

Spring 2008

## Interview of Gerard Francis Molyneaux F.S.C.

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### Recommended Citation

Molyneaux, Gerard Francis F.S.C. and Kramer, James, "Interview of Gerard Francis Molyneaux F.S.C." (2008). *All Oral Histories*. 103.  
<http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptohall/103>

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## Field Notes

Interviewee: Br. Gerard Francis Molyneaux

Interviewer: James G. Kramer

Interview Date: April 11, and 12, 2008 (morning)

Interview Location: Br. Gerry's office in the communication department

### The Interview:

Brother Gerry was born February 23, 1935 to John and Anne, youngest of nine children, with four boys and four girls in Upper Derby, PA. His father was a mason specializing in marble, which has been a business in the family for five generations carried on by his brother Jim, older by 5 years, while his mother was a stay at home mom. For primary education Br. Gerry attended St. Philomena's in Lansdowne graduating in 1949, then attending West Catholic graduating in 1953. Inspired by the Christian Brother's who taught him, after a summer of consideration by the request of his parents Br. Gerry entered into the Christian brothers. As every brother begins Br. Gerry went to Ammendale, MD where the head quarters for the Christian Brother in the region is. After spending one year, and some days due to a farming injury of being spliced open by root shears, Br. Gerry then went to live in a Christian Brother community in Elkins Park, while he attended La Salle University in February 1955. He graduated in June of 1958, with a BA in English and a MA in Theology. After this he headed to DC to teach at St. John's College High School where he taught English at the Airily school which at the time was the start of the new campus for St. John's College High School, which is currently their home campus off Military Ave. in North West DC. After being there for year he went to Cumberland MD, to teach at La Salle High School, which has since been shut down. While there he taught Latin, until it was dropped and then taught Spanish. Brother Joe Grabenstein, another Christian Brother on the La Salle University campus, was a student of Br. Gerry for both his Latin and Spanish class. During this time Brother Gerry also earned a MA in English from the University of Notre Dame in 1965. In 1966 he went to a school in Pittsburgh, South Hills High School, where he helped to start a small TV studio and run the morning news show which was a first introduction into the world of communication. Three years later he went to Wisconsin where he earned his PhD in communication, where he worked for while in as a resident coordinator, second in charge of a large dormitory for all men, and finishing his degree in 1976. In 1972 Br. Gerry spent a year at Lewis University, a Christian Brother school right outside of Chicago. In 1973 he came back to La Salle University as a teacher in the English department. He started the Communications program first as a 4 course track as a minor within the English department, and by a major by 1978. By 1985 Communication, became its own department

once it had a large enough full staff and they continued to work out of Olney until the Communication Department opened up in 1994. Brother Gerry is a four time published author, those publications are; Charlie Chaplin's City Lights(1983) James Stewart : A Bio-Bibliography(1992) Gregory Peck: A Bio-Bibliography (1995) and John Sayles (2000). Brother Gerry has a sister in law, Maribel Molyneaux who is also currently a teacher at La Salle University. Brother Gerry has also begun a travel study in the spring time to Prague to study film, and is also the moderator for Sigma Phi Lambda, a La Salle fraternity.

### The Interviewer

James Kramer is a full time student at La Salle University. He is an honors student, active in service work, and originally came to La Salle to study film under Br. Gerry, but unfortunately the film track is no longer around. I am currently looking into changing majors, from communication to a double in French and English. I graduated from St. Johns College High School in DC, a school where Br. Gerry once taught. His father and uncle are graduates of Calvert Hall High School a Christian Brother high school in the Towson, area as well that uncle is a Christian Brother who is a La Salle Alumni, and teaches at Hudson Catholic in New Jersey. The Christian brothers are nothing new to me, and have long been a close part of my education and my family's education. As well one of my favorite and most respected teachers from high school was TJ Curry, a La Salle Alumni, my first film teacher as well as an inspiration to come to La Salle, was also a student of Br. Gerry and helped to introduce us. I am from Sterling, VA but I grew up throughout a large portion of Northern Virginia area.

