

Oral History Interview with Ann MacGillivray
Conducted by Bridget Brownlow, March 30, 2011
Transcribed by Alison Froese-Stoddard, 2013

BB: Good Morning, this is Bridget Brownlow interviewing Ann MacGillivray on the 30th of March, 2011.

Hello Ann, thank you. Thanks very much with agreeing to speak with me today. Maybe we could start, and you could tell me your full name, your place of birth, and your educational history.

AM: Ok, my full name is Ann Clare MacGillivray and I was born Ann Clare Willms, so MacGillivray is my married name. I was born in Ottawa in Ontario. And my educational history is that I completed my high school at Sydney Academy in Nova Scotia. I then went on to Xavier College in Cape Breton, I did one year. We were living in Cape Breton at the time. And then I had a choice of where I was going to finish. My parents were moving back to Ontario with the military, it would have taken me three more years to complete my degree, two years in Nova Scotia. So I decided to stay in Nova Scotia. I applied to Dal, during my Xavier college year, and they said, yes, they would accept all my six credits, and then they reneged. So at the last minute I applied to Saint Mary's, was admitted on full scholarship...

BB: Nice!

AM: Very nice, yes. They accepted all my credits, and that was when I came, 1969. And so I graduated in '71 with the B.Com. Probably I was the only woman in the graduating class that year. Then I went on to work at a C.A. firm, and got my C.A. in 1975. Then I went back to Saint Mary's and got my Masters in Business Administration in 1995, I think. So I've been a Santamarian for a long time.

BB: And interesting as a mature student, you would have been when you got your MBA, that you've been able to get a different perspective.

AM: IT was very different. When I arrived in 1969, I was in the first group of women that lived in residence. And so I was in a house, on the top floor, I think that was the fourth floor at that point, and they were looking for Residence Dons, so I became a Residence Don. And the following year, I guess I was the head Don for women because they got the little apartment on the bottom floor.

BB: Very nice!

AM: So, that meant that in addition to being on full scholarship, I then had my room and board paid for as well.

BB: Oh, wonderful!

AM: While I was here, I did a main line in accounting, I marked for one of the part time faculty, and actually he didn't like to do his labs on Friday morning, so I did those too. So that's what it was – my educational history here.

BB: That's great. So let's go back to your first arrival on campus. When you first arrived, those first few days and weeks in 1969, what was it like?

AM: Well, I had gone home to be with my parents over the summer, so I arrived by train.

BB: Did you?

AM: Yes, I arrived by train with my big trunk. I was picked up at the train station by a Saint Mary's person, it was a student, so it was great. He brought me right up to the campus, and I don't remember all the business about getting into the residence and everything, but I do remember over the next couple of days exploring around Halifax. But also standing in line for registration for hours, and standing in line to buy books, and all that – and just getting into classes.

BB: And did you notice – of course you were here after the, just one year following the introduction of women officially. What did you notice about.. did you feel you were a minority...

AM: Oh, definitely. There were a lot of comments, of course I was living in residence so we had meal plans and so on, and you had no capability of having any food in your rooms or anything. And so there were a lot of comments from the guys saying, oh you're here for your M.R.S. degree and all that, you know...

BB: M.R.S. being...

AM: Married! Mrs.... Just lots of comments were made. And I did have a problem with the faculty member who said to me one day, because you know, there were maybe two women in the classes in business that I was in. And he said to me, How are you liking it? And I said, oh, I'm really enjoying it. And he said, we'll see how you like it when you fail the course. And I said, I have no intention of failing the course. He said, well, women don't succeed in business. And so I got moved out of his class in a hurry. I thought, I've only been here a week or so and he's saying this to me, so that was only the really negative thing that really happened. One particular faculty member, way back when. But everybody was very accommodating overall.

BB: That is very interesting because I am particularly interested in... I know that – it goes without particularly saying, that the majority of people on campus, both faculty and students did welcome women. But there were those that didn't.

AM: Yeah.

BB: And so those are the ones I'm interested in, so I'm very grateful for your anecdote.

