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Interview of Paul Joslin, F.S.C.

Paul Joslin
La Salle University

Donna Sharer
La Salle University

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FIELD NOTES

Interviewee: Brother Paul Joslin

Interviewer: Donna L. Sharer

Interview date: June 26, 2009 (morning)

Interview location: Hudson Catholic High School, 790 Bergen Ave, Jersey City, New Jersey, U.S.

Field notes written on July 28 – 30, 2009 and edited on August 1, 2009

The Interviewee:

Brother Paul Joslin was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on September 3, 1946. He grew up in Colwyn, Delaware County, Pennsylvania which is adjacent to southwest Philadelphia. He attended West Philadelphia Catholic High School for Boys where he was introduced to the Lasallian Christian Brothers. During the middle of Brother Paul's junior year of high school, he became a Juniorate and on June 15, 1964 became a Novitiate in the Christian Brothers. Brother Paul studied Spanish at LaSalle University, then LaSalle College, as an undergraduate from 1965 – 1969. He earned a Masters degree in Spanish from Millersville University of Pennsylvania, then Millersville College, in 1974. During his vocation as a Christian Brother, Brother Paul has taught Spanish and religion at Archbishop Carroll High School in Radnor, Pennsylvania, Calvert Hall Catholic High School in Towson, Maryland, West Philadelphia Catholic High School for Boys in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a Christian Brother's school in Chiquimula, Guatemala, the Colegio de la Salle in Huehuetenango, Guatemala and Hudson Catholic High School in Jersey City, New Jersey. Brother Paul currently lives at the Christian Brother's house at Hudson Catholic High School in Jersey City, New Jersey.

The Interviewer:

I, Donna Lynn Sharer (b. June 1961 in Bilwi, Nicaragua), lived in Bluefields, Nicaragua and in August 1963 moved to Warwick, New York, U.S., a then rural area in western Orange County, New York. I earned a B.S. Ed. in History / Social Studies Education from Millersville University in 1983, a MA in English/Creative Writing/Poetry from Temple University in 1989, an Education Masters/ Reading Specialist from Temple University in 1994 and will earn an MA in History from LaSalle University in 2009. I have lived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania since May 1985 but have spent extended periods of time in Nicaragua during the 1980s and visited annually through 1995. I last visited Nicaragua in 2007. In 1988, I was a member of a delegation to El Salvador and in 1991 I spent two weeks at a language school in Huehuetenango, Guatemala. I have been a secondary teacher in the School District of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania since September

1992. This oral history interview is part of the requirements for a course required for a MA in History at LaSalle University.

Background:

I was interested in interviewing a Christian Brother who had spent time in Latin America or Central America in particular. I was not familiar with the work of the Christian Brothers but I was familiar with the work of other Roman Catholic orders in Central America during the 1980s and 1990s. In late May 2009, through Brother Joseph Grabenstein, the LaSalle University archivists, I was given the names of two Christian Brothers, Brother Paul Joslin and Brother Gregory Cavalier, who had lived in Central America. I selected Brother Paul Joslin because he could be contacted via email; the other Brother has no email. Also, Brother Paul lives in Jersey City, New Jersey which is more convenient than Baltimore, Maryland, the home of Brother Gregory.

Brother Paul had lived and worked in Guatemala for twelve years. He currently lives in Jersey City, New Jersey which is approximately eighty-five miles from my home in Philadelphia and therefore it was a reasonable distance to set up an in person interview. Brother Joseph Grabenstein established contact with Brother Paul via email. I then, per the suggestions of Brother Joseph, emailed Brother Paul directly and he was very open to being interviewed. Through emails and during the interview, Brother Paul and I discovered we had a number of things in common. Brother Paul grew up in Delaware County, Pennsylvania and attended West Philadelphia Catholic High School for Boys. When I moved to Philadelphia, I lived in West Philadelphia. I had a job in the late 1980s and early 1990s where my immediate supervisor was very active in the West Philadelphia Catholic High School alumni association. Both Brother Paul and I attended Millersville University in Pennsylvania, Brother Paul for a Masters in Spanish during the summers of 1970 – 1974, and I as a full time undergraduate from 1980 – 1983. Brother Paul had lived in Beltsville, Maryland and I have a brother who lived in Beltsville, Maryland. I was born in Bilwi, Nicaragua and lived with my family in Bluefields, Nicaragua in the early 1960s. Although Brother Paul never lived in Nicaragua, a fellow Brother, Brother James, who is integral to Brother Paul's life story, lived in Bluefields, Nicaragua from 1969 – 1979.

