Abstract

Edward Koronkiewicz was born in 1954 in Southwest Philadelphia, PA. He graduated from West Philadelphia Catholic High School for Boys in 1972. After a year as an Aspirant, he joined the Christian Brothers and received his habit in July 1973. He graduated from La Salle College with a B.A. in Secondary Education/Social Studies in 1976 and later earned a Master’s in Educational Administration at Villanova University. He has taught Social Studies at Bishop Walsh High School in Cumberland, MD, Archbishop Carroll High School in Radnor, PA, and West Philadelphia Catholic High School. He was also the Disciplinarian and later, Vice-Principal at Archbishop Carroll. Before he came to La Salle he spent twelve years at West Catholic where he taught one class of Social Studies each year while simultaneously serving as the Assistant Principal for Academic Affairs. He was instrumental in the merger of the West Catholic Boys and West Catholic Girls into one school. When the schools were joined he became the Assistant Principal for Academic Affairs. In June 2000, he became the Associate Registrar at La Salle University and remains in that post today. In his free time Brother Ed enjoys cooking, walking, reading, spending time with family, and relaxing at the Christian Brothers’ house in Ocean City, NJ.

Interview Log

1st Part
00:00

Brother Ed was born on May 3, 1954 at Presbyterian Hospital in West Philadelphia. He is the oldest of six children in the family and spent the first 14 years of his life in Southwest Philadelphia in the 2600 block of South 61st Street in St. Mary of Czestochowa Parish. His father is of Polish heritage and his mother was born and raised in England and is an Anglican. They met in 1952 while his father was stationed in England while serving in the Air Force. His maternal grandparents visited America in 1968 and he visited his family in England in the early 1980s. His paternal grandfather died in 1954 and his paternal grandmother was very kind to him, close to him, and a strong influence on him. His paternal grandmother came to America from Poland on the Lusitania in 1912 at about the same time the Titanic sank. She remembered the event well and said she came to America for a better life. She later worked in a tobacco factory on Greenway...
Avenue in Southwest Philadelphia. His paternal grandfather was a mechanic who also drove a bus during World War II.

07:24 Brother Ed’s parents met in Margate, a seaside town on the East Coast of England in 1952 and will celebrate 65 years of marriage this June. Since 1968 they have lived on Magnolia Terrace in Upper Darby, PA in St. Laurence Parish. His father was a reservist in the Air Force at the Philadelphia Airport and later at the Willow Grove Air Base. When he retired from the Air Force he took a job as a cashier at the Acme supermarket in Newtown Square, PA. His father is a very quiet, laid-back man who wanted Brother Ed to carry on the family name and join the Air Force. His mother worked at Strawbridge’s department store and then at Philadelphia National Bank. She is also an Anglican, or member of the Church of England. He considers his mother to be a very courageous woman for leaving the only country she ever knew to marry his father and live in a new country with people she never met before. She did not return to England to see her family until June 1976 and since her family in England did not have a phone for much of that time, their only communication was exchanging letters in the mail.

12:56 There is a five-year gap between his birth and the birth of the next child in the family. Discipline at home was strict. His own mother was not even allowed to talk at the dinner table when she was younger. The common punishment was “sit on the couch you’re not going outside” and there was sometimes an occasional “strap”. His demeanor as a teacher and how he behaved in front of his students is a reflection of his parents and how they raised him. He never really thought of doing anything bad. He would sometimes go to the New Jersey shore with his friends for the week. His parents trusted him to go. It only cost $50 to rent a house for the week, or $10 per friend. They would get a neighbor to buy them a bottle of alcohol. The landlord was well aware they had alcohol.

16:50 In response to a question about how his parents influenced his religious upbringing he stated, “My parents aren’t very religious to be honest with you.” However, he and his siblings all went to twelve years of Catholic school. And the family followed all the rules and customs of the Church such as “no meat on Friday” and attending mass on Sunday. Only two of six siblings (he is one) are practicing Catholics today. His sister stopped attending church after the story of the Priest Abuse Scandal broke. She raised her own children as Catholics but they don’t practice the faith and he commented that he “finds it sad”.

