Interview Index of Brother Arthur Bangs

La Salle University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
April 02, 2007 3 P.M.
Interview conducted by Caitlin Haug

Topic: This Interview was conducted in order to collect the oral history of Brother Arthur Bangs and his time spent as Brother of LaSalle, which includes his time outside and within the campus of LaSalle University. This interview is one contribution out of many interviews being gathered about the faculty of LaSalle University. The major goal of this interview is to gain a better understanding and outline of the historical shape that LaSalle University has taken throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This interview was conducted in Brother Bangs’s office in Olney Hall on the second floor at LaSalle University. Brother Bangs was born in Philadelphia, where he went to West Catholic High School. He then furthered his education by joining the Brothers of LaSalle upon graduation and entered as a student at LaSalle (college at the time.) After graduating from LaSalle, Brother went on to receive his M.A. in the Classics and Theology and began teaching at the high school level. Brother Bangs then took the offer from the Brothers to get his P.H.D in counseling at Catholic University. He was hired at LaSalle in 1969, where he has been teaching and up until a short time again working in the counseling center. From 1979-1982 Brother Bangs resided in Switzerland as the head of LaSalle’s Program LaSalle in Europe. This two hour interview surveys Brother Bangs experience within the Brotherhood as a student at LaSalle, as a teacher at LaSalle, and as a Brother in the modern day world. It further surveys his experience on LaSalle University focusing on the evolution of the counseling center, women entering the campus, and the campus diversifying.

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Permission granted to conduct the interview. Brother Bangs announces his full name (Brother Arthur Joseph Thomas Bangs) and that he was born in Philadelphia, PA (West Philadelphia) He comically gives his birth date as January 1st 1932, and then corrects himself. His actual birth date is January 5, 1932. He gives a brief description of his parents (Day Bangs and Margaret Mary Stevenson,) mentioning that his father worked for PECO as an electrical engineer, though originally from upstate New York. His mother was a secretary at PECO at the time and this is how his parents met. Brother is the oldest of four, only sibling still living. Brother’s name is Bob, sisters Mary and Margaret (who was institutionalized because she was profoundly retarded. Mentions he was a graduate from West Catholic and recently received the outstanding Alumni Award from West Catholic, which he points at. He also shows several communion pictures of himself and his family. Discusses education abroad at La Salle, references Providence College, Loyola, U Penn, Freiburg, Switzerland, Galway, Rome, Mexico City.
Grew up in Upper Darby in St Lawrence Parish. He was taught by sisters in grade school and then Brothers once he went to West Catholic, which he didn’t find overwhelmingly strict. He was in the band and the debating team and held a job all of high school. Continues to speak about his grade school education and then his high school education. He recently just found out he graduated at number 3 in his graduating class in the Arts and Science. Freshmen year began thinking he wanted to become a Brother, because he liked the Brothers who taught him at West Catholic, especially Brother John Owens a legend (known as Handsome John,) who he still has dinner with every night. Brother Bangs was drawn to the manliness and the power of the Brothers. He admired the wisdom of the Brothers and the “memory.” The Brothers were good role models. They demanded a lot but were fair. He also loved the camaraderie of the Brothers, and he felt that they were almost like a religious army. Brother was a natural self disciplined person, felt as adolescence could have been a better older brother to his siblings.

15:30 Majored in Latin before going in to counseling. He taught Latin in 3 different High schools. Brother got his P.H.D. in counseling at Catholic. He was given three years off teaching in order to go to back to obtain this degree. He got his M.A. in the Classics and Theology at Pittsburgh. All Brothers had to get an M.A. in theology back then. Taught high school in Pittsburgh, Maryland, and Washington, d.c. He came to LaSalle as a teacher in 1969. Has done extensive traveling. He has hit over 450 cities in Europe. He did not always stay with the Brothers while traveling, but “roved” around in the late 70’s. He loved being on his own. French was his strongest foreign language, which was beneficial for when he was working for the LaSalle in Europe program when dealing with the students living situations over Europe. As the director of LaSalle in Europe he also negotiated the LaSalle student’s grade for the courses taken while in Europe, though it was the totality of the experience that was invaluable for the students. The students all had Euro passes in order to do a great deal of stories. Has a great deal of humorous stories relating to students during his stint in Europe. Though two terrible incidents did occur within the program, these incidents did not take place while Brother Bangs was the program director. During this time Brother Bangs did not live in a community of Brothers for 3 years, which was very hard for him but good training. He wasn’t used to this. The communities of Brothers were very large when he was younger, now the communities are smaller, consisting of only 5-8, though is contains 14 Brothers. The smaller communities are hard for him to understand.

