

Oral History Interview with Mary Ann Hotchkiss
Conducted by Bridget Brownlow on March 29, 2011
Transcribed by Alison Froese-Stoddard, August 2013

BB: Ok, so today is the 29th of March, 2011, and it's Bridget Brownlow interviewing Mary Ann Hotchkiss. Hello, Mary Ann. Thank you very much for coming in.

MH: No problem, it's my pleasure.

BB: I'm very grateful to have you here. Today we're going to talk about your early experiences and memories at Saint Mary's, particularly important because you were part of the first group of women to arrive here. So maybe we could start, if you could tell me your full name, and your place of birth, and your educational background. Those three areas.

MH: All right, my full name is Mary Ann Hotchkiss, when I attended university it was Boudreau.

BB: Mary Ann Boudreau.

MH: From Meteghan, Digby County, Nova Scotia. A tiny little fishing village. So for me, coming to Halifax, oh my goodness, it was like I had arrived and come to the big city.

BB: Right. Exciting!

MH: It was all very exciting. Very exciting for me. Sorry, you wanted to know where I was from ...

BB: Yes.

MH: And my educational background? I took a Bachelor of Science Degree here, I attended Saint Mary's from 1969, which was the first year we were allowed in residence, but I think it had opened up in '68. And then I graduated in '72 with a Bachelor of Science and Mathematics and then I went on to Dal for two years. I must be one of the few students that went on to do a Masters degree at Dal and still lived at Saint Mary's.

BB: Really! Did you?

MH: I lived at Saint Mary's the whole time.

BB: So that's interesting. They allowed you to stay...

MH: They did, because it wasn't full, and Elizabeth Chard was the Dean of Women there, and I said, I'm happy here, can I stay on, and they said sure.

BB: Good enough! So they let you stay!

MH: And so I just walked over to school. So it was great.

BB: So I'm going to take a step back, you said coming to the big city, to Saint Mary's, and... I always like to ask: What was your first impression the first time you sort of walked on campus? And what did you think?

MH: I loved it.

BB: Did you?

MH: Of course, I had a brother who had attended prior to my coming, and I came with a sister. We came together. She had been sick a year – she was two years older, but had been sick and missed schooling for a year. Anyway, we ended up graduating at the same time and coming here at the same time. So we were roommates, and it was exciting. So it wasn't as scary as, coming with a sister and a brother who had already graduated from here. He took a Bachelor of Science, and taking Dentistry at the time. So it was, ok, I knew something about it. It was so exciting for us. Wow, you know. Huge. And Halifax is not that big town, but at the time... Especially coming from a little village. And yeah, I thought it was great. My impression was that it was big, but it was friendly. Like I really... I felt as though I counted. You know? And people were interested too, because two of us coming at the same time, from the same family, with the French background, and so yeah. I thought everybody was so kind and helpful, and yeah, we loved it from day one. And being from the Catholic background, you know it had been a Catholic University, and that was important to us too, at the time.

BB: And so maybe I'll touch on that. Part of what I'm looking at is also the impact of secularization, so that would have happened a year after you would have arrived.

MH: That's right.

BB: Did you notice anything about that?

MH: I was aware it was happening, I don't know that it affected me in any way, or that all of a sudden the university changed, you know, it was still a very caring and small university where the individual really meant a lot. But it's funny, because over the years, still being connected with the university through my husband, I talked a lot with international students and what brought them here, and what made them decide, and still, a lot of them said that because it was a Catholic university, that draws them still. Although it isn't any more, but there were priests there. It was someone from Africa, and there'd be a priest there telling them about, not Saint Mary's, but they would go on to find the history of a university that was at least Catholic, or at least Christian. So it was still probably has an effect because of the history.

BB: It is interesting, isn't it.

MH: Yeah, although it's secular now. I don't know, maybe the attitude...

BB: And would you have regarded, a common theme that's coming out of my interviews would have been the high regard that people had, or potential students had, for the high quality of education that the Jesuits provided.

MH: Yes.

BB: That would have been your...

MH: Yeah, in the back of my mind. Plus I think that Saint Mary's would recruit at Clare District High where I attended, it was like, WOW. You know, these important people that are coming here, (laughs) like, SAINT MARY'S, and they made it sound so great, so you know, that was one influence. I remember MacDonald, one of the technicians, I can't remember his first name, but he had come. Actually, after I worked here, he was still here. But it was funny that we felt, whoa, we're so important. And of course, they would always say too, what great students they had from Clare.. they made you feel like, hey.