19:06 He stated the Church played a role in the neighborhood. For instance, Block Collection, where the Priest would come to your house to take a kind of census, priests would bless food on Holy Saturday, and religious ceremonies or processions would be held throughout the neighborhood. He tells a funny story where the Italian parish in Southwest Philadelphia would have a procession where statues of saints were carried and people would pin dollar bills to them every summer. The procession ended with fireworks. His father was at work at General Electric (the biggest employer in the neighborhood at the time) and his mother
was home alone and not ready for all the noise. She was scared to death and said she hadn’t heard anything so loud since the Blitz during World War II.

21:41 He was an altar boy and he often helped his diabetic pastor who had lost a leg to his disease. He would also help with religious processions and the counting of the Sunday collection. He attended St. Mary of Czestochowa School which was part of his Polish national parish for grades 1 to 8. There was no kindergarten at the time. There was a pre-school type of program offered by the School District of Philadelphia at Morton Elementary School in the summer before 1st grade. The teachers at St. Mary’s were all Polish and they belonged to a religious order called the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth. The Polish language was taught and Brother remembers they would say some prayers in Polish and greet the Pastor in Polish but it was the same book every year and there was no real emphasis on learning anything more the rudimentary aspects of the Polish language. He also remembers a few students who still spoke Polish when the arrived at St. Mary’s and the Sisters would give those students some instructions in Polish.

24:55 As a grade school student he completed all his work because he knew he had to and that was what was expected of him by the Sisters and his parents. He was a “laid-back” student who would sometimes earn second honors. He later joined the CSC, or “Community Service Corps”, in High School where he would tutor students after school at St. Rita of Cascia School in South Philadelphia and St. Rose of Lima School in West Philadelphia. He was in the Cub Scouts for a short time but his parents could not really afford to buy him all the necessary supplies like uniforms and mess kits so he left. He was not musically or athletically inclined so he did not learn an instrument or play a sport on an organized team, although he did play pick up games in the street. The Sisters at his school were strict and most, but not all, used some type of corporal punishment. There were no more than 35 students per class. Some Catholic schools in the area had 100 students per class. It seemed to him that all through second grade they prepared for 1st Holy Communion.

30:30 In order to become a member of St. Mary of Czestochowa Parish and School one had to be at least partially Polish. Some non-Polish students went to school there but only if they lived too far to walk to St. Barnabas School. The 6th and 7th Grades were held in one classroom. The Sister would teach the one grade on one side of the room while the other side did their classwork and then she would teach the other grade. The Sisters lived a very simple life and even did their own laundry by hand. They made their presence known in the community by wearing their habits to the different stores. Most kids in his neighborhood went to St. Barnabas because they were not Polish or part Polish. There were many, many children in the neighborhood and it seemed like most people got along well.

34:16 There is a 15-year difference between his birth and the birth of the youngest sibling. There are six children in the family. There is a five-year gap between himself and the second oldest sibling and then another sibling every third year
thereafter. He is named after his father. He feels closest to his brother Allan who never married and helps take care of his parents and takes summer vacations with his sister and her family. When he was in high school he stayed in the same bedroom as the youngest child who was a baby. He would wake up in the middle of the night to feed the baby and change diapers, etc. because his mother needed to go back to work for financial reasons. He also remembers cooking meals for the family in high school. He has a love of cooking until this day and even threw his back out while cooking for the Brothers at their Ocean City, NJ home at 31st Street and Central Avenue this past New Year’s Eve. The other Brothers helped him finish the work. He will also cook this year’s Easter dinner of traditional Polish food for his family. He remembers his childhood as being very similar to the other children in his neighborhood.

2nd Part

00:00

The Brothers’ shore house in Ocean City, NJ was built in 1898. It sits on an entire city block and is a beach front property. It was unheated until recently and was not used in the winter. This past year was the very first time the Brothers gathered at the shore house to celebrate New Year’s Eve. In 2009 or 2010 Ocean City decided the house was actually a hotel and major work needed to be done to upgrade the property. The entire house was torn down and the property was split into four lots. Three of the four lots were sold and houses were built on these lots. The house that was built on their lot was finished in April 2016. He said it is a gorgeous house which he loves and he spent St. Patrick’s Day weekend there to escape La Salle’s campus which is rather chaotic that time of year.