As indicated, the arrangements for the interview were done via email. Brother Paul and I did not talk before the morning of June 26, 2009. This method of contact proved sufficient for organizing the interview. On May 27, 2009, I secured an interview with Brother Paul for June 26, 2009 in Jersey City, New Jersey. Brother Joseph Grabenstein had given me a copy of Brother Paul's Christian Brother hand written assignment record from 1964 through 1992, four articles which reference Brother Paul, two Christmas Newsletters written by Brother Paul in 1976 and 2006 and a letter indicating Brother Paul was selected as the Distinguished Lasallian Educator for the Baltimore Province in 2006-2007. I used the articles, my knowledge of Guatemala and suggested questions provided by Dr. Barbara Allen, the professor for the oral history course, to develop questions for

the interview. I sent Brother Paul the initial set of questions on June 14, 2009. After receiving suggestions from Dr. Allen, I sent a revised set of questions on June 20, 2009. I encouraged Brother Paul to edit the questions but he had no suggestions or changes.

Description of the Interview:

I drove from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to Jersey City, New Jersey, approximately 85 miles, and arrived Friday morning, June 26, 2009 at 9:10 AM. I had made arrangements to meet Brother Paul Joslin at Hudson Catholic High School, Jersey City, New Jersey, at about 9:00 AM. Brother Paul Joslin is a teacher and Department Chairperson at Hudson Catholic High School, part of the Dioceses of Newark, New Jersey, and until September 2009, an all male high school. I had made arrangements for Brother Paul to call me shortly before 9:00AM to enable us to meet at the school. Brother Paul was waiting for me in the school's parking lot when I arrived. The school is at the corner of Bergen and Glenwood Avenue in Jersey City, a suburb of Manhattan, New York City. Jersey City and Manhattan are divided by the Hudson River. The school is approximately a mile from Liberty State Park and a mile and half from Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. Adjacent to Hudson High School and the parking lot is the Christian Brother's house where Brother Paul lives. After I parked, we went to the Brother's house where I met another Brother. Then, Brother Paul escorted me through a hallway which led to the school. Brother Paul had prepared his classroom for our interview.

Brother Paul is European American, 63 years old, approximately six feet tall, thin and trim. He is balding and keeps his remaining hair cropped. He wore a Hudson Catholic Polo style shirt tucked into casual slacks. Brother Paul, as indicated in the interview, is an avid runner and runs in marathons. Therefore, he is, in his words, "in shape" What is more striking is his mild, relaxed manner yet determined, intentional story telling and sharing. It was clear he had read and thought about the questions I had sent.

After we entered his classroom, he opened a window and turned on the ceiling fans. The school is located on a busy corner and therefore, during the interview, car horns are occasionally heard and there are a few sirens. The classroom was arranged in rows with a teacher's desk, complete with a computer and LCD projector, in the front. Since no school was in session, the walls were bare and the room appeared to have recently been cleaned. During the interview, a few people were working in other classrooms and in the hallway. We stopped the interview at one point when a few people approached the classroom.

Before beginning the interview, Brother Paul and I arranged two desks with attached seats across from each other. As I previously wrote, I had sent him the initial set of questions June 14, 2009. I revised the questions twice, once with the assistance of my professor, and he received the final set of questions June 20, 2009.. During the interview, we each had a hard copy set of prepared questions which we used during the interview. I

also gave Brother Paul a set of the photocopied articles from Brother Joseph L. Grabenstein. While I generally followed the prepared questions, there were some additional questions and I eliminated questions based on the needs of the interview. For example, during the interview Brother Paul told me some of the dates and locations on the hand written assignment record from 1964 through 1992 were incorrect. I also did not understand, based on the assignment record, that Brother Paul left Philadelphia during the middle of his junior year of high school and therefore he did not graduate from West Philadelphia Catholic High School. Lastly, there was no indication that Brother Paul attended graduate school at Millersville University.

