

**Oral History Interview with Alleyne Murphy:
Conducted by Bridget Brownlow, January 17, 2011**
Transcription by Alison Froese-Stoddard, May 9, 2013

BB: So right now it is 2:30 PM, on the 17th of January, 2011. This is Bridget Brownlow, and I'm conducting an interview with Alleyne Murphy in regard to her work at The Mount and any connection with St. Mary's and the thesis I'm working on. So, thank-you very much. (aside... This is hi-tech.... when I looked at it, I thought there's no tape, (laughs) ...it's all digital.)

So maybe I could start to ask you, if you could state your full name.

AM: All right. It's Alleyne Travis Murphy.

BB: And your date and place of birth?

AM: St. John, New Brunswick.

BB: Great. And can you describe your educational background?

AM: I have a Bachelor of Science degree from St. Francis Xavier. A Master of Science degree from the University of Montreal. I have a professional dietetics registration of Canada, I'm an honorary member of the Dietetics Profession of Canada, and I am a Professor Emeritus at Mount Saint Vincent University.

BB: That's very impressive. A very impressive background!

AM: Oh, and I should say... I have a Doctorate in Human Letters.

BB: Oh! (laughs) That's a small piece! A doctorate in Human Letters?

AM: Yes.

BB: What exactly does that mean?

AM: Actually, it's an honorary degree from the Mount in recognition for contributions to the University and to the two professions that I worked in: the Community Economics Association where I was the vice-president for international development and oversaw our projects in the Middle East, Africa and South America.

BB: Wow.

AM: And the dietetic profession, I've been responsible for professional standards which include the education of dieticians, the internship programs, continuing education and now recently, you know, uh... I forgot what we call it.... Special status for those who have done particular research... fellowships. Fellowships in the association. That was my contributions, those things, to those professions.

BB: Right.

AM: So that was what the honorary degree was for.

BB: Well deserved! And when did you receive that degree?

AM: 1997?

BB: Ok. That's not that long ago. That's great. And could you help me understand your first associations with The Mount?

AM: I came to The Mount in 1951, let me think.... Yeah, '51. September 1951. And I was responsible for the... My background is in nutritional sciences, food science. So I was in the program for nutritionists and dieticians. Do you know that program? And I left in 1956 when I was married. I went back in 1966...

BB: Ten years later...

AM: ...And I was, when I went in 1951, I was the first and only full-time lay professor in the University.

BB: Wow –what a pioneer! I mean, you've been a pioneer in many other respects, from your educational background and what not, but to be the first lay person... Now, help me understand please... What was that like?

AM: Well, it was rather pleasant. The Canadian Dietetic Association regulates the profession, like the medical association, so and so forth. And they regulate, they look at seminar course content that the students go through in their four years. They also have requirements for the faculty. They want to know, they require certain backgrounds of the faculty. So the University was embarking in a new building, Evaristus had just been opened that fall, and they were building their accreditation with the Dietetic Association. They had always been accredited, but you know, accredited over and over again every five years.

BB: Right.

AM: They built a beautiful new department there, looking to keep up their good standards and so forth, so... I was welcomed.

BB: That's wonderful.

AM: And I was given free rein to do pretty much... They trusted that I knew what I was doing.

BB: I'm sure it was well-placed. That's great.

AM: (laughs) So I had a very nice time.

BB: And were there opportunities for you to be creative in your development of various programs, and...

AM: Well, the course content is defined, in terms of what you have to cover in all those years, and so forth. It's based on three years of chemistry, three years of biology, so you know, a lot of courses in nutrition and food science. I knew the courses, I mean... I had done them myself, and I had done them at the graduate level, so I knew pretty much what I needed to do.

BB: And what would have been the student population at The Mount, approximately?

AM: Oh, I would say.... Maybe about a hundred?

BB: Really? Oh wow, ok. So a very small student body.

AM: Oh, yes.

BB: Yes. Ok. Now I remember the fire of the Motherhouse – was that prior to 1951?

AM: Yes.

BB: Yes, ok.

AM: Yes, I think it was in February of 1951.

