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Interview of Gloria Donnelly, Ph.D., R.N., FAAN

Gloria Donnelly

Melissa Pompeo
La Salle University

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Narrator: Dr. Gloria Donnelly, Ph.D., R.N., FAAN

Interviewer: Melissa Pompeo

Date: April 3, 2007; 3:10 PM

Location: Dr. Donnelly’s office at the Drexel University College of Nursing and Health Professions located in the Bellet Building of Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA

Language: English

Ephemera: A photocopied newspaper article about Dr. Donnelly was brought to the interview, but was not used. Towards the end of the interview Dr. Donnelly showed me the old copies of Cherry Ames novels she used to read when she was young.

Dr. Donnelly was not only the founding dean of the La Salle University School of Nursing, but was also the director of the nursing program before it became its own School. She participated in the feasibility studies involved with its inception and helped design the original curriculum. The interview was conducted in her office in the Bellet Building of Drexel University, where the College of Nursing and Health Sciences is headquartered.

Dr. Wolf was able to provide me with a great deal of helpful information about the La Salle nursing school at present. However, since Dr. Donnelly was its founder she was ideal interviewee to tell me about the program’s past. Also, she has a reputation for feistiness and I thought that this characteristic would lead her to speak at length about her involvement with La Salle. I contacted Dr. Donnelly via e-mail to request the interview, and was directed to call her secretary to schedule it. I was encouraged by the tone of the reply I received; she seemed warm and eager to answer my questions. I contacted the nursing offices in late March and scheduled the interview for April 3. I began my research for the interview by visiting the La Salle University Archive and looking through boxes of materials given to me by Brother Joseph Grabenstein, the university archivist. I made photocopies of pertinent articles and used the information I learned to formulate questions for the interview. The digital voice recorder used was borrowed from a friend.

I was quite excited about conducting an interview with Dr. Donnelly, as I had heard stories about her from my mother, who was a La Salle nursing student in the program’s earliest days, and found the articles about her to be very interesting. I was shown into her office by her secretary. The office was bright, with white walls and light green molding and a large window overlooking the city on one wall. Her dark wood desk and accompanying bookshelves took up two walls, and she had various posters and pictures of her family around the room. Some of these posters were related to nursing conferences she had attended and others had humorous messages on them. We sat at a conference table in the middle of the office.
Like Dr. Wolf, Dr. Donnelly is small in stature but has a commanding presence. She has a warm smile and, although clearly very professional, also seems to enjoy laughing and telling stories. She has a characteristically Philadelphia accent. Before the interview began, I thanked her for her time and requested that she sign the required legal release to place the interview in the school archive. Also like Dr. Wolf, she read the document carefully before signing. I also explained how the interview was conducted and then turned on the digital recorder.

I began the interview by asking some basic biographical information about Dr. Donnelly, thereby forming a context into which to place her answers throughout the interview. She spoke freely on each of the topics we discussed, smiling frequently and often adding personal anecdotes. During the interview she would occasionally look upwards while recalling the details of her answers to my questions, and she often made hand gestures as she spoke. I found, however, that she covered most of the topics I had desired to cover about forty-five minutes into the interview, and I had to think of new questions. This was the only stressful aspect of the process. Overall, however, it was a very enjoyable experience to speak with her, and I found it interesting to learn about the School of Nursing and Health Sciences’ humble beginnings and the accomplishments it has made.

The interview also went well from a technical viewpoint. The recorder functioned well and was small enough to remain unobtrusive. There were only a few small interruptions, such as ringing phones and a janitor who entered the room to take out the trash (the bag produced a rustling noise that sounds like static on the recording).

After the interview was completed, I thanked Dr. Donnelly once again for her time. She gave me a copy of a nursing journal that she edits (Holistic Nursing Practice) and, after we exchanged goodbyes, I left the office.