AM: And the Dean that was uh, whether it was the acting Dean, or the Chair of the accounting area, I don't remember, but it was Paul Cormier who went on to be the Auditor General of the province. He was a wonderful teacher. But anyway, I spoke to him, and... no problem. I was moved immediately. So that was great, yeah.

BB: Good. That echoes the remarks of other women who were here at a similar time as yourself. Yes, there were the occasional nasty remarks and that, but overall it was a sense of accommodation and support. Yes. Interesting!

And what memories do you have being a Don in Residence? That would have been a very interesting role.

AM: Yeah, it was. You know, I... In those days, you weren't supposed to be drinking, because the legal drinking age was 21. Of course, most of us were 18, 19 years old, so we weren't, but it was interesting because some girls would get drunk on the weekends, you know, and having to deal with that was, you know, something for a 19 year old to deal with, you know... and really there wasn't a lot of support on campus for where we could tell them to go. You know, I would refer them to Elizabeth Chard who was the Dean of Women in Residence, and lived in residence, so... And you know, we were supposed to be in by midnight, and that kind of stuff, and most of us were, you know, but there were a few. But by the end of the term, we'd already lost a few people who didn't want to be here, but overall, it was pretty good, you know. In the A House – or Vanier as it is now known – they had little pods of six girls – three pods on a floor, and then you'd have your common room, so there was always... a little bit of this or that... You know, you need to clean the bathtub after you use it, because there were only three bathrooms, or you can't leave all your junk in the common room... but overall, it was really not bad.

BB: So you have good memories of that.

AM: Good memories, sure.

BB: So in terms of your academics, you said that you felt, you were in accounting and would have been one of the only women... How would that... Any other memories associated with that?

AM: Well, I still know some of the people that, you know a lot of them, the people in my classes, then went on to be C.A.s, so I did too. And although that was a trying experience, but you know, they were always very good about getting together, to do homework together, to talk about it, that kind of thing, or in residence, and... it was good. What was interesting is that until 1971, human rights allowed discrimination on the basis of gender.

So my first summer, 1970, I applied for summer positions with C.A. firms, and I didn't get one. And that was fine. But then in the fall, in 1970, you apply for a C.A. permanent position in fall for the following summer, and at that point, most of the postings said, Men Only Need Apply, because they knew I was in the system.

BB: Wow. Can you imagine this happening now?

AM: I did get interviews, especially for the ones that didn't cotton on to the fact that there was a woman who was going to be applying. And so, my grades were good, and then they said insulting things, like "Well, hiring a woman would be like hiring a Chinese." And I thought, now you're insulting women and Chinese! "Because our clients wouldn't accept these, you know, people as auditors." And so I moved back to Ottawa. And I got a job in a C.A. firm there. And then came back to Halifax a year later, and one of our Saint Mary's grads had quit at DeLoitte and Touche - it was Touche-Ross in those days - and I got on.

BB: Wow.

AM: Yeah.

BB: So you were a pioneer in more than just... through your academics here, but you were thrust into a workforce that....

AM: ...didn't want women either. But you know, when I was in Xavier College, and I was at Sydney Academy, I did these IQ tests, I'll call them, they were aptitude tests for different professions, and they always said, well, you're really great with numbers, so you should be a math teacher. Well, the last thing I wanted to do was to be a teacher. Very strange after 33 years of teaching at the Mount, you know, and anyway that's where I ended up, but that's not where I wanted to be. And so, I thought, what else can I be? So I said, oh I can be an accountant. So that's what my goal was, and that's what I set my heart on, and so I was going for it!

BB: And you succeeded! That's amazing.

AM: But it was, yeah, it was interesting.

BB: Did you have a sense at the time that you were, both at your time at Saint Mary's and obviously when you were trying to find employment after, that you were a pioneer?