BB: Was it?

AM: And Evaristus was under construction at the time.

BB: Right. And the most recent Motherhouse that has been torn down... They would have started building that...

AM: ... that was much, much later.

BB: Was it? Ok. It seems like it was here and gone in... And so, you left in '56, and...

AM: ...Went back in '66.

BB: Went back in '66. And so what were some of the more significant changes you saw when you returned in '66?

AM: Um, well, of course the student population had grown, diversified, and.... I think what you have to understand is the University is made up of really three distinct groups. You know, there's the faculty and administration, there's the board, and then there's the students. And the students at that time were beginning to understand that they had a voice.

BB: Right. Yes.

AM: A significant voice! In what they were being taught, and the running of the University... And for the people who come in on the boards – they come from the business world, many of them, and they're not – they're used to structure, authoritative structure, and

they're not used to their employees telling them what to do! (laughs). And they weren't used to having faculty either. I can remember one bank manager who didn't understand why you'd have a faculty member on the finance committee. (laughs) After all, we're discussing salaries!

BB: (laughs)

AM: So it took a bit of learning on everybody's part to get their roles straightened out.

BB: Sure, that's right!

AM: And to understand that this is cooperative mentor.

BB: And I suppose this would have been true, this notion of student dissent or protest...

AM: See, that was coming out of the United States. At the Mount, especially, where it was largely run by a religious congregation... they didn't really have to answer to anybody.

BB: Yes, that's right.

AM: I mean, they ran it successfully according to their ways for many years, so it wasn't easy for them to have a board of outsiders coming in and... It wasn't easy for them to have faculty associations, or any of that. And it wasn't easy for faculty, actually, to even consider faculty unions.

BB: Right.

AM: I mean, even if the faculty wouldn't have had a background in unions, and those associations regarding salaries and all that..

BB: It was all very new.

AM: It was very new. So the Faculty Association really wanted to establish norms for the definition of what an assistant professor was, and an associate professor, and a full professor... And all the terms for employment, tenure, and so forth, teaching loads... Well, I mean this was all very new.

BB: Yes, yes. St. Mary's actually was the first university in the country that developed a faculty union.

AM: Were they?

BB: Yes. And thankfully, to date, one of the only without a strike.

AM: Yes. We actually had a strike...

BB: Did you? What year was that? Do you remember approximately...

AM: '68, I think...

BB: Oh, Ok.

AM: '67, '68, around that.... I think I have the exact dates upstairs. You're welcome....

BB: Oh, I think that's ok. You would have been in an association, I guess, would you have been? Not a union?

AM: Yes.

BB: Not a union.

AM: No, association. But some of us, you know, were also members of professions. So we had to consider what our status was in the different association, you know?

BB: Oh, it's very complex, wasn't it?

AM: Very complex.

BB: Now, what you would have noticed would have been some of the striking differences, say in student body – you said that they were more diversified when you returned in '66... What about the numbers? Had that grown?

AM: Oh, that increased too.

BB: Ok.

AM: And the campus had grown, there were new buildings and things.

BB: Right. And how about in terms of other faculty, were there –

AM: Oh there were lots of new faculty. Men and women, you know... A lot of lay faculty.

BB: Wow. So quite a change from when, only 14 years, 15 years later you returned..

AM: Well, ten years, really. From when I left.

BB: Yes, from when you left.

AM: But there were people that came in in those early 50s too, in the Sciences. We had people teaching Chemistry, and in fact one professor from St. Mary's came to teach Chemistry. And we had a gentleman, a Dr. Ivankie (?), who came and taught Classics, and he was the m(?) in the English department. So they were gradually adding more and more.

BB: And I can't remember, myself - I should know - but the President of the University at the time, around '66...

AM: Were all Sisters.

BB: They were all Sisters. Who was, which Sister was that, do you remember?

AM: Probably would have been Sister, oh.... I just thinking.... I think that would have been Sister Catherine.

BB: Wallace?

AM: Yeah.

BB: Yeah. I think you're right, that's right. Because when I think back to what I've read and, a time of great change...

