

Spring 2015

Interview of Margot Soven, Ph.D.

Margot Soven Ph.D.

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FIELD NOTES

Interviewee: Margot Soven

Interviewer: Rebecca Goldman

Interview date: March 11, 18, and 25, 2015

Interview location: Margot's office, Olney Hall, La Salle University, 20th St. and Olney Ave., Philadelphia, PA.

Field notes written on April 18, 23, and 26, 2015.

The Interviewee:

Dr. Margot Iris Soven was born in the early 1940s on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. She spent her early life in New York City, attending public schools in Manhattan and Brooklyn. She received her bachelor's in English from Brooklyn College. After college, she married her husband, Paul, and moved with him to Chicago, where she taught at a high school while earning her master's in English at DePaul University. She enrolled in an English literature PhD program at Rutgers while living in New Jersey and completed a PhD in rhetoric at the University of Pennsylvania after moving to Philadelphia. In 1980, Margot joined La Salle's English department, where she currently holds the rank of Professor. In addition to her teaching, she has held several administrative positions at La Salle, including Director of the Core Curriculum and the First Year Odyssey Program (2000-present), Director of the Writing Tutors Program (1985-2000), Director of Writing Across the Curriculum (1982-1995), and Director of Composition (1980-1995). Margot currently lives with her husband in the Philadelphia suburbs and has three grown children and four grandchildren.

The Interviewer:

I, Rebecca Goldman (b. 1985), am a student in Dr. Allen's graduate Oral History class at La Salle University. I am currently completing a Master's in Public History at La Salle. I moved to the Philadelphia area in 2003 to attend Swarthmore College, where I graduated in 2007 with a major in linguistics and a minor in psychology. I received my MS in Library Science from Drexel University in 2008. I currently work at La Salle University as the Head of the Archives and Digital Initiatives Department, managing the University Archives and digital projects in the Library. I have previous experience with conducting, recording, and transcribing interviews for research, and with editing transcripts to identify linguistic phenomena.

Background:

Dr. Allen recommended Margot as a good candidate for this oral history project. Margot and I already knew each other professionally through my previous role as manager of Connolly Library's video collection. I was also familiar with Dr. Soven's faculty development work at La Salle and thought that she would be able to provide a perspective on La Salle's history that included both the English department and the university at large. I emailed Margot in early February to ask her to participate in the oral history project, and she readily agreed. Margot and I had a short meeting in late February to discuss the project in more detail, set ground rules for the interview, and schedule our first interview date. We decided to meet during her office hours on Wednesday afternoons; each session would last no more than an hour.

Description of the Interview:

I met Margot in her office in Olney Hall on March 11, 18, and 25, 2015. Before starting each interview session, I turned off the heater in her office, to reduce background noise, and tested my recording device while both of us were speaking. Although we closed the office door, some noises from the hallway were captured on the recording.

Each interview session lasted roughly forty-five minutes, for a total recording time of two hours and nineteen minutes. During the first interview, we were interrupted by a student arriving for office hours; Margot requested that we end the interview early. The final interview ended after I had exhausted my list of prepared interview questions and offered Margot an opportunity to share some culminating thoughts. After the interviews, I sent Margot a copy of my interview log for her review. In her comments, Margot offered additional information or clarified statements she had made in the interview. I have included her comments as footnotes in my interview log.

I structured my interview chronologically, starting with Margot's childhood and ending with her reflections on her life and career. I drew on Paul Thompson's "A Life-Story Interview Guide" in writing questions about Margot's family and personal life. My questions about her education and academic career were based on research conducted on La Salle's Digital Commons, on La Salle's website, and in *Living the Promise*, a recent history of La Salle. In beginning our second and third interviews, I asked Margot to reflect on what was said in previous sessions, or to cover topics that were missed.

In her oral history, Margot shares her perspective as a woman in academia, as a long-time professor and administrator in academia, and as a parent and spouse balancing family responsibilities with academic and career goals. She provides insight into how universities and liberal arts education have changed over the last thirty years. Margot is also a pioneer in the teaching of writing, having entered the field as it was just beginning and authored several books and articles on the subject. Her many contributions to La Salle and to her field deserve wider recognition, and I am honored to share her life story through this oral history project.

Note on recording:

I used the RØDE Rec app on a first-generation iPad to record the interview. I used an external conference microphone during recording, which has the advantage of capturing multiple speakers but the disadvantage of picking up ambient noise. I exported the interview in WAV format into the Dropbox app on my iPad, where it was backed up to my personal laptop and to cloud storage. I used NCH Express Scribe software to listen to the interview while writing the interview log.

Editing decisions:

My editing decisions included:

1. Deciding where to insert timestamps in the interview log, and determining when a change of topic was significant enough to merit a separate timestamp.
2. Within timestamped segments, presenting information in a different order than it was presented during the interview to achieve better clarity. (For example, in the first interview log, Margot discusses her educational experiences out of chronological order, talking about college, then graduate school, then college again. Within the corresponding timestamped segment, information about her graduate school experience follows information about her college experience.)
3. Eliminating repeated words, hesitation sounds, and corrections from direct quotations.
4. Using brackets to indicate information, not present in the original interview, but that requires only a few words of explanation, or that is essential to understanding the interview.
5. Using footnotes to indicate information, not present in the original interview, that is too long to include in brackets, or that requires a citation.
6. Excluding the interviewer's questions and comments.