

**Oral History Interview with Don Harper**  
**Conducted by Bridget Brownlow on January 20, 2011**  
Transcribed by Alison Froese-Stoddard

BB: So today's date is the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, approximately 3:00 PM, and it's Bridget Brownlow here interviewing, gratefully interviewing Don Harper about his recollections about some of the earlier days here at the University.

Don, so if you could state your full name, please to start?

DH: Don Harper. Donald Francis Harper.

BB: Francis is my son's middle name so I love that name. And my favourite saint too. Donald Francis Harper.... And the date and place of birth?

DH: Moncton, New Brunswick, and the fourth of July, 1948.

BB: And could you give just a brief overview of your educational background.

DH: I grew up in Moncton and New Glasgow, and attended public schools in most cities, and finally graduated from Moncton High in 1966, well actually I took an extra year because I had a grade thirteen program there, which is gone now, but I attended that. And then applied for Saint Mary's in the fall of '68, and came here to do a four year Bachelor of Science. And after that I was enrolled in the Canadian Navy, and I guess my education continued with all the training in the navy, and then served in the submarine service until 1976. And then I went to work at Dalhousie in some administrative jobs and the bookstore, and finally to Saint Mary's in 1980, to Saint Mary's to take over the bookstore.

BB: So you've had a long career here at Saint Mary's as well.

DH: Pretty well, education, and then working here and starting in 1980. That's right.

BB: So if you could take me back to 1968, to the fall of 1968, I'm interested in any memories that come to mind for you of what was it like for you at that time, what your impressions were, and anything you can think of.

DH: Well, my impressions of Saint Mary's back in '68, being a naïve freshman, I suppose, I arrived on campus – I had seen the campus before, I had visited the campus the summer before because I knew I wanted to apply to go here, so we did a little walking tour of the campus. I didn't know much about the place, but...

BB: Can I ask why you wanted to apply?

DH: Yeah, I was actually at the time, had a girlfriend who was going to Mount Saint Vincent Academy – the high school there – we were both from Moncton, and really, when I was applying to universities in the Maritimes, it really didn't matter much to me. St. FX, Mount Allison, I just thought I'd go to Saint Mary's, and I can be in Halifax and spend the year close to the girl I was going out with. And so I came to Saint Mary's in the fall of '68, and you know, once I was accepted I was quite happy with that.

BB: Great.

DH: But back then, I can remember, for example getting ready to come down to Saint Mary's. I made sure I had nice clean clothes on, I even got a haircut before I came down.

BB: Did you have long hair?

DH: Not really, but in the late '60s, long hair was starting to... even in high school, kids were starting to grow long hair – longer hair

BB: Right.

DH: You know, Beatle type hair. But at the time, I guess I was interested in trying to get through university through the armed forces. In appearance, I guess I was trying to be a bit more conservative than most students. So anyway, I can remember getting off at the train, walking down Inglis street and getting to campus. And I was in for a bit of a shock right away, because this was the late '60s, and there was a lot of American influence at that time in Canadian universities. Meaning, it was the age of the student revolution, right? Student protests, that hippy influence, that sort of thing. So when I arrived on campus, most of the students, or a lot of the students who were into long hair and jeans, and I was saying, wow, this is not quite like Moncton High, you know. So of course we had American students here, and so I just quickly took off my tie, tried to look as casual as possible. But I had no problems adjusting at all. You know, I was more than happy to live the casual life. Because there had been dress codes at Saint Mary's, being an all male institution previous to that, there were dress codes about you wearing a sports coat, and maybe a shirt and tie to class. Well, that ended before I got here, but I had heard that those dress codes existed. So in retrospect, I was actually quite happy that the university was sort of keeping up with the times, and the students were really embracing the casual look of the late 60s. Very typical of the time.