02:51

His first TV was a large console, a black and white model. His family did not get a color TV until they moved to the suburbs. Sometimes, but not every year, his family would go to North Wildwood for the weekend in the summer for a vacation. His parents do not go on vacations anymore. During the holidays he goes home and spends times with his parents and siblings.

05:32

He had chores as a child such as taking out the trash. His family did not shop at the large supermarket on the main street in town. They would go to the corner store and buy everything on credit. The shopkeeper would write everything in a black book and then the family would pay the bill every other week when his father was paid. He never took money with him to the store. Someone from the family would have to go everyday to get the food for that night’s dinner. He had a favorite Aunt, Winnie, who was deaf due to a botched surgery when she was younger. She never married, which he thinks was sad, and was very good to him, giving him money for the movies and candy. She worked at a pharmaceutical company at 12th and Hamilton called Hance Brothers where she filled bottles. He later lived right across the street from this company. It burnt down while he lived there and the Brothers house smelled like smoke for weeks.

09:13

He went to West Catholic High School for Boys at 49th and Chestnut in West Philadelphia. It was absolutely huge to him since his school was so small in
comparison. Even the other “feeder” schools were much larger than St. Mary’s such as Most Blessed Sacrament School in Southwest Philadelphia, close to his house, where there were 3600 students on roll, which is more than the number of undergraduates at La Salle University. It was still two, gender separate schools until 1989 when the the boy’s school was closed and merged with West Catholic High School for Girls. They moved to the girl’s school because it was newer and needed less improvements. Some faculty were upset because there were no sports fields near the girl’s school. The new West Philadelphia High School (public school) is on the site of the old boy’s school.

13:26 He went to West Catholic from 1968-1972. There were 1800 boys on the roll there. It was so big that he felt a bit out of place. Even though he no longer lived in the city he went to West Catholic even though technically he should have gone to Monsignor Bonner High School in Upper Darby. He loved his four years at West Catholic and it was his first exposure to the Christian Brothers.

17:56 In high school he was a member of the Community Service Corps, the library staff for three years, the Yearbook in Senior Year, and dramatics. The girls would come to the boy’s school very rarely, maybe for a class that was not offered at the boy’s school. Two of the most influential teachers he had at West Catholic were laymen in the Social Studies Department – Bill Gaffigan and Dave Clayton. They were still on the faculty when he returned to West Catholic in 1989 to become Vice-Principal. He loved the faculty at West Catholic when he was an administrator and said they were very hard-working and cooperative. He attributes their hard work and willingness to go over and above what their contract stated to the demeanor of the Christian Brothers. Most of the other Vice- Principals he would speak to at Archdiocesan High School meetings would complain bitterly about their faculties. Because of this, he hated going to those meetings.

21:43 Brother Ed was encouraged to go to college. The students would be sent to a guidance counselor to talk about careers and goals. He was surprised to be put in Track 1 Math and says he was basically a Track 2 student. His first year at West Catholic had no tuition, only a book fee. In 1969-70 the tuition was $100, and for the remaining two years the tuition was $300 each year. Tuition rose so dramatically because many Christian Brothers were leaving the religious life during these years. He stated that many left because there were too many drastic changes as a result of Vatican Council II. Others left because there were not enough changes. Some Brothers left to get married. Several hundred Christian Brothers from his Province left between 1968 and 1972. If a Brother left the religious life, he could remain on La Salle’s faculty but they were encouraged not to return to West Catholic.

26:37 His first job after high school was at Philadelphia National Bank from 5 pm to 1 am. It was in the old Gimbel’s Department Store building in Downtown Philadelphia. He batched, coded, and processed checks. This was during his first
year after high school graduation when he attended junior college and was an Aspirant to the Christian Brothers. He would get up at 6 am and take public transportation to Peirce Junior College at Broad and Pine. It was a rat race but he says it was good for him to work so hard with a job and school. He had a very low draft number and the draft was ended shortly after he graduated from high school. His one brother could not join the service because of a caved in chest. He was able to get a deferment once he joined the Brothers.