AM: Yes, I did. I did. I realized that this was a men's school, and that it was a men's world in accounting, I knew that. But I've always been one where... you know, to me, I did not feel it was fair to be held back because of your gender. So I was willing to take on the fight. The reason I didn't go to Dal was I thought... At that time, Dal was ranked one of the highest schools in Commerce in Canada, and you know, I did a lot of preparatory

work, and sent off course outlines, and had it in writing that they would accept all these courses, and then they backed down. So I thought, I don't want to deal with a school that isn't good on its word,

BB: That's right.

AM: And so, to me, Saint Mary's was very good as well, in terms of its reputation for commerce and business, and so I said, I'm going to Saint Mary's. Because I had made my mind up, I was coming to Halifax!

BB: Wow. So... were you from a particularly religious background, from a Catholic background?

AM: I am Catholic, and it wasn't necessarily that it was - that I needed a Catholic school, what I wanted was to stay in Nova Scotia. Because we had been living in Sydney, and going to Ontario meant extra time because of the grade 13 and all that stuff. So my parents wanted me to go to The Mount, where I've ended up at -

BB: That's right!

AM: But at that time, they did not have a Bachelor of Business Administration or a Bachelor of Commerce. What they had was a Bachelor of Arts in Business and Economics. And I wanted to be able to major in accounting so that I could go get my C.A. Well, I wasn't sure that The Mount had that capability, so I didn't want to go there.

BB: Interesting. And you know, I interviewed Mary Anne Hotchkiss yesterday, and of course, she was in Math and Science, and I didn't explore that with her, but I wondered - she hadn't focused on The Mount at all. But I wonder if that would have been a similar case for her, as for you, that they wouldn't have had the programming for her.

AM: They might not have.

BB: Interesting. So, in terms of The Mount, maybe I'll ask you a couple of questions about that now. Were you aware when you were here at Saint... By the time you arrived in '69, the series of failed negotiations between The Mount and Saint Mary's had already taken place. It never worked out, so... Catherine Wallace would have been negotiating at that time. And I believe - that my research anyway, has demonstrated that there were at least three different serious times of negotiations between the two institutions. Were you aware of any of that, when you were here?

AM: No. No, I was basically I was centered on Saint Mary's. And you know, we didn't mix with others. I mean, Dal - we didn't even talk to people - we'd cross the road if we saw somebody in a Dal jacket! Well, there was a big football rivalry, hockey rivalry - you know, you just didn't. If you went downtown and saw somebody in a Dal jacket, you'd

cross the road! (laughs). You didn't acknowledge that you wanted to speak to them or be near them, and of course, The Mount being a little farther away, and...

BB: You wouldn't see them, really.

AM: No, we didn't see them, there was nothing really, joint activities that we did, and so we were really, in those days, very small in our sphere of activity. You'd go to Point Pleasant Park, and you'd walk down to Spring Garden Road, and every once in a while you might go to the Oxford Theatre, or the Halifax Shopping Centre was a long way away!

BB: Yeah, it would have been!

AM: So we really just stayed around this area. There were lots of things on Spring Garden Road, and Scotia Square, maybe, but.. Scotia Square was just brand new.

BB: Eveybody talks about that and, that the... exactly what you're saying, that the the tiny...

AM: We didn't go very far!

BB: That's right, the journey out to The Mount which seems you hop on a bus out here now, and you're out there. That wouldn't have been the case at all.

AM: No.

BB: Part of my interest in that, is that the oral histories that I've received from The Mount, from the Sisters, who would have been deeply involved with the administration, during the years I'm interested in, they speak a lot about the girls from The Mount comparing everything to Saint Mary's. Saint Mary's had a better cafeteria, or had a better salad bar, or longer hours, or their dances were better, or they had a pub, or you know, all those different things. So that's part of my interest.

AM: Yeah. And if we go back to residence – we were successful after about six weeks after moving into residence in having male visitors in our rooms.

BB: Wow.

AM: The Mount didn't get that until about 15 years ago! And guess what, I was on the committee at the time! (laughs). But you know, we petitioned to Dr. Chard, and she listened to us, and then we had limited visiting hours. Certain hours on the weekends, mostly. I don't remember exactly what they were, but that was really, we had a townhall meeting, and people spoke up for it, and some people spoke against it, and so a compromise was reached that there would be certain hours that you could have men in your room.