So anyways, I was on a small campus at that time, back in '68. The residences were being built, the Vanier and Loyola residences, the stadium, they were dumping earth at the side of the field there to do the stadium, where the concrete seating is today. And that was all under construction. The Science building, the student centre here, they only had one floor here for the students originally, and in '67, '68, that's when they built the five stories for the student centre here. There was a lot of construction going on. So that's

what I really saw, I saw a campus in transition, and a lot of visible construction and that sort of thing. And of course, that was in response to a lot of growing population, and that was a period of growth, and I became immersed in that kind of environment. That's what ... My recollections are of that. That growth, and the increase of the student population, and all the development. So I was really one of the first students to.. well, we were the first students to live in the low-rises, what they called the Vanier residence. And it was all men, and there were four sections: A, B, C, D house. It was all new and we moved in it was still under construction, they were still putting carpet in in the halls, we had no curtains on our windows, no trash cans, I mean... That all evolved in the first two or three or four weeks in September. There were guys doing drywall, and everything like that, so even our own residence was under construction, but it pretty well settled down. And I was a residence student for the first two years at Saint Mary's. The second two years I lived off-campus in private houses, apartments, that sort of thing, with some friends from Moncton. But I felt that the first two years in residence was actually a good experience. Because it kept me on campus, and I got involved in things going around campus. You know, there were sporting events and maybe some of the societies, and student council, and that sort of thing. And of course it was easier to meet people too. You were all living together in a small area in residence, and you tend to develop a little network of friends from your area. And I think that helped too. Rather than just living downtown in an apartment, coming back and forth.

I had a fairly good student experience the first couple of years because of that, but I was taking science here, and majoring in physics. And so we were a smaller group. There were three or four physics majors the year I graduated in '72, so we were a small group, the physics department was a small department, and I think that that sort of helped – well, it helped me a lot – have a close contact with the professors, and the other students that were involved with things. So you kind of felt special, and you weren't one of fifty or sixty students majoring in a subject, so yeah. That was a fairly positive experience too.

BB: Great. Very interesting. And so, as you know, I'm interested in the arrival of women, so you came at the same time that women arrived on our campus.

DH: Well, there were women enrolled at Saint Mary's when I came, and I guess you know, I mean, the University originally looked at the possibility of amalgamating with The Mount, but The Mount wanted to remain a women's university and so Saint Mary's did start enrolling women. They were few and far between when I was here, though. And as a matter of fact, they weren't living on campus. I can even remember being, for example, on a weekend going down from the residence to the cafeteria and somebody would come back and say, Oh there's women in the cafeteria. They were invited, you know as a guests for dinner or something like that. So, I mean the presence of women on campus outside the classroom back then was, you know, it was kind of rare.

BB: Really!

DH: Unless it was a public event like a football game, you know, like women in the residence or any private functions, it was fairly rare. Uh, it didn't take long, as you probably know to change, as you know, for the trend for more women to be attending university you know, I mean back then the number of women attending university was a smaller percentage than what it is today, obviously. There's more women here now than men, actually.

BB: Right.

DH: But back then, we were the majority and so all the years I attended here as a student and worked here, I just saw that evolve to what it is today. So there were a lot of changes to be made, and there was a lot of adjusting, you know, but I think at Saint Mary's, I think it was fairly positive. You know? The fact that the Jesuit influence at Saint Mary's was waning at the time, because the Jesuits did give up their administrative and governance control of the university during those years. As a matter of fact, when I was at Saint Mary's, there was still a Jesuit president, Father Labelle, and then he was replaced in my second year in 1970/71 with Edmund Morris, who had been an administrator at Saint Mary's, and took over as interim president, and then after that, I believe it was Owen Carrigan who became president. So during my years at Saint Mary's I really saw the transition from the presidents from the Jesuits to the secular president, and then I also saw the introduction of residence space on campus being dedicated for women's living space too. So, all under the guidance of Elizabeth Chard who actually, she was the Dean of Women. She was first Dean of Women because women were assigned residence space and, you know, the universities never looked back.