He joined the Christian Brothers in 1973 because of the positive influence they had on him while a student at West Catholic. It seemed there was an influx of Brothers in his Senior year and he liked the work they did. He also felt he would be a good teacher and would like to pursue that career path because he enjoyed his experience as a tutor and helping his siblings with their homework. When he first joined he was called an Aspirant. A Brother would visit his home about once a month and discuss the vocation with him. He lived with his parents in Upper Darby during this year. He just knew he had a vocation or “calling” to the religious life and he still has it. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to describe the “calling”. He can’t really describe it but he knows it happened. He “took his final vows in 1981 or ‘82”. At first he lived at the Scholasticate in East Mount Airy while he was getting his Bachelor’s degree at La Salle. The he completed his Novitiate year and then went to teach again. Each year he would take vows, called “annuals” promising to stay for the next year. Then he applied to take the final vows. He stated he thought about the priesthood in grade school and was inspired by one of the parish priests “Father Ted”. But by the end of high school he was only interested in becoming a Christian Brother.

The difference between a Brother and as Priest is very similar to the difference between a Priest and a Nun. The Brothers live a religious life in a community but do not perform the sacraments. His father wasn’t thrilled at first that he was joining the Brothers but was happy about it by the time he left home after his year as an aspirant. No one in his family was opposed. He received his religious habit at La Salle’s chapel in July 1973. After that he usually wore the black shirt and collar. He did his student teaching at West Catholic with another Brother. They would drive there each day. During the first year of formation the house they would have lived in was closed for renovations (the former convent at St. Therese of the Child Jesus). During this year they lived with the Brothers of Charity, who were teaching at Cardinal Dougherty High School, on 70th Street. By the next fall the Brothers wanted their house back. So then he had to live at La Salle with the other Brothers and he did not feel welcomed. The new members had to sit in the back of the chapel for example and had to sit together at meals. If he sat in the wrong place he would be told so immediately. They were able to move into the newly renovated house by Thanksgiving.

All the changes of Vatican Council II were already implemented by 1973. So many changes were made that he had to get a used habit from a deceased Brother when he first joined because there were no new ones. Some of the older ideas and
customs are making a comeback today. His normal day as an undergraduate was similar to most other students except for the morning prayer and some household chores. The Divine Office, the official prayer of the Catholic Church is not required for him to say daily, but he has been saying it daily for many years.

44:43

He completed his student teaching at West Catholic and graduated from La Salle. He was contacted by the Principal at another Christian Brothers High School to teach Social Studies there for the remainder of the school year. He spent the 4th quarter and the next two school years at Bishop Walsh High School in Cumberland, MD. It was a culture shock to him because it was in a very rural area on top of a mountain 900 feet above the rest of the town. He said they “worked him to death” and he had to prepare for five different classes a day. He stated “I taught there for nine quarters.” This stresses that he wasn’t there for just two school years but 9 quarters. Today he thinks there is more preparation for the Brothers before they take final vows. He never really doubted or questioned his vocation.

49:16

His least favorite part of his formation years was his Novitiate year near Syracuse, NY, partially because he hates the cold and the snow. One of the Brothers in charge was a very mean person who degraded the Novitiates, especially the ones from the New York Province. (Brother Ed was from the Baltimore Province.) This man did not pick on Brother Ed because he stood up for himself. One victim of the leader’s relentless bullying left the Brothers but is now the President of a Christian Brothers high school in California. His favorite part of formation was when he left the Novitiate. Next, he was told he would be going to Archbishop Carroll High School in Radnor, PA. He had to go and take the job of a Christian Brother who was leaving. Because of the Catholic high school teacher’s union contract, a Religious teacher has to be replaced by a Religious teacher. If he or she is not, that job can never be held by a Religious again. This is why he really had no choice in the matter. He heard some stories that made it seem like he would not want to teach at Carroll but he stayed there for nine years and he loved it. He was a full time teacher for 3 years and for his first seven years the school was co-institutional (he was on the boy’s side) and for his last two years it was co-educational. He helped with the major transition of combining the two gender separate schools into one co-ed school. When he served as the school’s Disciplinarian, he “ran the place like a boot camp”. He was very hard on the Freshman and easier on the Seniors. He was a very tough, no nonsense teacher and this attitude served him well when he became the Disciplinarian. The students knew better than to mess with him. He learned strictness from his parents. Some students were going so far as to smoke pot in class and hang out the windows. The Principal at Carroll wanted to shape up the school and was able to get some of the weaker teachers to leave by “calling them to task” and when they couldn’t do the job expected of them they either quit or were fired. The year before he became the Disciplinarian he taught all of the Junior boys. He was very strict and gave them a great deal of work. When he became Disciplinarian all his former
students were Seniors and the stories they told the younger students helped to keep them in line.