BB: Right. That is pretty radical, when you think about it!

AM: In 1969..

BB: So no wonder the girls were all worked up at The Mount!

AM: Yes, exactly! They couldn't even... You know, it was interesting when I first went to The Mount in 1978, I was amazed that your father, or your brother could not even help you move in.

BB: Really. As late as '78...

AM: Yeah, and it was even quite a bit later than that, it just continued on that nobody could go up to the rooms, not even your parents to see what your room looked like... Like your father can't go up and see where you're living? I just, I found it truly amazing. But they did have a lounge on the ground floor I think, where they could have visitors, but you couldn't even have your brother or your father help you up to your room with your luggage.

BB: Wow, so just no tolerance whatsoever.

AM: None whatsoever.

BB: Wow, that's fascinating!

AM: Bizzare. That was bizarre.

BB: Ok. So you weren't aware of anything, ok. Do you remember, Mary Anne Hotchkiss brought up yesterday, she thought it was really rebellious and exciting, there was some sort of a protest here at Saint Mary's... it was held in the cafeteria here. Do you remember going to anything, any sort of student protest?

AM: Ah... no I don't. Now, I mean, I was only here for two years, because I had completed the year at Xavier College, but Mary Anne came from high school, I think.

BB: Yes, she did.

AM: So she would have been here for three years, So it might have been the year after I left. But we did protest about the food at one point. We did, although I don't remember exactly how we did it, or what we did, but I remember going home at Christmas to Ontario, and the doctor saying to me, "You need more fruits and vegetables." And more nutritious food... and so I think a lot of us went home sick at the first term, and so I think in that next term, we were really pushing for the cafeteria to give us more balanced food.

BB: I know one of the reasons that that's more familiar to me, is that Pat Crowley, he spoke about that too, that particular protest and him going back home to Newfoundland, and his mother was just beside herself that he wasn't well, and ...

AM: That's right. And my doctor said, "I want you to take vitamins, because it's obvious that you're not getting the nutrition that you need though your cafeteria.

BB: And so was it successful? Did you remember...

AM: I believe that it did introduce more fresh fruit and vegetables, so you know, you could take a banana away with you, or an apple with you or that kind of thing.

BB: That's the other element that I hadn't really considered in this study, that protest culture at the time, so that has been relevant in many of the interviews. Do you have any thoughts or comments about around that?

AM: Well, it certainly was a culture of protest in those days, and we were hearing about the protests in US schools, and we never had anything like that, that I could recall, but we were very aware of speaking up for our rights. And so we did! We wanted men in residence to visit us, so we asked! We insisted! And you know, the same thing with the food.

BB: The dynamic that I'm hearing around that is that the common theme with both Saint Mary's and with The Mount is that that voicing of student rights, was a change for the Jesuits and the Sisters equally.

AM: Yes, well I think that they, you know you come from high school, and you can be expelled, or disciplined, you were very respectful to your teachers. Yeah, you showed up for classes, and you and there was no – now the students have semesters, and options, in their programming, and we basically – you went to school, and this is basically what you did all day. You know, there were no free periods, there were no choice in your courses, so you know, you just obeyed everything. But, you know, I think that it was just the times. The music, and what was going on in campuses across the world, and it was just a time of protest for a little bit more freedom.

BB: And an exciting time!

AM: It was. Exciting... So in spite of my very traditional route that I was going with Commerce and C.A., I realized that I was doing something that was non-traditional.

BB: Right, it would be really quite rebellious to...

AM: .. In that regard, but you know, to all outward appearances, you would never think..you know, I wasn't dressed like a hippy, or anything. I was dressed like... an accountant. (Laughs). And you know, for the most, conformed along the way. But my thoughts were, I was as good as anyone else. And I'm going to do what I WANT TO DO!

BB: I think that's wonderful! Were your parents supportive? I assumed they instilled that in you at some level.

