

2007

Interview of Leo D. Rudnytzky, Ph.D.

Leo D. Rudnytzky Ph.D.
La Salle University

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FIELD NOTES

Narrator: Dr. Leo Rudnytzky

Interviewer: Meghan P. McCormack

Date: Session 1: April 12, 2007 – 12:30 p.m.
Session 2: April 17, 2007 – 5:00 p.m.

Location: Dr. Rudnytzky's office, located in Room 240 of Olney Hall at LaSalle University.

Language: English

Ephemera: Texts in various languages, a great deal of which are written in the Cyrillic alphabet; pamphlets on the minor in Soviet Studies from the early 1990's.

Dr. Leo Rudnytzky is currently Professor Emeritus of the Foreign Language and Central and Eastern European studies departments. His time at LaSalle University has spanned nearly five decades. He has been both student and faculty at this facility. He is semi-retired and spends a great deal of his free time abroad. (Two days after the second session he would be in Kiev.) The interview was conducted in his office, which is located on the second floor of Olney Hall on the Main Campus of LaSalle University. The building was full and active during class sessions.

Dr. Barbara Allen informed me that Dr. Rudnytzky would be amenable to being interviewed. With that said, I hesitated contacting him early on in the semester, so as to not disrupt his schedule. That plan nearly backfired when I attempted my initial contact with him. The email address that I was given was not functional. I then attempted to track him through the LaSalle website, but to no avail. My next course of action was to contact Dr. Blumenthal, another interview subject for this semester's oral history project, to obtain Dr. Rudnytzky's actual email address or telephone number. After several days, Dr. Blumenthal was kind enough to return my call. He gave me both Dr. Rudnytzky's email address and telephone number, at which time I contacted my subject immediately.

In my initial email correspondence, I gave Dr. Rudnytzky my name and background information, the purpose of my email, and I also reiterated the function of the interview. I explained that we enlisted the assistance of Brother Joe Grabenstein in the archives in order to research our subjects. His response was brief, only asking that I call between a certain time on the next day. I did so, but was unable to reach him. After that, we played "phone tag" over the next several telephone calls.

When we spoke, he was still agreeable to the idea of the interview and its parameters. He informed me that he would be away in the last weeks of March. The first interview session was then set for March 12, 2007, upon his return. Our next communication would come the day before the interview, in which I contacted him via email. Its purpose was to serve as

confirmation for our appointment. I again detailed the purpose of the interview and what would take place. In our phone conversation, he suggested that the mid-day interview take place in the cafeteria. After hearing the accounts of several of my fellow students and the sensitivity of their recorders, I quickly decided against that location. I suggested to him in the confirmation email that we hold the interview in his office or a suitable quiet locale. I offered him the option to see the questions prior to the interview. I was hesitant about this decision, but I felt it important that he have the option. (He would ultimately decline that offer.) Attached to the email was the required legal release. I felt that he should have the opportunity to read and alter it prior to the beginning of the interview. My impression of him, from my limited communication with him, was that he was somewhat reticent so I also included directions in regards to the interview. I asked that he be expansive with his answers and, as Dr. Allen says, that we were not looking for “sound-bites.” I closed the email by again thanking him for his participation in this project.

Dr. Rudnytzky is a tall man, about 6’3. He speaks impeccable English with a noticeable accent. He was dressed in a plaid blazer and slacks; stereotypically professorial. There were books strewn about his small office. Those were the ones that could not fit in the two bookcases that lined the walls from top to bottom. Two metal chairs sat before his desk, which encompassed about half of the probably 7x4 room, a stack of books did not occupy only one of the two chairs. I noticed that many of the books were written in languages other than English, mostly in the Cyrillic alphabet. His small window offered a negligible view of a gray building façade. After making our initial introductions in his office (Olney 240) and we soon began the interview. The abrupt beginning to our session, in combination with his imposing figure, had me exceedingly nervous. That fear was soon quelled as Dr. Rudnytzky stretched his legs out across his desk and began to chat about his arthritic pain in the damp weather. (It had been a cold and rainy day.) I too have that ailment and so we found our first common ground.

Initially, Dr. Rudnytzky was under the assumption that he would begin to tell his story and that should I have any questions, I would be free to interject with them. Afraid that he might “hijack” the interview, I reminded him of the format in which I would ask the questions and he could be as forthcoming as he would like. From that point on, the interview went smoothly. Dr. Rudnytzky is an adept storyteller. I’m not certain if he anticipated my questions, as he has been interviewed several times before and his preparing his own biography or whether my questions were so introspective that of course he would answer them while telling his story. While my ego would like to believe it’s the latter, anyone who speaks to Dr. Rudnytzky would attribute it to his skill and not my own.

My subject was comfortable with being recorded. We had both silenced our mobile phones to prohibit distraction. During our time, the phone did not ring. However there were two separate knocks at his door, the first of which Dr. Rudnytzky ignored. The second time, he did get up, at which point I stopped the recording. Thus, that session ends rather abruptly. Dr. Blumenthal asked to borrow one of Dr. Rudnytzky’s books. At that point in time, we were very close to our scheduled closing time, as the subject had a 2:00 p.m. class to teach. He was kind enough to walk me out, as it was on his way to get a quick bite to eat prior to his class. We chatted some more and said our good-byes and agreed that we would meet back at his office the next week on Tuesday, April 17, 2007 at 5:00 p.m. to conclude our interview.

The final session began much more comfortably than the first. His office and demeanor were still the same. He was dressed somewhat more casually; removing his sweater to wear a tee shirt in his balmy and diminutive office. The interview flowed more like a conversation. I attempted to address the important subjects that we did not get to during the first session, such as the changes at LaSalle over the past five decades. I was surprised at how limited his discussion on pivotal changes at the school, i.e. co-education and racial integration, were. This could be attributed to his mental state. He would go on to say he was tired of speaking, which could account for his less detailed renditions of those events than previous questions. The interview ended. I again thanked him for his participation and he responded kindly.

It is my opinion that both sessions were extremely fruitful, both academically and personally. He has a wealth of knowledge that I was fortuitous enough to hear. My experience on this project was nothing, but gratifying. The only pitfall was a slight fear that I had accidentally erased the vast amount of information he had shared and that I had digitally recorded. Thankfully, this was not the case. Subsequently, his interview can now be stored in the archives and hopefully be used at a later date and time.