


Spring 2013

## Interview of Peter J. Finley, Ph.D.

Peter J. Finley Ph.D.  
*La Salle University*

Meghan Bassett  
*La Salle University, mbassett9@yahoo.com*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptohall>

 Part of the [Clinical Psychology Commons](#), [Diplomatic History Commons](#), [Eastern European Studies Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), [European History Commons](#), [History of Religion Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Military History Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), [Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Commons](#), [Sports Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Finley, Peter J. Ph.D. and Bassett, Meghan, "Interview of Peter J. Finley, Ph.D." (2013). *All Oral Histories*. 46.  
<http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptohall/46>

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral Histories at La Salle University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of La Salle University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [careyc@lasalle.edu](mailto:careyc@lasalle.edu).

## FIELD NOTES

**Interviewee:** Peter J. Finley Sr.  
**Interviewer:** Meghan Bassett  
**Interview Date:** April 6, 2013  
**Running Time:** 3:25:09  
**Location:** Peter's home in Sea Isle City, NJ

Majority of field notes written on April 9, 2013. Interviewee and interviewer section were written on April 27, 2013, along with minor editing of previous notes.

### **The Interviewee:**

Peter J. Finley Sr. was born an only child to parents John J. Finley and Margaret Francis Dunn on September 20, 1931, in Philadelphia Pennsylvania. He grew up in the Fairmount section of Philadelphia. Peter attended St. Francis Xavier School for grade school, La Salle Prep School afterwards—located at 1240 North Broad Street at the time—and La Salle College, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology in 1953. Peter's connection to La Salle began early in his childhood; his father, John J. Finley, was in the College's graduating class of 1924. Peter earned a master's degree at the College of William and Mary in June of 1955, and shortly after joined the Marine Corps. In 1956, he was shipped to the Middle East with a battalion to patrol the Mediterranean. Peter married his wife Nancy in 1958 after two tours in the Middle East, and they settled down in Philadelphia, for a short time, to start a family; they would ultimately have five children. Peter worked as a clinical psychologist for the Vineland Training School, as superintendent for the John Helmbold Education Center, he earned his doctorate through Temple University in 1973, and all the while he remained in the U.S. Marine Reserve. He was then called to active duty to work as a psychologist for the Marines, developing screening tests for personnel of American embassies around the world. As a Colonel, he received the highest possible military clearance. He retired in 1998 and now lives with this wife in Sea Isle City, New Jersey.

### **The Interviewer:**

I, Meghan Bassett, was born in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania on July 28, 1987 and grew up in Haddon Heights, New Jersey. I earned my B.A. in History with a minor in Philosophy from La Salle University in 2012 and continued on to pursue their 5-year B.A./M.A. option in Public History. This requires a student to take undergraduate and graduate courses simultaneously, so while I was earning my B.A., I was taking graduate courses in lieu of a senior seminar. I expect to earn my

M.A. in the fall of 2013. I moved from New Jersey to Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, upon the beginning of my academic career at La Salle in the fall of 2010. Pete is a cousin, mentor and wonderful friend of mine, and the opportunity to interview him for the History department's 650 Oral History course is a privilege.

### **Background:**

About a year ago, looking forward to my lineup of future graduate courses, I was well aware of what the 650 Introduction to Oral History course entailed. I knew, going into this course, that I would ask Pete to allow me to interview him. My most obvious motive is his history at La Salle University, his father attended school here also, and the Alumni Association annually presents an individual with an award in his name. Yet, my motive was personal, too. Pete is the first cousin of my grandmother on my father's side, which makes him my third cousin. My memories of family reunions and functions past are full of Pete and the Finley family. In 2010, when I was searching for a school at which to complete my undergraduate degree, it was Pete who I called for advice on schools in Philadelphia. I had just moved to Upper Darby, and I wanted to commute somewhere in the area to receive lower tuition and to spare myself the necessity of living in campus housing somewhere. It was Pete who steered me in the direction of La Salle, and the amount of intellectual and personal growth I have gained here I will never be able to convey, nor for which I could thank him enough. Naturally, then, I asked Pete to let me interview him for this course, and he obliged excitedly.

To prepare for the interview, I first consulted La Salle University's archivist, Brother Joe Grabenstein. Having spoken many times with Pete, he gave me specific questions to ask and specific stories to ask him to tell. He also helped me search the online records of university publications in which Pete and his father received several mentions, especially in the newsletter *La Salle Alumnus*. It is Pete's daughter, Anne, from whom I received the bulk of my background information on Pete, and whom I consulted often in the stages of preparation for clarification of topics, or to run questions by her. She is very involved in her parents' lives, as are all their children, and very knowledgeable of their history.