BB: They brought you up.

MH: Yeah. They had a great attitude. I just felt the individual student mattered. You know, and coming from a small area, that's important. Coming from a city, it would matter too, otherwise you'd just be lost in the shuffle.

BB: That's right.

MH: It's not so bad if you graduate from school, because then you have a job, but when you're just starting off – and I had just turned 17, because I was essentially 16 when I started here, because I had skipped a year.

BB: Wow.

MH: And so I was young starting anyway, because I was an August baby, I had just turned 5 when I started school, and skipped a year. So I was...

BB: So you had turned 17 in August..?

MH: I had turned 17 in August when I started in September. I was very young. And then, drinking age is 21, right? I got my Masters degree when I was 21, and it was like, Hey! Something's wrong, but somewhere along the way it changed to 19, so I didn't have to wait until I was 21 the whole time. So that was a little different too.

BB: That's right! So when you arrived, obviously the year before had been the first year that women officially, co-educational. And the women that I've interviewed as part of that

year in '68 indicated that they noticed, they were certainly small in numbers. So what did you notice when you came in '69?

MH: Definitely small in numbers. Yeah, oh my gosh. And like I say, I keep referring coming from a small little fishing village, and here it was, oh boy. The ratio was 6:1 and it was a little intimidating.

BB: Was it?

MH: Well, you know, there weren't as many women as you were used to, like in high school, it was more 50/50. Not that it was a terrible thing, you have to remember that I was in Science, and fewer of us, sometimes there were two of us in a class. And when I look back, it was sort of funny but... you drop your eraser and the typical... five guys go running to pick up your eraser. It was sort of neat in that way but then you'd be a little shy too because there were only a few of you and you'd get lost in the cafeterias sometimes, you know. There might have been, you know, if you walked in late because I had science classes, and if you walked in late there might have been two women there, you know? So you needed to walk across the... Not that anybody was rude, or anything, you just felt like, Whoa. A little overwhelmed, but that was good too.

BB: That's right. That's what I've heard too, from some of the other women..

MH: But it wasn't a bad thing, that's for sure.

BB: Well, that's good to know. I mean, in terms of the respectful behaviour for the most part... Now, the hippy culture was in full wave when you were here... Did that...

MH: Um, well... yes and no. That was a bit earlier, I think.

BB: Was it?

MH: Maybe, oh my god, I was so naïve anyway, like the hippy and the flower child kind of thing, the longish hair, the mini.. The mini skirts were in for us, oh lord, when I think about it, oh my gosh, my kids, my daughter would remind me of that whenever I would be complaining about what she'd wear.. And the polyester, those polyester days were a little bit different ... I still don't like polyester! And the big designs, and yeah. I guess it was a little bit hippy, but that's another thing. My sister and I were so naïve, coming from a small... we'd smell incense, and we'd go, "ohh, that's drugs!" You know, we had no idea! (laughs) So I guess that was around too, but we were all...

BB: (Laughs) But you were conservative compared to... and innocent.

MH: I know, when I look back, dear lord, yeah, we were. Just, everything was great, everthing was wonderful, and you go to church every Sunday, you know, it was really... And in fact, that's how I met Keith. It's funny, because Terry Monahan would come and pick us

up, my sister would trudge together mumble mumble, anyway, long story short, I got to meet him too.

BB: And so, did you start to date right away when you...

MH: Ah, it's funny, because I was so career oriented, got to finish my degree, and he was very into sports and football, and neither of us were really looking for a serious relationship, but yeah. The first year we met, and it just blossomed from there.

BB: Nice. That's lovely, beautiful, really.

MH: Yeah, it really was. I think we met in October of '69

BB: Wow.

MH: I know, it's amazing. And the rest is history!

BB: You met right around the same time I was born. I was born in October, '69.

MH: Now you've made me feel really old! Oh, isn't that something. Oh gosh.

BB: And now, you also worked in residence.

MH: Yeah, gosh I worked there for five years, oh my, and you'll ask me for years too.... I graduated in 74, with my Masters degree at Dal, and then that year, that October, '74-'79, I think,...

BB: You worked that in the residence department.

MH: I started off in counselling,

BB: Did you!