BB: Right, had to have a Dean for it.

DH: So now, of course, it's totally coeducational, there's no divisions in living space, or... it's quite a.. Although they do have sections, you know. But still, it's a .... I think it was a good process.

BB: So when you look back, think back especially to your first year I suppose, did it still feel really like an all-male campus?

DH: Oh yes.

BB: The numbers would have been so low.

DH: Very much so. Like, when I graduated, there was only one woman in my class, and she was studying engineering. She took physics and math courses, she was just one of us.

BB: What was her name? Do you remember?

DH: Oh, you know what, I could pick her out in the yearbook.

BB: Yes, I may have her name. It starts with an 'S' – Stringer?

DH: No, no... Well, back in '72 when I graduated there were a number of women in the... But if you look in the Sci – if you look in the Engineering section in '72, or she may have finished in '73 after me, You know, she's the only woman who was in my class, the whole time I was at Saint Mary's. Because I was taking math and physics classes so... she was the only...

BB: Only woman in your classes.

DH: Yeah, yeah. In the smaller classes, anyway. So the...

BB: But you say you saw that change over the years you were a student here. By the time you graduated, would it have still felt like an all-male campus?

DH: Uh, less so.

BB: Less so. Ok. So you did see a distinct difference over that time. Yeah. Interesting. And in terms of the documentation that I would have researched, say *The Journal*, and *Saint Mary's Times* or whatnot, in regards to the secularization of the university – there's very little – there was lots of student protest, both pro and con for co-education, but virtually nothing really about secularization. So do you recall anyone, you know, any discussion on campus around that, or did it just happen?

DH: Well, it was... well, you mean the control of the university being given up by the Jesuits? Well, I do recall the.. for example, there was a lot of criticism in the student newspaper at the time, in *The Journal*, but I can recall criticism of the administration. That was just a throwback to the American influence, really. The American campuses were in turmoil. Canadian campuses, a lot of the more radical students liked to pick up on that. And of course, the students who are running a newspaper would be the ones to pick up on it more than anyone. So they saw themselves as the journalists, the revolutionaries, the ones leading the anti-administrative cause, and that was just the thing to do back then. So in my second year, for example, I think Father Labelle was president, *The Journal* used to run articles, satirical articles on Father Labelle, and.. I forget now. Oh yeah, they had this cartoon of Father Labelle and they used to call him Mother Tucker, I don't know what the relationship was, but Mother Tucker was a comic figure or something back then in political satire, but they linked it to Father Labelle. But he was very very upset about this.

BB: Was he?

DH: And I only heard through the grapevine, like, I didn't physically see him ranting and raving about it, but I heard through different sources that it caused a lot of stress in his last year as president.

BB: Did it?

DH: Yeah, he had a very difficult time coping with the articles in The Journal that would criticize the administration, the decisions that were made at the university, the academic programs, policies, university policies. I mean, the Jesuits ruled here for years in administration without that type of critical feedback from students. All of a sudden, with the 60s, student protests and everything like that, it was all coming to the forefront. The student newspaper, especially. Very, very radical. Who were the editor's names... Smith.. He looked like Bob Dylan. Not a long haired raving hippy – this guy had a very very revolutionary mind, in a student context, in a student government context. And he just – as editor of The Journal, that was his vehicle. To move his agenda forward, his radical agenda. So it was all criticism of the administration, and criticism of the academic programs, academic freedom, that sort of thing. I can remember different incidences at Saint Mary's. One was a history professor, a Dr. Sutherland, who was fired by the department or something, or let go for some reason because of radical methods in the classroom...I forget what the actual issue was. But the student newspaper, they picked up on this. They took his cause, they championed his cause. They had sit-ins in front of the president's office, Re-instate Professor Sutherland! That was the type of student protest that you saw on Saint Mary's campus, and a lot of it had to do with the editors of the student newspaper. They're the ones who love to drive this little agenda.