56:30  He took his final vows while a teacher at Carroll. The vows are poverty, chastity, and obedience and also “stability within the order” which means you promise to stay a Brother for the rest of your life. He has had no real difficulty adhering to these vows. He only had to take three education courses. He had to do observations of classrooms from the beginning. One place he did this was De La Salle in town, a school for adjudicated youth. This was his teacher training which is not as much as new teachers receive today. One Brother he tried to help when he was an administrator in high school was just not able to do the job and eventually he left. La Salle expected him to major in secondary education but he could choose what subject he wanted to teach.

1:00:20  Other Brothers teach the Brothers in formation and there are many different speakers brought in to speak to them. Some of the speakers are Christian Brothers, some of them are from different Religious orders, some are laymen or women. In 1976 he received his B.A. from La Salle. In 1981 he took his final vows. He was the only brother to take final vows at the ceremony. There was a big party held for him at Archbishop Carroll High School. He invited family and friends from the old neighborhood and the entire faculty of Archbishop Carroll High School. A faculty member catered the event. The Christian Brothers could not pay for the whole party because of a lack of finances at the time.

1:03:20  The formation of new Brothers is much more structured today. They spend much more time together with their classmates and travel all over the country. He thinks these changes are positive, but he questions the practice of sending them all over the country. The Christian Brothers are separated into three different provinces. There is a friendly rivalry amongst them. There are more Brothers in their hundreds than there are in their twenties.

1:07:01  The biggest change in the Christian Brothers since he joined is the change into the three provinces. Another change is the average age of the Brothers is older. Two high schools that were staffed by the Christian Brothers have no presence there at all anymore, namely, Archbishop Carroll and Bishop Walsh. After a ninety-year presence at West Catholic High School, there is no full-time Christian Brother on staff, only a part-time employee, which he finds sad. Today, he lives at St. Katherine dorm; two other brothers live in the dorms as well. His room is a quad, which means it is two rooms connected by a bathroom. He loves to live there, but does not have much interaction with the students, although he would like to next year. He has no official role at the dorm. He has always lived in a community since he has become a brother. Thirteen or fourteen Brothers live in the main house on campus. Every Brother could not live at the main house due to lack of space.
In 1988, he left Archbishop Carroll for West Catholic High School for Boys as Vice-Principal. The next year, West Catholic Boys joined with West Catholic Girls, and he became the Assistant Principal for Academic Affairs. He then spent eleven years at the newly merged school. In addition to his administrative duties, he taught one class of history for a few years and during his last few years, he taught one class of algebra. He left West Catholic in June 2000. He loved his years there. When he arrived in 1988, many of the same faculty were still there from when he was a student there in 1972. They were happy to have him back and sad to see him go. He loved the staff and faculty and their extra work so he tried to accommodate them when creating their class schedules. He went to West Catholic in 1988, because Brother Ed Sheehy was leaving Central Catholic High School in Pittsburgh. Brother Ed Sheehy’s replacement was leaving West Catholic to go to Pittsburgh and Brother Ed Koronkiewicz replaced him. He especially loved his years living in Community at 12th and Spring Garden Street. He lived with other brothers in an old convent at Assumption parish, which closed in 1995. He was very close to downtown and did not need a car. Sometimes he would walk back and forth to West Catholic. He lived there for fifteen years and left in 2004 to live at La Salle.

In June 2000, he left West Catholic on a Friday and started at La Salle on a Monday. Brother Ed loved all of his high school level jobs but was excited to commence work at the college level. At one point he was asked to become Disciplinarian at La Salle College High School, but he said no, due to his age. He did not think he could go into the school “fresh”, in other words without teaching there first for a year or two.

He obtained his Masters in Educational Administration from Villanova University. He stated he knows the Brothers would give him a transfer elsewhere, but questioned what he would do if he ever left La Salle. He likes his job now. All of his jobs, except the one at Carroll, were discussed with him before he took them.