26:30 His family were probably the most influential people in his life, though he didn’t realize this until much older. Also, the Brotherhood as a whole was very influential throughout his life. His parents supported his choice to join the Brotherhood, but promised his father he wouldn’t enter until after his high school graduation. His father died a year before entering the Brotherhood. Now the Brotherhood considers even right after high school
too young to enter into the Brotherhood. Now entering into the Brotherhood when in your twenties and thirties is more common.

31:40
Brother Bangs describes the process of becoming a Brother, back when he entered into the Brotherhood, which is a much different process today. His Providence was located in the Archdiocese of Baltimore in Laurel, MD. Initial entrance you are called a postulant, and live with the novices. After one year you get the habit and take a name (no longer practiced.) His religious name was Brother Daniel Richard for 17 years. He was the second class to come up to LaSalle for classes. Brothers went out teaching after receiving his B.A.

Much of the day was spent doing religious exercises, prayer, mass, spiritual conferences, manual labor, and recreation. Rise at 5 A.M. and bed by 8 P.M. Bangs felt no regrets. He felt it was a good fit, though never saw himself as an extremely religious man, but always conformed to the regiment.

Bangs had a job for middle school onwards. He describes his job as a “soda jerk” where he worked up to 50 cents an hour. Worked four nights a week and Saturdays but had his best two years of grades while working. Two people probably had cars in his high school class back then.

39:30
He explains why he chose Latin as his major in college. Brother Jude taught him Latin in high school and college, and actually passed away at LaSalle a few years ago. When Bangs got his Masters at Pittsburgh this Brother’s mentor Dr. Arthur Young actually taught Bangs.

41:45
The idea of a Brother receiving a new name when entering into the Brotherhood was that you were becoming a new man. This practice lasted up into the 1970s. Initial name he wanted was already taken (names chosen off of a list.) He had the option to go back to his original name back in 1966. The Brothers decided that the Baptismal name was more important and holy. The vows of the Brotherhood are Poverty, Chastity, Obedience and two minor vows: teaching the poor, and stability in the Institute. Chastity has been a challenge over the years...as he appreciates beauty. The purpose of the Brotherhood is to help out the poor.

He mentions and describes the Saint Miguel middle schools, which the Brothers developed to help educate the poor.

49:20
The Brothers are laymen with vows, not priests. We are “male nuns.” Again mentions how the Brothers really grabbed his attention as real men. He was 17 when he entered into the order and didn’t realize how large of a sacrifice it would be to give up having a wife and family. This is made easier since he has his nieces and nephew’s families to connect with.

Here a lot of light hearted talk and bantering. Laughter. Bangs comments on being 75 years old but still feeling young. A lover of the youth.
LaSalle campus was much smaller when he was going here as a student. He didn't have much experience with the other students, because the Brothers were bused in for their academic classes and then bused back to their living quarters once classes were over for the day. There was very little free time in the Brotherhood. At this time the school was not coed, and the school was still mainly a commuter college. Bangs emphasizes the smallness of LaSalle as a campus.

It was gaining his P.H.D. that led him back to LaSalle as an educator. The Provincial approached Bangs to go back to school for 3 years and gain the P.H.D. in counseling. The president of St. John's pushed him to do counseling. Bangs came to LaSalle as an educator and counselor. He left the counseling center this past year. He is now semi retired.

Bangs begins to speak of his extended family members....then goes off topic.

