

Spring 2015

Interview of John Mackin

John Mackin

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FIELD NOTES

Interviewee: John Mackin

Interviewer: Alex Palma

Interview date: April 12, 2015

Interview location: La Salle University, Connelly Library

Field notes written on April 20, 2015

The Interviewee:

John Mackin was born on January 23, 1943 in Scranton, Pennsylvania. He moved to Longbeach, New York when his father returned home from WWII. Soon after his family moved there, they moved again to Collingswood, New Jersey. Finally, his family moved to Cherry Hill, New Jersey when John was 16. John attended public and Catholic school growing up and attended Boston College for his higher education. John hit a rough patch after college during which he struggled with alcoholism. Currently he works at the La Salle University Connelly Library. A position he got in 1984 while the library was still the David Leo Lawrence Library. John is a devout Catholic who is (or at least was) strongly involved/interested in political change. This is especially true in regard to Civil Rights concerns.

The Interviewer:

I am Alex Palma; I was born and raised here in Philadelphia. I'm a sort of undergraduate/ graduate student at La Salle University, studying History and Philosophy. I have been an intern at Laurel Hill Cemetery and the past but these days I'm working in the archive at La Salle University, Tutoring at La Salle University and Interning at Christ Church on 2nd Street here in Philadelphia. My father, Robert, teaches part time at several Colleges/University. My mother, Maria, is also from Long Island, she currently works for the Philadelphia Court system. Most of my family lives in New York

Background:

I had first thought of interviewing John Mackin for this project when Professor Allen mentioned that he might be a good interview. Initially, John was eager to do the interview. I knew him already since he and my sister are coworkers. However, I did not know him very well. All I had really known was that he was a nice older guy who worked at the library.

As the course went on, I would talk to John for a few minutes every time I stopped in the library to check out a book or anything. After a while, I came to build quite a strong rapport with him. Additionally, while building a rapport with John, I started to come up with an inkling of what I might want to include on John's questionnaire. I combined this inkling with the Paul Thompson questionnaire to create the final questions that I would use in John's interview. By this point, I had also given John some of his legal papers which he took a few weeks to look and mull over.

I had originally planned to interview John Mackin in March, but he developed a sinus problem. By the time he had recovered, I had some family issues to deal with. We were finally able to set up April 12, 2015 as our interview date. Originally, we had planned to meet downtown, but the Connelly library turned out to be the easiest place for each of us to get to. This was simply because we were both familiar with the area.

On April 12, we finally held our interview. John and I went up to the 2nd floor of the Library and secured ourselves a study room. The room itself was fantastically quiet, however we were interrupted twice by my phone and by other library users. We started the interview around 2:30 pm and were finished by about 5 pm.

Description of the Interview:

As previously mentioned, the interview was performed on April 12, 2015. The interview was done in a study room on the second floor of the Connelly library. John is 72 years old, he's clean shaven and lanky. On the day of the interview he wore khaki pants and a button up shirt (as John often does). John has a distinct and, truthfully, indescribable voice. The room that we decided to do the interview in was a conference room of sorts. Stereotypically so, even, it had a blue carpeted floor and a wooden table. In the corner there was even a fake plastic tree.

Before the start of the interview, we closed the door, hoping that would keep out ambient sounds. We both sat vaguely across from each other at the large wooden table that was in the room. I set the VN701 recorder between us and began recording. The recorder worked very well, the sound quality is great. I can make out every word that was said during our interview.

I went into the interview with a set of 100 questions. I had the questions critiqued by Professor Allen beforehand. During the course of the interview itself, I had a hard time staying completely true to the questionnaire. However, based on the presentations I saw in class, this seemed to be a fairly common occurrence. During the interview, I had to adapt on the fly and make up (what I thought to be) interesting and relevant follow up questions on the spot.

The goals of the interview were as 4-fold. I wanted to learn about John's early life, his political life, his life at La Salle and I wanted to learn about his contemporary life. Throughout the course of the interview, I think I certainly delved into each of these

topics to a degree of which I am satisfied. However, towards the end of the interview, we seemed to tread over a lot of old ground that we had already covered for whatever reason. Overall, however, I think I set out what I aimed to do. When the interview was over, I thanked John and we both left the Library.

Note on recording:

As I mentioned before, I used a VN701 audio recorder for this interview. I used a different recorder than the smart phone that I had used in my practice interview. This is mostly because I was concerned about battery life. I also checked to make sure that the recorder was still running several times during the interview. After the interview I got the WMA file off the recorder and converted it to mp3 using I Tunes.