that we had. I enjoyed, although I'd find those opportunities in other schools, there just seemed to be you know you could get involved in more cause you had to be! I mean like for basketball you know a lot of people would say oh you made the team, and it was not a question whether you made the team or not, only eight girls would go out! Whereas in a bigger school you might have twenty people go out and they pick twelve girls, only eight people would go out and they obviously they were all going to make the team.

(I) Did the students pull together during these sporting events? I mean did you have good...

(MV) Oh yeah!! We... more for the boys games they used to have pep rallies every home game and during the last hour they'd have all the cheerleaders with their uniforms on and all the classes would sit in their groups in the bleachers and we would do all these cheers. And the class that yelled the loudest the teachers would vote that had the most spirit during the pep rally we'd get this spirit stick. And I know they first used to make it out of cardboard but then it became a thing to try and steal the spirit stick and usually during half time of a game there would be a big wrestling match going on in the corner trying to get the spirit stick. Eventually it would get torn up every week, so then they started making it out of this metal cylinder and became more of a weapon than anything else. But I think the basketball games were like some of the highlights of our sports in high school because everybody was out cheering for them. And like everybody would go to the games, all the students and all the parents were there and we really got into the school spirit thing with those games. And then we would all go out afterwards for pizza, I don't know just kind of built a good relationship with all the students.

(I) Ok so overall how do you feel about your Catholic school experience? Was it a good one, was it positive?

(MV) I'd say if I had to do, my parents have, in fact my mom was just talking over Christmas about whether if she had to do it all over again would she send us to the Catholic schools. And she said she kind of doubted it because just because of all the opportunities we missed. But then I

said but look at what we did get. And she said she believes that our education was better than the public schools, at least the public school in town, maybe not, maybe not any other in any other place. If I had to do it all over again, and I was in first grade having my choice of where to I'd would do it again because it, I thought it was adventitious because of all the opportunities that I had being in a small school. I mean although we didn't have as many groups, we could be in all of them because we had to because there had to be someone to fill all the positions and different groups. The extra curricula even though there weren't as many opportunities I was always doing something because I was involved in just about everything. The closeness I wouldn't exchange for anything.

(I) Are you close with everyone in the school or was it mostly people in the class? Was there mixing between the classes even the younger?

(MV) Sure! I mean when I first got into that school I was in eighth grade and one of my brothers was in ninth grade and one was in eleventh grade. And there were a lot of bigger families, of course being Catholic they all stand by bigger family type thing. So usually what you found was that like our family would have kids in these grades and another family would so there was a lot of you know I would go with my brother to his friend's house because I knew someone from that family too. Even when we have parties, you know, go out for pizza after games I mean it wasn't just your class going out it was everybody. There was someone from every class and nobody seemed to make a big deal about the, you know younger older thing, it was just like one big happy family I guess.

(I) Ok so if you had to sum up Catholic school in one word or two words what would it be?

(MV) Oh boy! Mmm family is a good one because that's the way it kind of seemed.

(I) Mmhm.

(MV) Um I think maybe valuable because it really had a lot to do with you know the success that I am having going on to college and I think a lot of it had to do with Catholic schools.

(I) Ok thank you.

End of Interview