Bangs begins to speak about the entrance of women and how this led to women taking leadership roles within the LaSalle community, opening up many new clubs and programs. Bangs enthusiastically speaks about how presently there are all kinds of new programs developing for the undergraduate students.

Change was gradual but definite when he returned to LaSalle as a professor. He feels that bringing women as students and faculty members into LaSalle has been a major positive for the school.

The counseling center had more of an academic philosophy or focus initially verses the more personal issues (disorders and alcohol abuse) it has today. Bangs had a hand in this evolution in the center. It started to evolve when the center went coed. Occasionally supports were developed but difficult to form, though more popular in the 1970s. Support groups have been replaced by sport teams and sororities/fraternities.

LaSalle is physically in the midst of expanding by buying Germantown Hospital (not yet officially announced yet.) The science center will be expanded. He mentions that LaSalle's biggest success is the nursing program, which has expanded a great deal and now has a bachelor and masters program and a nutritional program. Many graduate and certificate programs are offered at LaSalle, but only one doctorate program.

Bangs begins to speak of the different therapies he has practiced. He now has a cognitive behavioral therapy. He also has the ability to use hypnotic therapy, but he doesn't practice that much. He feels that having a Brother in the counseling center has been a benefit. LaSalle probably has more Brothers teaching now than any other Catholic college in the States these days.
01:20:00
LaSalle is still a predominantly white campus. We brag about the diversity on campus but still not very diverse. Only about 20 percent minority on campus today.
He begins talking about the Spanish integration program on campus today. This program the Brothers rejoice about as a success. He mentions the segregation on campus, which has lessened the past few years. Bangs feels more of a connection to today’s students today, enjoying them more now than ever. Reflects on his positive experiences with students in the classroom and the counseling center.

01:30:00
Bangs speaks about his time as the director of the LaSalle in Europe program which was linked with Providence College. Bangs felt with his background in degrees he was qualified to lead the program, which had a 3 year leadership cycle. Again mentions the difficulty he had with living alone while leading the program in Switzerland. Also, lived with 65 Brothers all over the world in Rome for a semester in 1968. The Brothers were comfortable with all of this traveling because it was in line with their work. Further reflections of his travels during this time.
Speaks of the objective of the LaSalle in Europe program: exposure to Europe and a different form of education, experience the foreign world (especially in this religious center of Europe.)

01:40:00
After the LaSalle in Europe program, Bangs came back to LaSalle and entered into the counseling department right away, though to his regret had to wait a few semesters before he could again teach, as his position had been filled while abroad.
The Brotherhood has a lot more freedom today. It was very strict when he first entered. No salaries ever given, but it was never needed. The Brotherhood supplied each Brother with what was needed: food, shelter, clothing, and books. Possibly too much individualism is granted in the Brotherhood presently, along with too much free time. Bangs believes that this may be the reason for so few men entering the Brotherhood today: the lack of strictness. He believes in the word “balance.” Bangs talks about the difference of philosophy between the Brothers of differing generations.
Bangs was elected Superior of his community house in 1978.

01:48:20
He is very happy about his relative success at LaSalle. He thinks he is a good family man with his 13 “grandchildren.”

01:50:
Here Bangs begins to speak about his brother Bob. He related to the movie the Rain Man in terms of his relationship with his ill brother. He passed away when his heart gave out. Bangs has regrets, wishing he had spent more time with him. Bangs gave his brother his Kidney to help keep him alive for an extra 19 years, which he feels good about. His brother would have done the same for him. Bangs spoke at his brother’s funeral. He admires Bob’s simple life and his willingness to give to people. Bob was the type of guy
who would give the shirt off his back for a friend. A big regret for Art was that his siblings were all passed away for this 50th Jubilee.

01:57:00
Reflects on the day that he celebrated his 50th Jubilee. Chokes up a bit at the regret that his family was not alive to celebrate this day with him.

2:00:00
He discusses reactions to 9/11 on La Salle campus.

He talks about his sabbatical interviews across US and in Europe, 6 or 7 yrs prior to this interview.

Discusses his future plans; asks Caitlyn personal questions.