BB: Did they get him back in?

DH: Some of them did stay, yeah..

BB: Oh, ok.

DH: He eventually left, but I don't think he was forced out, he was reinstated. Other issues around campus back then, typical student protest... Protesting about the food on campus, for example. Now, I think that may have happened in an earlier age too, but it was just the '60s, right, and so anything that students didn't like, they would protest. So there was a big demonstration where students dumped their food in garbage cans out in the parking lot you know, and I think this was in.. the food demonstration was around 1970, my second year. Yeah, it was just... it was great. And the other thing, too, the student politics. The people who applied for the positions in student government, they were all men, although there were a few women on campus who were kind of outspoken in certain areas, but for the most part, it was males who ran for positions on the student council.

BB: During your time here.

DH: Yeah. And there was a lot of debate around the election campaigns back then, because that tied in with the age of the student protests in the late '60s and early '70s too. That just played into it. I can remember lots of interesting interviews and press conferences and even around the student elections. Today it's very formal, today the students, the student council is like a corporation.

BB: Yes, that's right.

DH: The elections are almost like, the federal election or an provincial election – they try to follow the same protocol. Back then, you know, these students running for council positions, they saw themselves as radicals. You know and they wanted to get into student government. And so they had all kinds of really neat conferences and debates, and you know, there was a lot of back and forth on campus between the conservatives and the radicals, the left wingers and all that... It made for really interesting times. And I sort of came in naïve; I didn't come in the street-wise student radical, I was pretty naïve. I was fairly conservative, you know. But I loved all this.

BB: Yeah? I can tell you found this all very exciting!

DH: Oh yeah. I thought it was great. I loved to see a long haired, bearded guy running for president, or running for student council, and out there, and shouting against the administration, and the changes that have to occur in student life... Oh, I just thought it was great. But I was enrolled in the armed forces, because they were paying my way through university, so I was – officially I was an Officer Cadet in the Canadian Armed Forces. So I was going to a civilian university, though. I didn't go to the Canadian Military College. They had a program that if you were already enrolled in a Canadian University, you could finish off your time at a civilian university. And then just do your training in the summer. That's for all the City U types in the armed forces. So I enjoyed being just a regular student during the year, and then I joined all the other RNC types in the summer for training. So that was a lot of fun back then. It was a lot of fun.

BB: Right. That's wonderful. Is there anything else you can think of about your time here from those days that might be relevant?

DH: I do remember getting involved with the committee, the student committee on CUSO, which was then known as Canadian University Services Overseas. I guess I just sort of fell into it after a professor asked me if I'd be interested in serving on this committee. So I learned about the organization, they used to send volunteers to third world countries after graduation, so I became a student representative of that society on campus. And, you know, we would keep up with what was going on nationally, and we would try to promote CUSO on campus. Try to educate students about the possibility of applying for CUSO scholarship, or a CUSO assignment after university through this national organization. So I thought it was a lot of fun. And strangely enough, I actually ended up

marrying a woman who had been to CUSO, and had been teaching in Jamaica and Nigeria for two CUSO assignments after graduation and so...

BB: And was she a Saint Mary's student?

DH: No, she was in Ottawa, and I didn't meet her until after her assignments, and she came back to Halifax, yeah we met in Halifax. But that was one student activity I was involved in during my nine years at Saint Mary's. But I must admit, the transition at Saint Mary's from an all-male university to a co-ed university, and then from the Jesuit institutional model to the secular, it was accepted. People just knew that the time had come. And so it evolved without a lot of resistance. There might have been a few pockets of resistance among die-hard conservatives who thought that traditions were being lost. But in actual fact, most of the changes that came about – more women on campus and fewer Jesuits, more of a secular institution, it was something that was accepted and really, it was promoted because of that. I think it made the transition a lot easier at the time.

BB: Right. Yeah, I've heard that before. I would agree from my research to date, there were some pockets of resistance, but overall... Many of the Jesuits welcomed women on campus as well. That...