MH: Yes, with Dr.Owen Carrigan was the president then, and stood off there, and Elizabeth Chard was the Dean of Women who moved on to registrar, and I took that position. So at that point, Keith and I were married, and he was the assistant director – they changed it from Dean of Men to Assistant Director of Residence women and the Assistant Director of residence men...

BB: Wow! And you each had those jobs!

MH: He was there, and I was here.

BB: That's wild!

MH: I know. So we were here together for a while, and then I decided to start a family, and I worked for about two years after Christopher was born, and decided to have a few more

children, and I stayed on as the assistant to the VP for a while. And then I stayed home with the kids.

BB: Yeah. Ok, that's great. So when you were living in residence, did you, even for females were they called Dons?

MH: Yeah.

BB: Were you a Don when you...

MH: Yeah.

BB: What are some of your memories around that?

MH: Oh, wow... Well, it was great. You'd have a floor of girls, and you'd have meetings, well, we had I believe. Don, was it Sabean? And Elizabeth Chard was in charge. It was just the 'A' and 'B' House at the time. There were only two houses, and you know, just to keep them in line.

BB: Which would have been a challenge, I'm sure.

MH: A little bit of a challenge, but a lot of fun. Those were innocent years, what would go on then compared to now... And you know, we still had people overdosing on drugs, and all kinds of things like that too, drinking, partying too much, and academically hurting a little bit but... But all in all, it was not bad... and of course by the time you're Don, you're two or three years into it, you're not a new student yourself, you know the ins and outs. And it's just to help them adjust to university life, mainly so...

BB: Yeah. Now do you remember much interaction with The Mount? Any memories around that?

MH: No. Not really. I don't know, you'd think the Mount with the girls. Even the "A" House and 'B' House. There was "A" House ... and then there was the 'B' House. It was sort of funny, you'd get cozy in your little area, and just like Saint Mary's – Dal kind of rivalry, I don't think there was really a rivalry, but I don't think anyone looked to hang out with girls from the Mount, no...

BB: Ok. Do you remember girls coming from The Mount to transfer, to switch to Saint Mary's?

MH: No, not much.

BB:” Ok.

MH: There were probably some, but really, there wasn't that much connection. The only thing I remember was that Keith coached their football team, the girls, one year.

BB: Really! OK. I didn't even know they had one.

MH: I think they did. It was intermural or something. But no, I can't say that there was .. I mean, there was an awareness that they were there, but, really. Of course, I was a science student.. I was like...

BB: You were focused on your studies.

MH: Focused! I could go out one night, Friday OR Saturday night, but not both. Gee, I was so...

BB: If only students were like you today!

MH: Oh, it was funny. So really I just...

BB: But the fact that you didn't know anything about that actually, is telling for me. It does.

MH: I mean, in what way would you think about interreaction...

BB: It would have been from the early 1960s to the late '60s, there were various attempts actually of The Mount and Saint Mary's attempting to amalgamate. So the Bishop at the time that you were here at Saint Mary's was James Hayes, and he would have been Chancellor of both universities, so they had this strange role. But there were numerous failed negotiations.

MH: Somehow, I don't know...

BB: Interesting. And interesting that your Don experience because, say at the same time at The Mount, the girls would have been very – from what I've heard – through oral histories there, they would have been very envious of all the privileges of Saint Mary's girls had, or they had a better salad bar at Saint Mary's, or they were allowed to stay out later at Saint Mary's, or have boys in the... different...

MH: Well, being co-ed is different.

BB: That's right.

MH: Yeah, and their structure with the nuns, although we had the Jesuits. Yeah, I don't know.

BB: So the fact that you didn't, that's not a big memory...

MH: I was sort of aware that they were there, but it wasn't a big...

B: Right. And that makes sense to me, actually, that you wouldn't.. that it would be a much higher love and awareness of what was going on here at the Mount, as opposed to here.

MH: Maybe, I don't... I know in the first year of marriage here, the relations were very very strict. Like, dark curtains and I remember there was some sort of a rally in the cafeteria and if we all showed up they'd changed the hours, it was so exciting! (laughs) I was a real rebel! Oh yeah, I'm like, oh my god, I'm going to break the rule! So yeah, we all had to break the rule for five minutes and then if we all broke the rule, no one could be disciplined.

BB: Did it work?

MH: Yeah! They changed the hours.

BB: Fascinating.