### **Description of the Interview:**

The evening before the interview (Friday, April 5<sup>th</sup>) I met the Finley's—Pete, Nancy, their five children, and their grandchildren—in Vineland, New Jersey, where Pete's middle son lives with his family. It was my youngest cousin's thirteenth birthday dinner, and they invited me to join. Pete and I sat next to each other and talked and laughed for hours; we share a sarcastic sense of humor, and have always laughed at the same kinds of things. This conversation, too, gave me reason to revise and add some questions to my list later that night. After Dinner, I followed Pete and Nancy in my car on the hour-long drive from Vineland to their home in Sea Isle City where I spent the night.

Waking up very early the next morning, I walked down to the beach to expel some jittery nerves; it was a brisk yet perfect day, and the vacation homes of the

Jersey Shore were empty for the most part. When I came back, Pete and Nancy were awake and we all had some breakfast. We allowed the morning to progress easily, until it seemed like everyone was adjusted enough to the day to begin the interview. Just after 10 AM, Pete and I sat down in his room that could be considered a den or office; it is home to his various mounted photos, honors, achievements, certificates, etc. Nancy stayed in the living room, but the door to the office was left open so we could all hear each other easily. Thus, during the interview one can hear the phone ring in the background twice, the second time Nancy answered and had a brief conversation, but this was unavoidable and I would not have asked to go somewhere out of either Pete or Nancy's comfort zone.

The course of the interview flowed naturally—Pete is a great storyteller—and I realized early on that my questions were often being formulated on the spot, in the form of follow-up questions because his memories are so thought provoking. Sometimes this may make the interview sound more like a conversation, and I admit, I interject, interrupt, and joke a bit too much on this recording. It was difficult at times to remember that I was, in fact, conducting an interview. The transitions from one life change, or one event to another, even though Pete was often pursuing many things simultaneously in his life, seem very easy to follow. Again, it is Pete's ability to recount his memories with such fluidity that make for such easy transitions, not so much my command of questioning. My questions sound like they trail off a lot, like they are not focused enough, and I leave them open-ended because I am either unable to frame them correctly or I am nervous to be very specific. This, I need to improve.

Toward the end of the interview, Pete reflects on what it means to him to recall memories, or to have them asked of him, and how this makes him feel. Thus, it is a bit emotional and revealing—and others part of the interview are, too—but I chose not to edit this out. I stumble over my words, sometimes, when I try to respond to these moments, but I am aware that I am not used to having such a responsibility as listening to someone's life story everyday, and I will get better as time goes on.

We took one break, for about an hour, and then finished around 2:40 PM that afternoon.

### **Follow-up:**

I was careful to make a note during the interview of the things I wanted Pete to repeat or spell out for me. That way, I was able to get the bulk of my post-interview questions in on the very same day. His daughter (my cousin), Anne, provided me with the most useful follow-up. She lives in the upstairs apartment of their home in Sea Isle, and she knows her parents inside and out. I consulted her because of her knowledge, and because she communicates through text messages, and so whenever I had a question I would send it along the wire and she would respond whenever she could. With Pete, he is seldom by the phone, and he and his wife are often busy with the grandchildren or commuting back and forth to doctors' visits, so I did not wish to bother him too much. I sent Pete and Nancy a thank-you-

card about a week and a half after the interview, and I promised to send a copy of all the materials to them upon this project's completion.

### **Recording:**

To record this interview, I used the GarageBand 5.1 software on my Macbook Pro personal computer. This software was helpful and easy to use while abstracting, just as before with transcribing. I was grateful for the software's ability to slow down the tempo of the interview to a pace where I could type along. I converted the interview into both MP3 and WAV formats, and kept it as one file.

### **Editing Decisions:**

My editing decisions included:

1. Choosing when it was time to switch to a new log, which indicates a new topic or a tangent within a topic.
2. Marked the beginning of a new subject of discussion or a new line of thought with the corresponding time in the interview (to the left of each segment).
3. Used direct quotations from the interviewee when his words seemed irreplaceable—or my own just failed me—during my abstracting.
4. Used an *em* dash in some of the quotations to show a lapse in time, or a moment of pause in order for the interviewee or interviewer to gather their thoughts.
5. Using brackets to describe audible interruptions, emotions, or implied information that seemed necessary to include for readability.
6. Used footnotes to expound upon topics or things that readers may not be aware of that were mentioned in the interview.
7. Chose to not include direct quotes from interviewer.