

2009

Interview of John J. Rooney, Ph.D.

John J. Rooney PhD

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Lauren Woodring

La Salle University

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Recommended Citation

Rooney, John J. PhD and Woodring, Lauren, "Interview of John J. Rooney, Ph.D." (2009). *All Oral Histories*. 99.
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FIELD NOTES

Interviewee: Dr. John J. Rooney

Interviewer: Lauren E. Woodring

Interview date: July 10, 2009 and July 17, 2009

Interview location: Food Court at La Salle University, Philadelphia, PA

Field notes written on August 5, 2009

The Interviewee:

Dr. John J. Rooney was born on March 19, 1923 to a working class family in South Philadelphia. He went to primarily Catholic schools and during his childhood, witnessed three word series from his house. He started attending La Salle University in 1940, majoring in chemistry. During World War II, he left school to join the Navy as a flight instructor. He came back to La Salle and graduated in 1946. From there, he went to Temple University to get a master's and then Ph.D. in psychology. During this time, he simultaneously went to school, taught first chemistry and then psychology at La Salle, and was director of the counseling program. After receiving his Ph.D., he became a permanent professor at La Salle. He taught classes until 1983, during which time he witnessed many changes in both the school and the psychology department, including a change from commuter to resident students and the introduction of female students. After he retired from teaching, he became the director of the Master's in counseling program, a position he has maintained up until the present. He has been active in a number of La Salle and professional organizations.

The Interviewer:

I, Lauren Elizabeth Woodring, grew up in rural areas of Pennsylvania. I received a B.A. in history and political science in 2008. I am currently working towards a M.A. in history at La Salle University and plan to graduate in the spring of 2010. My official residence is Chambersburg, PA but I spend most of my time at my apartment at La Salle University in Philadelphia.

Background:

As required for my major, I took Oral History with Dr. Barbara Allen in the summer of 2009. Part of the course work required a two-hour interview with either someone associated with La Salle University or a war veteran. After some consideration, I decided that the most personally interesting and convenient would be to interview someone associated with La Salle. However, as I am not Catholic, I decided that doing a Christian Brother may be too difficult. After looking at the list of interviewees Dr. Allen had posted I chose Dr. Rooney.

I first contacted Dr. Rooney by email on June 22, 2009. He agreed to be interviewed and we decided to set up a time for after the Fourth of July, eventually picking the Friday afterwards. I suggested meeting in his office but he wanted to meet in La Salle's food court. He also requested that the interview take place over two separate dates.

I began research by talking to Dr. Rooney's good friend and my former professor, Dr. John Rossi. Dr. Rossi gave me some information about Dr. Rooney including that he was the last World War II veteran at La Salle and that he originally studied chemistry. Dr. Rossi assured me that Dr. Rooney would be a willing participant and seemed glad that I was conducting the interview. I then proceeded to visit the La Salle archives with Brother Joseph Grabenstein. Brother Joe pulled around 60 pages of material, mostly articles written by and about Dr. Rooney, for me. These materials proved invaluable in the research process, especially an article Dr. Rooney wrote for the La Salle magazine about changes he has seen in the university. After reading these materials, I wrote some questions to ask Dr. Rooney.

Dr. Rooney and I emailed a few more times to confirm the time and place of the interview.

Description of the Interview:

I arrived to the Food Court on July 10, 2009 about five minutes early. I was a little nervous about finding Dr. Rooney as I had never met him and there were others in the food court. However, Dr. Rooney and Dr. Rossi were having tea and I was easily able to find them. Dr. Rossi introduced me to Dr. Rooney and joked that he was going to have to leave as he had already heard every story Dr. Rooney could possibly tell me. After making lunch plans with Dr. Rooney, Dr. Rossi wished us luck and left.

Dr. Rooney was seated at a table with a Styrofoam cup of tea. He seemed completely at ease and ready for the interview. He was dressed in a oxford shirt and slacks. He invited me to sit across the table. He had brought for me a copy of his extensive resume and some articles that he had written. He seemed pleased to learn that I had already read the articles. (I had gotten them from the archives).

The food court was quite full and busy that morning. Many people were having conversations and I was worried this would interfere with the quality of the recording. However, as Dr. Rooney had wanted to have the interview there, we remained. Most of the gaps in the transcript are due to noise that prohibited me from hearing what was being said. Another problem was that the workers often made noises with the dishes that were audible on the recording.

We started the interview almost immediately after Dr. Rooney signed the legal release form. He drank his tea throughout the interview. We were able to look through the large windows out onto the La Salle campus. Sometimes when he discussed the buildings,

especially College Hall, he would gesture toward the actual building. This made the stories he told all the more real. He spoke in a quiet but strong voice and was extremely articulate. He was able to laugh at some of the more amusing aspects of his stories.

During the first interview, we mainly covered his time as a student at La Salle and then his later education at Temple University. Afterwards he asked me a few questions about myself such as where I went as an undergraduate and how I liked La Salle. We agreed to meet at the same time in exactly a week.

The next week, the situation was much the same. Dr. Rossi was not there, but three older gentlemen surrounded Dr. Rooney. Again he had the cup of tea. He wore a similar outfit with the addition of a Philadelphia Phillies baseball hat. He seemed quite eager to tell the rest of his story and we started almost immediately. We discussed his experiences teaching and working at La Salle. I specifically concentrated on the changes he had witnessed during his tenure and he too seemed interested in this line of questioning. We ended the interview discussing the changes he hopes to see in La Salle's future.

He thanked me for interviewing him and we chatted a bit more. He was curious to know about Oral History and seemed glad it would go into his beloved school's archives. I asked him if he wanted a copy of the finished transcription and he said yes. We walked out of the building and then parted ways. I mailed him and Brother Joe thank you cards a week later.

Note on recording:

For recording, I used La Salle University's voice recorder on battery power without an additional microphone. After each interview I loaded the files on my MacBook and then had technicians at La Salle burn me a back up CD. I used Express Scribe free software to help the transcription process. Due to the location of the interview, other voices and background noise is quite prevalent and a few times, it is impossible to ascertain what is being discussed.

Editing the Transcript:

My editing decisions included:

- 1) eliminating most repeated words, unless the words were repeated for emphasis
- 2) eliminating most false starts, unless the false starts seemed significant
- 3) placing information about pauses and visual cues or nonverbal sounds in brackets
- 4) using empty brackets [] to indicate inaudible words or phrases
- 5) providing limited additional explanation in footnotes
- 6) placing a time indicator at or near the top of each page and at the beginning and end of each recording session
- 7) frequently eliminating transitional words such as "and," "so," and "because" in order to make sentences shorter and easier to read.
- 8) using a dash to indicate an awkward transition in the middle of a sentence

- 9) using a period to show a sentence that was not completed and a dash to show a sentence or question that was interrupted.
- 10) capitalizing and using hyphens between letters of words the interviewee spelled
- 11) using **bold** to indicate emphasis
- 12) using quotation marks to indicate reported speech