MH: Yeah, I don't remember it closed at 10 or midnight, and we had no locks on our doors. If we were lucky enough to have a single room, the drawer from under your bed you could open that up at night, and the no one could open your door. So that was like wow, if you had a single room, you felt more secure.

BB: Why no locks?

MH: Well in that day and age, and Halifax wasn't the way Halifax is now, you know, if you heard of one murder a year, it was like oh my gosh. Shocking talk of the town. So to get into 'A' house, you needed a key, but that was it. Everything else, other than the bathrooms was wide open.

BB: Wow! So do you.. that rally that you talked about, and I'm interested in cross-referencing things if I can, with the journals at the time, and stuff.. Would that have been '69?

MH: I think it was '69. That, or '70. The '69/'70 school year.

BB: Ok. That's fascinating.

MH: That was really something. And it was done very peacefully, and it was like, oh my gosh, we're really part of something.

BB: Wow.

MH: That was neat.

BB: Are there any other memories that come to mind.. You really were from a very pioneering era. Groups of women, academics, particularly at Saint Mary's... Is there anything else you can think of?

MH: I don't know that we gave it that much thought because it was the excitement of going to university, and all that stuff, but I mean, in retrospect, I'm like, wow, we were pioneers.

BB: You were.

MH: Other than the ratio, which made it very obvious, but other than that it was more, like in the classrooms,, being in science and mathematics especially, there weren't that many women, but it wasn't a problem at all. And in fact sometimes, you know it was sort of neat, because I was one of the few women there, so you sort of felt special. You know, it wasn't a negative thing at all.

BB: Were you aware of anyone, now it would have been preceding your time a little bit, but there were the occasional individuals who did not support women coming to Saint Mary's. They wanted it to stay all male.

MH: You felt that a little bit.

BB: Did you?

MH: Yeah. A little bit, but you let it roll off, because this was the... Even Father Hennessey, I have to laugh, he used to be Dean of Men, he wasn't the Dean of Men when we came, but it was still very much a presence, and he used to tease us, "Saint Mary's will never be the same again..", you know, with a little smile on his face. But you knew that in his heart of hearts, he knew it was time.

BB: Yes.

MH: So you know, a few.. every once in a while you'd feel like, oh, what are you doing here?

BB: Can you think of any specific examples around that, would it just be offhand remarks or...

MH: Yeah, offhand little remarks, but nothing that I would really have given it too much thought. You know, the old school, maybe the old...

BB: Because you would have been here with people who would have started here even in '66..

MH: Or even before. You know, and when it was an all boys school, and certain philosophy.. But all in all, I think that by the time it was decided mostly everybody was ready for it. You know, they're willing to explore it and it would mean expansion..

BB: That's right. It fit in with the other things happening, growing campuses, and ... yeah. Well, your thoughts and memories reflect in a very similar way to the other women who I've spoken to. They felt very much welcomed...

MH: And the odd remark, you expect that, you know, sometimes it's just teasing anyway. But I really, no, I felt very welcome. It didn't occur to me that often, like gee, we're pioneers. Really, I never thought of it. You know? We were just excited. And you're excited

anyway, we're going to university! You know? You're just in a different mindset. But one of my fondest memories, when I wanted to study, because like I said I had so much work to do. And on the floor sometimes, you could get, and we had a TV in the lounge, a black and white TV – no colour TV, black and white TV, three stations, there wasn't that much on anyway.. (laughs) So they would gather and have fun in the lounge, play guitars, but sometimes you just wanted to concentrate. So there was a bathroom in the McNally building, it's still there, I went by the other day to take a look at it. Oh My Gosh. They had a built-in desk, just for me. It was a counter, really, where you'd put your makeup in the washroom. It was a big long counter, I had a chair there, and there was a janitor, and he was Italian, oh what was his name, he was the sweetest man. And he noticed I was there a lot, and I finally explained why I was two or three hours in the bathroom, right? And he was cleaning up and he always made sure I got home safely, and he'd always check on me, and that was my office! I had my very own office. First year student with...

BB: That is priceless!

MH: That was the very best place to study, I tell you. And there weren't really that many women using the washroom like today.

BB: Sure, yeah.

MH: So here I was..

BB: You had the place to yourself.

MH: I had my own private little office where I could study. It was perfect, perfect, perfect.

BB: I think I even know the bathroom, maybe you're talking about..

MH: It's on the bottom hall, and it's right there when you come down the stairs, it's on the left?