AM: I think that was Sister Catherine Wallace.

BB: OK. Now, part of my interest, of course, is the St. Mary's decision to go co-educational, and at the time the local paper, as well as research in both The Mount's paper... the Picaro?

AM: The Picaro.

BB: The Picaro, and the St. Mary's Journal, and lots of stuff going back and forth about co-education. What would have been your experience or perceptions of that time?

AM: Well, I was a member of the Senate, and I sat on the Board at the time. I think there was uneasiness, I would think, about how it would work.

BB: You mean in an amalgamation of the two universities?

AM: Right. How that would work out. And actually if we needed to do it. What was to be gained, what was to be lost...

BB: It was a heavy topic.

AM: Oh yes. It was.

BB: So at Senate, would you have been regularly dealing with this at the Senate level?

AM: It would have always been a topic – probably more at the Board than the Senate... The Senate is primarily concerned with curriculum –

BB: Academics –

AM: Yeah, academics. I mean, it would come up. Because of course, there would be the question of whether, who's going to teach what!

BB: Right!

AM: You know if you're going to amalgamate, that means some people give up, and some people you... on both sides, and do students move into St. Mary's to take courses, do St. Mary's students come out here?

BB: Right.

AM: So it would have personally affected the professors.

BB: Yes, of course.

AM: I just think there was... It was taken seriously. I think, relief when they decided to stay independent of one another.

BB: And was there a concern about losing, then, female students once St. Mary's went co-educational?

AM: Oh, sure. Because they figured, well if you live in town, maybe you'll decide, maybe the trip out to The Mount would... And would the boys come out?

BB: Right. Yes.

AM: Would they come, they're so used to being handy to where they go to school. Would they bother to come out?

BB: Because there was a fairly short period, St. Mary's would have been officially co-educational in '68, and I think The Mount was just shortly thereafter, a couple of years.

AM: Yes. Because we offered some programs I think that some of the boys wanted to take, so... they came.

BB: What did you notice about that, about the arrival of men on campus?

AM: In the beginning, there weren't that many, to be honest. They were largely in the Business or Education departments. So... I think they were always welcomed, everybody tried to make them feel comfortable. I think they were – any of them that I talked to said they were given to understand that this was a women's university. And the courses, you know, were going to reflect that.

BB: (Laughs)

AM: Come with your eyes wide open! (laughs) And of course, a lot of them liked having all these girls around!

BB: Of course, that's right! I would that might be a fringe benefit (laughs)

AM: I don't think there was no great disruption or anything... Probably had to add some washrooms.

BB: Right! They had to do the same at St. Mary's!

AM: Practical things. (laughs)

BB: A woman I spoke to this morning said the same, that we had nowhere to go, they didn't have those types of amenities, they had to deal with that. That's interesting.

Now, of course, the historiography around this as well would be the changes that resulted from Vatican II, and that was impacting things that were happening at the time... What would be your thoughts around...

AM: Probably was reflected more in the Philosophy and Religious Studies courses, perhaps. Probably also the Sisters who were in the University, they lost their habits, they changed their habits. Went to a very modified habit, a shorter habit. And so... You know, I'm in the Science department, you know, so... I'm not paying much attention to...

BB: ... Sort of those social type changes...

AM: They didn't really penetrate our department that much, so... I think it was welcomed. I don't think the Mount was anything but ecumenical in its approach to people who came, and who taught there, I mean, there was no... you know...

I remember, when... Mr. Martin always tells this story when he was a professor of Chemistry – He said that he came out of his first class and he met me in the hall, and he said to me, the students here are very polite, aren't they. I said, yes –and he said – they all stood up when I came in. He was not a Catholic man, and I said, well that was your cue to say the opening prayer! (laughs) Of course, there were no opening prayers, in those days. Probably there were, way back in the Sisters' diocese, in the early '50s, but I don't think the rest of us were quite up to the opening prayers!

BB: (laughs) that's funny.

AM: Now whether they stood up for that, I don't know! He always tells me that's what I said to him.