DH: Yeah, you know, that's true. I think one of the most telling interviews is Father William Stewart, the long rambling interview that he did with somebody, and they eventually put it in the Archives, and of course he was very conservative too, but he had a lot of insight. And if you can read between the lines, he eventually saw it as a good thing. He was open minded, and I think most of the Jesuits were too. They just knew the time was coming, and of course, there were fewer locations back then too. I mean, they could look ahead and see that the time was coming where they wouldn't be able to staff the university with Jesuit teachers, so I think that really had a lot to do with it too.

BB: Would you, in your estimation, think that the changes going on at the same time as Vatican II would have had any impact on the changes at Saint Mary's and other traditional Roman Catholic universities?

DH: Well, um, I thought some of the changes directly, insofar as I... I wasn't raised in a Catholic family. When I came to Saint Mary's of course I didn't always go to church on Sunday, but I can remember the first time I attended church services at Saint Mary's in 1968, and later on in 1972, I saw a lot of differences. The parish church, Canadian Martyrs Church on campus, of course that was our link to the Catholic church on campus. And yeah, I saw a lot of changes in the ways the services were conducted on campus. I wasn't really doing a lot of studying back of the changes in Vatican II because I was just a typical fallen away Catholic during my years at Saint Mary's. At the same time, I can see a lot of the changes in the changes in the parish located on campus here.



BB: When I ... back to some of your earlier comments, it's of interest to me that I interviewed the first female lay faculty member at Mount Saint Vincent, and she too spoke of the sort of difficulty that the Sisters of Charity would have had, similar to what you would have had with the Jesuits, with student resistance, and student voice, and critical that they would have had to deal with that as well.

DH: Yeah, because that was a new model. They had been so used to policing students who followed instructions and didn't voice a lot of contrary opinions and that type of thing. So they found it hard to deal with. It was almost an insult to their complacency that we'd all developed over the years. It was just a given that the students, under them, would be ...

BB: Compliant.

DH: And proper. And so when they saw that change, when they saw that resistance – I think their world was starting to fall apart. And like I say the situation here with Father Labelle, I understand he almost had a nervous breakdown from the stress that was so strong, you know. From everything he read in the student paper, you know, he heard the students going on and on, and What's Saint Mary's coming to? You know, who are these students? This new generation of students – he couldn't connect. He couldn't cope. Mind you, even the secular presidents probably had problems too, but not as big as the Jesuits who had to change their whole outlook to administration and teaching.

BB: Well, that's great. Is there something – I think if something else came to mind, we could always revisit again..

DH: Oh yeah.

BB: Is there anything else you can think of?

DH: Well, the fact that I've been at Saint Mary's for the last 30 years as bookstore manager, I've really seen the campus evolve in comparison to my four years here as a student. You know, I... It's been, it hasn't been a shock, but it's been a gradual change over thirty years, from the day I graduated until now, I sort of witnessed the evolution of the campus. And so, you know, I had time to absorb the changes, and for the most part, I could see why the decisions were being made and also how the academic programs were being enhanced, and how the physical plan was changing, and the student make-up of the education programs, minorities, more minorities, more foreign students, and the presence of these foreign students in special programs.... All of these things, all of these changes, they didn't happen overnight. And they've evolved over the years mainly for the good, definitely for the good.

BB: You've had a wonderfully well-rounded experience at Saint Mary's and your time as a student.

DH: Yeah, I think anybody spending thirty years at Saint Mary's from 1940 to 1960 - and you compare 1970 to 2010 or whatever, change was much more rapid and ongoing than in previous decades, so yeah...

BB: You've seen a lot.

DH: That's true.

BB: That's great. Well, if anything else comes to mind, you've certainly provided me with wonderful insight into your time here.

DH: I hope you can use some of the material.

BB: Absolutely, I'm sure I can. And I thank you very much, and I'm just going to conclude the interview.