BB: I know exactly where...Next to the faculty lounge. Sort of, it's just around the corner...

MH: Yeah. And the faculty lounge is the .. And the connection to the other building as you go outside, and ... Oh my gosh. Well, whenever you go in there, think of me!

BB: I will think about you, I will! Studying away, that's hilarious! Um, any other faculty at the time, or anyone that stands out to you...?

MH: Dr. Singh, he was my favourite teacher.

BB: Was he? Dr.Singh?

MH: And there were two other Singhs, Dr. K. Singh who wore a turban, and it took me a little while to get used to the Indian accent.

BB: Sure.

MH: But most of my professors were Indian, in mathematics at the time, so once you got the accent down pat it was fine. I know some people have difficulty with that, but no, he was so smart, and he made me love mathematics.

BB: Did he?

MH: Yeah. He was my absolute favourite. I often thought, I don't know where he is now, I know he retired years ago, but I'd love to tell him that.

BB: And what was his first name?

MH: Oh, I should know that...

BB: I'll look him up.

MH: And then there was Dr. Y. P. Singh. I liked him too. But K. Singh was my absolute favourite teacher.

BB: Isn't that nice to hear, that you know, you can recall their inspiration.

MH: Oh yeah. He was just so full of knowledge, and so... Office hours all the time, and committees, and sometimes you'd work on a math problem all weekend, you just couldn't wait for Monday, just what am I doing wrong?... Some of these math problems could be 2 or 3 pages long, so if you made a mistake at the beginning... And I'd get there, and he'd smile every time he'd see me coming, and then in two seconds he'd find the... and you'd just go, oh, thank you. And you could tell he was just so happy to help out, and he was just so smart. Like very, but didn't... Some professors are very smart, but they can't come down to the level of us, and they don't explain well. But he was..

BB: A very good teacher.

MH: A very good teacher, but very intelligent. And sometimes you hear, oh this person is too smart to teach? No, that's not being smart, you know, you just don't know how to get down to the level where that student has a problem.

BB: That's a challenge for a lot of faculty. So it's nice to hear that you had a good experience.

MH: Oh, excellent, excellent. And he and Y.P Singh was...

BB: And what about Elizabeth Chard? What was your ..

MH: Elizabeth was very welcoming, and of course it was quite the job for her, all these girls on campus on what to do. And she was a pioneer, obviously, the Dean of Women, and.... Very businesslike, very structured, very organized, but very kind. You know, if she liked you, she'd go to any lengths to help you out. So yeah, she was good.

BB: You're right, and very pioneering, too.

MH: Very much so. And it must have been difficult for her. You know, for the first time around, she would have had no comparisons to make. She really did a fine job.

BB: I regret that I didn't get the chance to interview her. She did tell me, just passing one day, that when she applied for the job here, they required that she bring her mother to the interview. She had to bring her mother to the interview!

MH: (Gasps) She did say that, when we had our little reunion there. Imagine.

BB: (laughs) And her mother was horrified to go out to a Catholic University! You know, she had to sit there while she was interviewed for the job.

MH: Oh my gosh, I wonder how many men had to bring their mothers or fathers...

BB: Exactly. At the university today, 65% is female.

MH: 65% now. Wow. Has it changed!

BB: I know. And I think it's pretty much across the board, more women are..

MH: Isn't that interesting. Of course, a lot more men are going into trades now, which is a good thing too to have the balance.

BB: But we've really come full circle in a pretty short period of time.

MH: Yes. 65%, I didn't realize. That's amazing.

BB: Yeah. So is there anything else that you can think of, that you'd like me to capture, or...?

MH: Mmm, I don't know. I think that pretty well covers it. No complaints. I mean, those were really the best years. It really was great.

BB: You can tell that you...

MH: Oh yeah, it is fond, fond memories. I can't think of anything else that we...

BB: Oh, you touched on lots of great stuff, and as I said, you've really complemented what some of the other women have said.

MH: That's nice that we're all on the same wavelength.

BB: Yeah, no one had anything... and I'll interview Ann MacGillivray tomorrow, so it will be interesting to hear her perspective as well. She was here at the same time as you?

MH: Yeah, for sure. That's great.

BB: If anything else comes to mind, please...

MH: Just give you a call?

BB: Yes, I just kind of like it to flow, and whatever sticks out for you, that's great. Thank you very much.

MH: My pleasure.

BB: And I will end the interview now.