BB: And of course, the Mount would have been ahead of St. Mary's in having a non-Catholic president. I can't remember who the first was, at the Mount, but I know it preceded St. Mary's. St. Mary's would not have had... In fact, our current president is the first non-Catholic.

AM: Oh, the first non-Catholic. Margaret Fulton was the first non-Catholic.

BB: Yes. I think she was. That was ages ahead of St. Mary's. That does make you wonder about the ecumenical nature of education at the time at the Mount.

AM: Well, we had so many professors who were not Catholic - they came to everything that was going on, they to the Baccalaureate Mass, they appreciated... they spoke highly of the tradition of the Sisters, and you know, they certainly bought in to our notion that women deserve to have a good education to prepare for a life of their choice, whether it's in the home, or out of the home. Many of them chose to come to the Mount because they liked the atmosphere.

BB: Right. The single gender education.

AM: Yeah, they... And I just think they like the idea of having good students, too.

BB: Now, yourself, having gone to a co-educational university – universities, with Montreal and St. FX - how then, did working at the Mount impact your perception of the benefit of having an all-female institution? And did you sort of become a convert to see what that would be....

AM: (long pause) I'm just trying to think... I saw benefits in... I suppose, the girls were very free to speak their minds. Just like, you get a group of women together and they'll talk. They talk less freely in mixed company than in ...

BB: That's right.

AM: ...you know. And so, probably the clever girls didn't mind being clever and smart, and taking over, and doing things...

BB: Fewer distractions as well, maybe.

AM: Well, maybe that, yeah.

BB: Interesting. So obviously that was something that you felt you supported, and...

AM: Oh yeah, I didn't go to all-girl schools, so...

BB: That's right.

AM: So I... thought they were fine. I didn't have any problems.

BB: Is there anything else that stands out to you about that time, the '60s, mid to late '60s? Anything else you can think of?

AM: I think it was just the adjustments. It was just the adjustments to – and probably for the Sisters, they had the most difficult adjustment to make.

BB: Part of my research I've read, the various challenges that Catherine Wallace had, would have been students – Mount students, wanting what they would have seen St. Mary's students had. So they wanted a salad bar at the Mount, because St. Mary's had a salad bar. They wanted to be able to stay out later, because the St. Mary's students got to. So I think that there would have been some of that challenge for the leadership at the Mount. Trying to remain competitive, and not lose students...

AM: That's true.

BB: Right.

AM: Yes, there certainly... I think there was always that feeling that we are outside – like, Dal, Kings, St. Mary's, they're all in the city – and even though it is a little short run, in those days it looked longer than it is now.

BB: Right! It would have been a great trek, really!

AM: Well, no bus! You can't walk out there!

BB: (laughs) No.

AM: Did you talk to Anne Derrick at all?

BB: No. But she would be a great candidate, wouldn't she?

AM: Oh, she was a wonderful...

BB: She was very outspoken, I've read.

AM: Oh, she was a wonderful student leader. And I think she opened the eyes of a lot of people. Yeah, Anne Derrick was good. I remember, because she was on the Senate with us.

BB: Yes, ok. I think I've read of various sit-ins, and things that she initiated.

AM: Oh yes! She was, you know... but she was right! You know? She knew her ground and she knew what she wanted, and I think in a way, it was good to have somebody like Anne, because she had a strong voice, and ...

BB: And of course, she is today...

AM: Absolutely.

BB: ...What a wonderful advocate for...

AM: For women, and for justice. She was a real advocate for justice, and student rights.

BB: In those days as well. That's right, I had heard about her. And she would have been featured in the student newspaper...

AM: Absolutely. And you had... probably the most difficult ones were the Sisters, because the Sisters were used to... their whole life was: you obey. Whatever the Mother General, or whatever, the leader... In those days you didn't question things so much. And I think at the early days at the Mount, they didn't imagine the students questioning things so much about their daily life. So I suppose for them to have these young students questioning everything probably was, you know, they were used to, well, if this is the rule, you obey the rule. And then you have to ask yourself, well is that rule right?

BB: That's right.

AM: Probably it would help to go back to your other question about the Vatican because that was a whole series of questioning.