### Background

I was immediately drawn to interview Br. Gerry because of my relationship with him. When I first became interested in being a student at La Salle, my teacher and trusted advisor, TJ Curry brought my attention to La Salle and told me about Br Gerry since I've always been extremely interested in film. He told me of classes he had taken with Br. Gerry including an entire course on Alfred Hitchcock and a story of acting out a scene from the Martin Scorsese remake of Cape Fear, which Br. Gerry still remembers as well. After months of talking about his classes, and programs offered including the travel study program to Prague, I was excited to come up to a Communication open house for the chance to met Br. Gerry. During this time Mr. Curry had been in contact with Br. Gerry about me and when we finally met we had much to talk about. After a full day of tours on campus, a long ride up, I finally got to meet Br. Gerry about 5-7 minutes before he began a panel of La Salle Communication Alumni about to give a speech on what jobs could be had with a communication degree from La Salle. When I first introduced myself, and told Br. Gerry who I was he declared that I was his grandson of film students, as my teacher was once his student. Within those 5 minutes I explicitly remember discussing Jimmy Stewart and what a jerk he plays in the Man Who Knew Too Much and Rear Window, the

amazing scores of Herman Bernard especially his score for Taxi Driver, and the Departed and the historical works of Shakespeare and the allusions both explicit and implicit in the film. After the presentation we talked for a good 20-25 minutes on Jim Jarmusch and his most recent films, exchanged emails and said our goodbyes. When I first got on campus though I was pleasantly surprised to find a welcome email in my inbox, informing me on film events going on campus. Since Br. Gerry and I run into each other, sometimes I'll drop by his office causally to discuss the latest films we've seen and exchange the occasional DVD. I also was very pleased to get an invitation from Br. Gerry for dinner at his home, a Christian Brother residence. I'm currently looking forward to taking Film as Art with Br. Gerry next year, as well as looking into going to the Prague travel study in the spring. Br. Gerry was the first name on the tip of my tongue for an interview because of the warm welcome, and extended generosity of friendship that he has extended to me and any other student for that matter.

#### Description of the Interview:

I met with Br. Gerry on the morning of April the 11<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 in his office. I woke up that morning picked up the voice recorder from Multimedia Services and walked down to the Communication building. Br. Gerry's office is down the hall to the right after walking in the front door, the large office mid way down the hall past a doorway covered with posters. His office has a sitting area outside his front door where the department secretary sits, and in the office next to his is the Communication department chair, Dr. Texter.

His office has large glass windows that look out the front of the building and on his opposite wall is his book shelves, three, consumed with books, including his own and his dissertation on Charlie Chaplain, City Lights. He has a desk on both sides of the room, on each side of the office that I explained in the later sentences, one with a computer the other without. On his desk are picture frames, and general office supplies, his desk underneath his book shelves on the right side of the room, has chairs on the opposite side of him, I take the one on the right as it is the closer to Br. Gerry and will be best for positioning the recorder between the two of us for a clear recording. Behind me on the wall facing Br. Gerry when he are various pictures, and items of memorabilia and things from Br. Gerry's career, and the wall behind him is no different, including a signed poster of Jimmy Stewart from the opening of his hall of fame, and a signed portrait of Gregory Peck.

I sit down; he turns from his one desk and rolls over in his chair with wheels to his second desk where we sit across from each other. Br. Gerry informed me that there would be a second student coming in about 40 minutes so we began right away. I was somewhat nervous at first about being a good interviewer and being able to say the right things. Under the suggestion of

Br. Joe Grabenstein, I brought out some photocopied resources of old news clippings, articles, from campus and Philadelphian newspapers, and records I had collected from Br. Joe in prior weeks in the archive. Right away Br. Gerry overlooks a few, gives a small little grin and a couple chuckles and corrects a few dates for me. The interview begins and right away Br. Gerry seems more than happy enough to fully answer all my questions. The interview gets rolling along and we get all the way up to 1969 and Br. Gerry going to Wisconsin when his secretary came in and informed him that his next appointment was here. We shook hands, I said thank you, and we arranged to meet the next morning at 10:00.

The next morning I walk down to the communication building from St. Basil's dorm. As I approach I recognize and see Br. Gerry's car in the parking lot, it's actually the only one around. The whole campus is quite and the Communication building is no different. I ring the bell because the doors are locked and Sid Macleod opened the doors for me, asked what I was doing, I politely answer, and was on my way. I sit back down with Br. Gerry in his office, in almost exact same spot and position to him, he turns from one desk with the computer to the one with out to face me and we start off right where we left off. This second session was a lot of fun just out of interest of the stories which Br. Gerry was telling me. He tells them so well and he was laughing right along with his stories and moving his hands to go with the stories. This session seems much more laidback and we take our time a little slower. After a while the recorder was turned off, we were done, but we continued to chat about movies and stories like we regularly do.

#### Note on Recording:

I recorded my interview with an Olympus digital voice recorder WS-300M, on battery power, without an external microphone. After the interview was over I connect the Olympus recorder to my IBM Think Pad computer where I saved it as a WAV file and set it to open and play with Windows Media Player. I rented the voice recorder for the week from Multimedia Service on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of Olney, near the end of the hall way. I borrowed it Friday morning before the interview and returned it on the agreed time of Monday at 11 in the morning.