After perusing the articles, Brother Paul signed the release form. Because of potential interruptions, we agreed to stop the interview with a hand signal if either of us needed a break, if there was a major interruption or too much noise from the street. For the interview, I used an Olympus, WS-500M, digital audio recorder with a RadioShack Omni-directional Boundary Microphone. After checking the battery and the tape recorder to ensure it would pick up our voices, we began the interview. The interview lasted until approximately 12:45 pm. The interview is recorded in three parts: Audio Tape 1 is 36:15 minutes, Audio Tape 2 is 87:14 minutes, and Audio Tape 3 is 34:58 minutes for a total of 158:17 minutes or two hours and 38 minutes and seventeen seconds. The first taping was stopped because of a potential major interruption. People from the hallway were nearing the room. This also provided an opportunity to check the recording. Tape 2 was stopped because of a long pause and to allow Brother Paul time to refocus following his retelling of a very painful experience in Guatemala – the murder of a Christian Brother.

During the interview, I attempted to keep my comments to a minimum. In general, I acknowledged what Brother Paul said by nodding my head, saying “um-hm,” and responding with “okay.” The transcript does not include “crutch” words or “guggles” by either Brother Paul nor myself. At the end of the interview, I did interject my experiences more than I intended but my comments did solicit additional information from Brother Paul and are empathetic.

Following the interview, I shared with Brother Paul that we had something else in common – I had also graduate from Millersville University in Pennsylvania. We shared a few more stories, returned the desks to their rows and closed the window. Brother Paul walked me to my car and I thanked him for sharing his stories and time.

Note on recording:

For recording, I used an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder, WS-500M on battery power. I used a microphone - RadioShack Omni-directional Boundary Microphone. The next day, I listened to the recording by connecting the Olympus recorder by USB port to my IBM ThinkPad T-series laptop and uploaded the audio files for storage. I put the recordings onto a CD I formatted to store the recordings, transcript, a list of questions,

field notes and a bibliography. I had assistance from the LaSalle University media lab in converting the files.

To transcribe the recording, I used NCH Express Scribe software. The initial transcription was done over a six day period on slow speed, from 70 – 85%. I reviewed and revised the transcript three times both with slowed speed and normal speed.

Editing the Transcript:

I used the *Baylor University, Institute for Oral History Style Guide*. Spelling of names and places were checked, primarily, via email correspondence with Bro. Paul, but also via the internet.

Editing decisions included:

- Based on the Style Guide, I used “Bro.” when identifying a Christian Brother with his first name but used “Brother” with his surname and to identify organizations, such as the United Nations, with “UN.” I included periods with U.S. to distinguish it from the word “us.”
- Eliminated some repeated words (e.g. very) unless used for emphasis. Brother Paul often repeated words, especially “ready” and “very” for emphasis.
- Used a dash to indicated interruption by either the interviewer or interviewee and an incomplete sentence (e.g. not a complete subject and predicate)
- Indicated a short meaningful pause with a dash and a longer meaningful pause by writing “pause” in brackets
- Eliminated any false starts, unless the false start emphasized an idea
- Used empty brackets [] to indicate inaudible words or phrases. There was one short period on the tape when there is considerable static but I was able to decipher most of the dialogue.
- Included additional explanation, clarification or references in footnotes
- Placed a time indicator at the top of each page and beginning and end of each recording session. There are a total of three recording sessions of audio tapes.
- Eliminated most feedback words, “crutch” words, encouraging words or guggles. Throughout the interview, I as the interviewer often said “um-hum,” “uh-huh,” “um,” and “okay” to show recognition of the interviewee. At times, I chose to include “okay” because it seemed essential to the flow of the conversation.
- Eliminated transitional words such as “and,” “so” and “because” if it made the sentence easier to read
- Used hyphens to divide a word when the interviewee spelled the word and capitalized where appropriate
- Spelled the full name of a whole number, including the last two number of a date, (e.g. seventy-six) but not the entire date (e.g. 1976) and decades
- Created a title page which is considered page one but is not numbered; all other pages are numbered on the lower right of each page
- Used quotation marks when it indicated an obvious quote if it was by one person

- When the recording was stopped for an extended period, I indicated it with **pause in recording** and at the end of the interview, **end of interview**.
- Indicated nonverbal sounds or events which occurred during the recording in parenthesis (e.g. car horns) if the sound was significant, to indicated laughing by the interviewee (e.g. laughs), interviewer (Donna laughs), and when both the interviewee and interviewer laughed (both laugh).
- Indicated a point where the tape was inaudible and unintelligible with parenthesis (unintelligible) and included a time stamp
- Used **bold** to indicate emphasis by the interviewee.