BB: Yes. So it was a time of questioning...

AM: But the fact that there were questions in the Church probably made it easier for the Sisters and everybody else to ask questions.

BB: Right. It was kind of a healthy exercise.

AM: It was.

BB: What would be some of your recollections of Francis d'Assisi?

AM: Um, she was a leader.

BB: I ask that because she featured prominently in the negotiations at St. Mary's.

AM: Oh, did she.

BB: The early ones, the ones in the '50s. So the Mount had actually purchased, at one point, property at St. Mary's... I think you would have not been there at the time...

AM: No, I wasn't.

BB: So she would have been deeply involved in those negotiations, of course, they didn't.... and then Catherine Wallace took over.

AM: She was the academic dean at the time.

BB: Francis was.

AM: Francis d'Assisi was. So she would have had the control over... She would have been involved because she would have been involved with all the courses, and programs, and I mean, that would be her area. I could see why she'd be involved.

BB: Yes.

AM: She was forceful.

BB: Was she? Yes. And sort of severe in her approach?

AM: Yeah.

BB: I suppose that trying to negotiate with the Jesuits at that time might have helped her! (laughs) Who knows?

AM: Well, you had two strong personalities, because you had Father... can I think of his name now... the president of St. Mary's....

BB: Trying to remember who it was... wasn't Labelle.... Labelle was involved in ...

AM: No, the man before him.

BB: Fisher?

AM: No.

BB: Oh, not McNally?

AM: Well, maybe it was Labelle?

BB: McNally would have been, well, he was the McNally building, so he was there in the early '50s, and I believe he was the one that turned down the final offer with Francis d'Assisi, but.... Maybe it was Labelle.

AM: I don't remember, but I think you had two strong personalities. You know.

BB: And I've looked at some of the correspondence from that time, and it was... (laughs)

AM: Yeah, I have a feeling that, you know... I think some of the professors would probably see a lot of merit in that they'd have a collaborator to work with, you know. For me and my department, there was no similar department at St. Mary's. So I was totally protected. I didn't have to worry about it. My students were going to come, regardless!

BB: And really, your department would have reflected, I think, part of the strive for maintaining that independence because it was so unique. Does that sound correct, or?

AM: Sure, yeah.

BB: So when you're specialized, like that...

AM: We were specialized. I mean, I can see why it wasn't taken so seriously by me... (laughs) If I was in the English department I might have had a different perspective!

BB: That's a fascinating way to think about it.

AM: Yes, I was totally protected. We were the only ones in the city. Even Dal wasn't going to take me over!

BB: And based on my research, the affiliation between the Mount and Dal was interesting as well. In fact, Francis d'Assisi had graduated vis-à-vis taking courses at Dal in the '30s.

AM: Many of the Sisters did. They took courses, their degrees at Dal. Yes, first degrees. There was an early affiliation, and in fact, right up until the present time there's always been an opportunity for some of the senior science students to take senior level courses at Dal. I mean, there is that transfer of things, you know.

BB: Isn't that interesting... because the 'natural' affiliation you would think would have been St. Mary's, but really, it was Dal all along. I wondered, in fact, as I read through Francis d'Assisi's -

AM: Probably because, probably they went to Dal because St. Mary's was totally masculine. There were no women there. At Dal, there were always women. I think the problem with affiliations is that the professors never want to be in the position where they lose their senior students. You don't want to have to teach first and second years only. And if the upper levels go off some place, because then you never have an opportunity to teach the research in your department, or so forth. Professors would – when you're talking about amalgamation you want to be sure that...

BB: That you hold on to your more senior students.

AM: That's right.

BB: Your graduate students.

AM: That's right. Because that's where the challenge is in teaching for... at one level.

BB: Now your own, on another note, were there any other specific areas of research that you yourself were quite engaged in?

AM: I ran a program in the Dominican Republic. I had money from CIDA to build a nutrition, education, and recuperation centre. So we, with another faculty member, Sister Catherine McGowan, we introduced a program there to.... 'rescue' children under the age of five who were dying from malnutrition.

BB: You must have been very proud of that.

