

3-9-2011

Interview of Carl Clayton, F.S.C.

Carl Clayton
La Salle University

John Young
La Salle University

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Recommended Citation

Clayton, Carl and Young, John, "Interview of Carl Clayton, F.S.C." (2011). *All Oral Histories*. 68.
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FIELD NOTES

Interviewee: Brother Carl Clayton, F.S.C.
Interviewer: John P. Young
Interview date: March 9, 2011 (afternoon)
Interview location: Br. Clayton's home, the Christian Brothers' residence at 8605 Cheltenham Avenue, Wyndmoor, PA

Field notes were written on April 23, 2011

The Interviewee:

Brother Carl Clayton was born George Clayton on April 26, 1938, the youngest of four boys, whose family resided in Baltimore, Maryland. He attended Calvert Hall High School and received a scholarship to attend La Salle College in Philadelphia, PA, beginning in September 1956. After a brief time as a student, Mr. Clayton decided to enter the Christian Brothers order. He completed his spiritual and intellectual training and took the name Damian Carl. Eventually his name would change to just Carl. Br. Carl reported to Pittsburg Central Catholic in September 1961 and was later assigned to La Salle High School in 1963. Br. Carl served as vice principal until 1968. Brother Carl would return to La Salle on three different occasions and served as vice principal (1972-77), religion teacher (1986) and guidance counselor. He also served as campus minister at La Salle College (1978-80), California Polytechnic University (1991-94) and St. Mary's University (mid 1990's) in Winona, Minnesota. He also served as principal at St. John's High School in Washington D.C. (1988-91) and oversaw its transition to a coeducational institution. Brother Carl was a member of the Bethlehem University faculty (1998) and returned to serve on the faculties at Hudson Catholic High School (2002-05) and Calvert Hall High School (2005-08). Brother Carl currently lives at the Brothers' Residence at La Salle High School and is the moderator of the Alumni Association.

The Interviewer

I, John Paul Young, (b. 1965 in Philadelphia, PA), grew up in a suburb of Philadelphia, PA and earned a B.A. in Economics from Boston College. I began teaching high school in 1990 and earned a M.A. in Education from La Salle University in 1996. I am a state certified teacher of Social Studies and have been a member of the faculty at La Salle College High School for the past fifteen years. I currently teach Western Civilization and Advance Placement American History but have taught World History, Sacred Scripture and Algebra I in past years. My extended family resides in Philadelphia and the surrounding suburbs.

Background

My interest in conducting an interview with Brother Carl Clayton can be traced to several conversations I had with colleagues during the past fifteen years at La Salle. I had been a student at La Salle during the early 1980's and returned as a member of the faculty in 1996. Brother Carl had been at La Salle at different times but never during either of my tenures. Members of the Social Studies department always spoke highly of Br. Carl with respect to his teaching and administrative abilities. He seemed to be a highly competent and engaging person who left a favorable impression on many. We finally met two years ago when he returned to La Salle for the fourth time, serving as a moderator of the Alumni Association. He was not a member of the faculty but would stop by the department to converse with various individuals. When the opportunity came along to interview an individual for the Oral History project, I felt compelled to interview a Christian Brother and approached Brother Carl in mid-February 2011. He was open to the idea of being interviewed and commented that the Christian Brothers were in the process of gathering oral histories of their members. We agreed to meet in the next week to conduct a pre-interview.

Our pre-interview was conducted on February 24, 2011 and we spent approximately ninety minutes discussing his early education, entrance in the Brothers and professional career. I was fascinated to learn of his extensive teaching, counseling and administrative experiences and was prepared to begin the research phase of this process. I contacted Brother Joseph Grabenstein at the La Salle University archives and spent three hours collecting information on Brother Carl and his places of employment. Yearbooks and school newspapers provided valuable insights into the significant issues of the time and many questions in the interview were based upon this information. I contacted Brother Carl and we agreed to meet after school on March 9, 2011 at the Brothers' Residence, which is located on the campus of La Salle High School, 8605 Cheltenham Avenue, Wyndmoor, PA 19038, to conduct the formal interview.

Description of the Interview:

I arrived at the Brothers' Residence, which is on the campus of La Salle High School, after school on March 9, 2011 and we retreated to a small library off the main hallway. The Brothers' Residence was part of the estate that encompassed the property prior to it being purchased by the Christian Brothers. It is a stone building that contains several floors with an addition that became the chapel. Brother Carl is seventy-three years old and is in good health. He met me at the front door and he selected a small library off the main hallway as the location of our interview. The room contained two large chairs with a light between them, a couch and book cases filled with a variety of novels. The door was shut which provided both privacy and silence from outside noises or disturbance. The room was very comfortable yet became increasingly warm throughout the interview.

We spent a few minutes discussing the oral history project and I commented on the times that I had attended mass in the chapel during my time as a student. Brother Carl had lived in this residence at various times during his professional career. He was dressed in casual clothing rather than his religious habit and was very relaxed. I discussed the research that I had conducted with Brother Joe Grabenstein and gave him a sense of the format of the interview. I planned to work chronologically beginning with his early life and entrance into the Christian Brothers. I felt that his extensive experience would be the focal point of the interview and did not plan to spend a significant amount of time on his early childhood. Brother Carl and I had not spent significant time together prior to the interview and I was careful not to develop questions that might require him to share a significant amount of personal information. Lack of familiarity with an interviewee has both benefits and drawbacks. I was prepared to uncover a significant amount of new information which would enhance the process but was reluctant to pursue sensitive topics. I commented to him that many department members had spoken highly of him and looked forward to learning about his experiences at various stages of his career.

We sat on the two large, cushioned chairs with the table between us. I placed the recorder on the table and tested it first. The recorder worked well and we began the interview with some questions about his early life. The interview lasted a little over two hours. The room remained quiet although a door bell could be heard at various times. The temperature in the room seemed to rise during the interview but it did not present a significant distraction. Br. Carl shared many memories and insights and was comfortable speaking about various topics. We did not take a break and completed the interview at 5:00 P.M. I was very happy with the results of the interview and was eager to begin the transcription process.

Note on recording:

I used a Sony ICD-P620 on battery power to record the interview. I did not use an additional microphone. After the interview was completed, I connected the Sony recorder by USB port to my IBM ThinkPad and uploaded the audio files for storage in an MP3 format. I burned them to a CD in MP3 format as well. I used the Sony Digital Voice Editor software to playback and transcribe the interview. I used a variety of speeds on the software, primarily at a much slower rate to ensure a quality transcription.

Editing the Transcript:

My editing decisions included:

1. including most spoken words, even ones that are later replaced with other terms
2. remaining consistent with each comment regardless of sentence structure
3. eliminating “and” in some cases at the beginning of a sentence
4. providing a limited amount of information in footnotes
5. placing a time indicator at or near the top of each page
6. using quotation marks to indicate reported speech