Some of his responsibilities in addition to being the Registrar are that he served on the formation committee for one year, taught summer school at the Shore House for a few years and served as bursar at the Shore House for a few years. He served as Superior for other Christian Brothers for a few years while at Carroll. He did not like the job and would not want to do it again. He does not have a spiritual advisor at this time and has never served as one either. The other Brothers are very supportive. He has never taken a large role in the formation of the newer brothers. He stated that he is respected by the younger Brothers and they see him as someone they can go to for help and advice. Right now there are 4 or 5 men in the province for formation. There are no new Brothers on campus this year, although there usually are at least a few. In January 2000 the Christian Brother who was Registrar retired and he was replaced by a woman who hated the job and quit. Thus the job became available and he was contacted about applying for it. He had to be interviewed and was hired a few days later. It was bittersweet
to leave West Catholic but after twelve years it was time to move on. He felt that he could have stayed for a few more years but his superiors felt that twelve years at one job was enough. He thought he would like to work at a college before he came to La Salle. He started in the midst of getting ready for new students coming for orientation. There was a great deal of on-the-job training. There was really no real formal training. It was a job he had to “jump right into.” One of the things he does not like is there are times when there is not enough work to do.

1:32:00

He uses a computer program, Banner, to help with all of the scheduling. Many colleges utilize it. One of the main responsibilities of the Registrar is to handle all scheduling. He tells the chairperson of each department what courses should be offered and how many sections should be offered. He also creates the final exam schedules and arranges all classroom assignments. He taught one section of Algebra recently. When there isn’t enough to do, he constantly checks course counts to make sure people are registered. He also makes personal phones calls to remind students who are late for registering for classes. He also tries to find new ways to work more efficiently. This coming year there are 220 incoming freshmen which is more than in the past. Right now no one works under him. Everyone in the office is an equal and he helps them as needed. He has no long-term vision for the office at this time, but he wants to go as paperless as possible. For instance, any time any student comes to register, they have to complete a form, which he would eliminate. When he retires, he thinks he may not be replaced. That is a hard question. If he is replaced, he thinks the new person would not do as much hands-on work with the students. Some of the changes since 2000 are that no report cards are sent home and more and more Registrar-related tasks are completed electronically. The computer programs are more complicated. It is difficult to assign rooms for hybrid courses, which are part-online and part-in-person. Also, a new employee was just hired to work exclusively on graduation.

1:44:25

There is nothing about the job he would like to change. One big change on campus is the use of cellphones. When looking out his window at the Quad, he can count on his hand how many students are not looking at their phone. Sometimes he will even see students walk into each other because they are on their phones. While he was teaching, if he saw students on their phones, he would stand behind them until they put their phone away and remind them to keep it away. One of the positive changes he has seen on campus is the planting of new trees, grass and plants. However, he would like to see the money go towards classroom improvements, such as new furniture, or money to hire new faculty and raises for current faculty.

Part III

0:00:00

He also serves on the Continuing Activities Committee which meets weekly and discusses upcoming events on campus and where they will be held. He is also on the Calendar Committee which develops the academic calendar and the Core
Advisory Committee. He is the Chapter Advisor for Alpha Chi Rho, a small fraternity of very nice students, where he runs the Study Hall which meets three nights per week. He has chores at the Brother’s House as well. He oversees the meals and posts a menu in the kitchen and helps with the food shopping and is assigned to keep one of the community cars clean. Some of meals are prepared by a cook and the rest are brought over from Dining Services. He gets a month’s vacation per year and loves to spend time in Ocean City, New Jersey. After registration, it starts to get a little bit slow. For this summer, he has already requested what days he would like to have at the Shore House. He also loves to cook, read, do any kind of puzzles, walk for exercise and especially enjoys his Kindle reader. He gets an email every day of a list of free or discounted books on Kindle and likes to choose books from there. Each day his work and responsibilities are finished around 9 pm or so. Every Sunday at 9 am, there is a community meeting with all the Brothers on campus. Every Sunday the Vincentians come over to say Mass. He goes to mass with the students on Sunday evening. He said no one particular person has had a large influence on him, but in general, he feels the groups he has worked with over the years have been excellent. When he retires, he would love to live in Ocean City, New Jersey and sit on the deck. He would also like to do some volunteer work at some of the Catholic schools in the area. He has no big travel plans at this time. I asked Brother Ed if he had anything to add and he said no. Finally, I thanked him for participating in the interview.

11:22 Interview Ends.