AM: Oh, I was back there just last year just to see..

BB: Were you!

AM:for a final time...

BB: So it's still running!

AM: Oh, it just been wonderful, just wonderful.

BB: That's fabulous! They must have been delighted to see you there! Founder of the program!

AM: It was a very successful program. When we first went there, we were in a poor, poor area of the country. I would say 50% of the children didn't live beyond their 5th birthday. They had all the malnutrition diseases you could think of, and so we... I had money to take two students, two graduates with me. And they stayed for two years, and they set up the program. And we brought in the mothers of the children, and we taught them, you know,

what to do. The basic diet in the Dominican Republic is rice and beans, which is in a lot of countries, but children who are being weaned cannot take beans as they're served to adults. So we showed them how to cook the beans separately, put them through a sieve so they turn out to be like a gravy, pour it over the rice. You have a complete protein meal, and it doesn't interfere with their culture.

BB: Wow, so just a different approach of cooking.

AM: That's all. We told them that you could use green leaves, squash leaves, radish leaves, cook them the same way you cook spinach, put them through a sieve, put them over the rice, and you have another protein meal. And we taught them to put little shoes on their feet, and panties on them so they wouldn't be sitting in the dirt... bare naked. (laughs)

BB: Just small basics, though.

AM: Oh, totally basic, basic things.

BB: The Sisters of Charity always had an international outreach component...

AM: Sister Catherine McGowan was a Sister of Charity... She and another Sister had gone to the Dominican Republic in the late '60s at the request of the Dominican government. They decided to stay on when the job with the government was finished. So Sister Catherine, who was a nutritionist, knew all of these families and children. So of course, the idea of having money to build a centre was wonderful.

BB: Isn't that wonderful. Yes.

AM: And people to get it started.... And we've always had wonderful cooperation... the doctors would come and give us time free of charge. Things like that, to test the health of the people. And when there would be hurricanes and so forth, our women were often put in charge of the distribution of the food because they had a system. And the interesting thing is, when I did my first five-year follow up, we brought in all the families, and all the children. And in those families where children had been born, after their mothers had been in the centre, none of them were malnourished.

BB: Wow. So you have wonderful data there to support that. Isn't that wonderful. So who did you go with when you went back last year?

AM: Angela went with me, because she... Angela went the first time we went down. And the first time we went down I took my husband and Angela, and her younger brother, because I had so much equipment to take. And I needed carriers. (laughs)

BB: Literally! (laughs)

AM: So I took Angela back, and she couldn't believe the difference she saw in the place.

BB: So what year was it when you first started it up?

AM: '78.

BB: What a wonderful initiative.

AM: The centre that we built first is now a medical centre. We had a doctor's office, one of our own people who went to medical school, came back to work with us. We had a dentist office, we have pharmacy... We always had pharmacy, and we have a bigger centre for the children, and we always taught them how to garden, so they could grow the green leaves and things. And we got the Mount – we got Dr. Canning who was head of child studies, she had money from CIDA to put in a program for early child development. Because our children really weren't prepared to even go to school. They never had a pencil, they never had a crayon, they never had a piece of paper... We now have three teachers there.

BB: Wow – you must have been just overwhelmed with pride!

AM: And this year, the teachers are actually getting paid by the government.

BB: Wow, even better! Isn't that great.

AM: So that was a really good thing. So I suppose I was really interested in nutrition education.

BB: Right. And you did a wonderful job.

AM: Well, we did interesting things locally too.

BB: You know, even today, my work over at Oxford school, they've now got an initiative, a healthy eating initiative, where tomorrow is banana day. And every child will get bananas. So they're bringing in a different fruit, or healthy snack every day. So important. And they run a breakfast program, of course. Isn't that wonderful.

AM: It's taken us about 50 years for people to realize that nutrition's important!

BB: That's right! You must just shake your head. When you see the problems with obesity in society, and... you know?

Right. Is there anything else you want to mention?

AM: No, I can't think of anything.

BB: Well, that's great. I'll end our talk now. Wow, it's quarter after three.

Thank you very much!