AM: Well, they were... Yes. They were. They wanted me to get a good education, get a good job, that kind of thing. It was interesting because I wanted to be a doctor at one point, and my father said, no no, no... Your brother's going to be the doctor. So.. that's what happened. But he was, he came around to a career

BB: Because all that was so new as well. You know, women...

AM: My mother was... had an education, she went to Prince of Wales college in P.E.I., and she was a secretary, you know, and at a high level, an administrative assistant. And then when she got married, she stayed home, until my sister left home, or was old enough to be left at home. But by then I'd left for university. So then my mother went back to work, but you know, very traditional kind of family. You know, mother stays home. And my father came around to that.

BB: So many firsts in your life. The last area I'm interested to see if you have any memories around would be the secularization of Saint Mary's. And to give you a bit of context, there's very little in the journals, it just seemed to have gone through.

AM: Well, when I was here, I actually did not ever have a Jesuit as a teacher.

BB: Interesting.

AM: All the Commerce faculty were non-Jesuit, and I had to take a philosophy course because it was required of all students in those days, and had a Professor Monahan, who was not a Jesuit either. And so I didn't really feel their presence at all. Father Hennessey was involved of course, because of the football team, and all that, and he was always around. He was the one who looked after students, and got them out of trouble when they needed it, and that kind of thing. But really, I had no sense that there were many Jesuits left.

BB: Right. So even in '69, there was the sense that they were sort of not...

AM: Right. Because who was president? It was....

BB: Labelle?

AM: No, I think it was Owen Carrigan, or was it Edmund Morris?

BB: Yes, he was the interim between...

AM: Morris was the president that year – I'm pretty sure he signed my degree.

BB: Edmund Morris did... Did he!

AM: I think so. I think that even Labelle was, maybe ill or had gone. I don't remember.

BB: Really he didn't take well to the student protest culture. I've heard that, that that was very difficult on him. Fascinating! Ok, so...

AM: I think only, at that time, when you came out of residence, there was the cafeteria and you walked outside at that point, because there were no links – no Loyola wasn't there, and ...you just walked around, and you couldn't go in at that end of McNally, because that was the Jesuit residence, so you walked around to the front and you came for your classes. But really, I never saw them and never had any interaction at all.

BB: So was the South wing of McNally, or the North wing of McNally – was that classrooms?

AM: Ah, no, that was offices at that time. The year before, it was residences and then it was converted to offices. I don't know where the offices were before that, because even though there may not have been that many, because that was the first year that the residences opened, so the men that were in those little rooms... It may have been that it was two floors of residence, and two floors of offices. I don't remember. But then they moved over to CMD house, and Vanier, and then the high rise.

BB: I have a good friend who was a Sister of Charity, and she, so I see her every month. And we talk with sadness, about, you know, about the Motherhouse being gone, and it looked so much like McNally. Same stonework, and same timeframe, really, they were built around the same time.

AM: It was a beautiful building. I thoroughly enjoyed every minute I was in there. Now have you been in the new building?

BB: I've been there quite a bit.

AM: It's also a lovely building too, but.. not the same.

BB: They were really struggling, I think, with the lack of freedom, I think, and the sense of ownership, if that makes sense. When you're really used to running your own affairs and now you're renters, because really that's what they are. Yeah, so that's been a struggle for them. Interesting. Is there anything else you can think of that would be, that you'd like me to capture?

AM: I don't really think so. It was a great time. I really, really loved it here.

BB: That shines through, from everyone that I've spoken to, they loved their time at Saint Mary's during those years. That's wonderful.

AM: And it was a small community, you know, so when you went to the cafeteria for breakfast, lunch, supper, you know, you'd see all the same faces, and we all supported the football team, basketball team, the hockey team, you know... Yeah. We were a small group, in those days you saw each other a lot.

BB: And you helped to build a strong culture. I guess that level of intimacy is still something that the University strives to maintain.

AM: It's hard when it's a big school, but you really had a sense of community.

BB: Yeah. Very good. Well, thank you very much, I'll conclude our tape.

~End of interview~