Interview of Stephen Andrilli

**Interviewer:** Jane Highley  
**Dates of interviews:** March 6, 2019 and March 25, 2019  
**Location:** Office of Stephen Andrilli, Holroyd Hall, 1900 W. Olney Avenue, La Salle University, Philadelphia, PA 19141  
**Transcript & log created by:** Jane Highley  
**Recording Equipment:** Recorded on an LG V6 smartphone using the “HD Audio Recorder” app

**Abstract**

Stephen Francis Andrilli was born on August 15, 1952 in Bryn Mawr, PA. He was born to Francis and Leatrice Andrilli. Dr. Andrilli is the oldest of four children; his three sisters are Carol (now Carol Strosser), Patricia (now Patricia Kempczynski), and Barbara (now Barbara Parkes). Aside from a few years of living in Gettysburg, Dr. Andrilli has lived in the Philadelphia area for most of his life. He attended St. Jerome School, where he finished 8th grade. He then attended LaSalle College High School, where he graduated in 1969 at age 17. He entered La Salle University (formerly La Salle College) in 1969 and graduated with a B.A. in Mathematics in 1973. From La Salle, he went directly to Rutgers University, where he earned a Master’s in 1975 and a Ph.D. in 1979, both in Mathematics. His dissertation is titled “On the Uniqueness of O’Nan’s Sporadic Simple Group.” He taught for two years at Mount St. Mary’s College in Emmitsburg, MD, and then joined the Mathematics and Computer Science Department at La Salle University in 1980, where he was hired as Assistant Professor. He became Associate Professor in 1992 and then Professor in 2017. Among many publications, he is the co-author of two textbooks: *Elementary Linear Algebra* (5th edition) and *Linear Methods: A General Education Course*. In 1990, Dr. Andrilli was awarded the Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching. In addition to teaching math courses at all undergraduate levels, Dr. Andrilli also taught courses in the Education Department and was the supervising professor for education students pursuing a career in math education. Being a “coach” for these pre-service student-teachers for 19 years has been the greatest source of pride and joy for Dr. Andrilli. He supervised 89 undergraduate and graduate students as they were beginning to learn the craft of teaching math at local secondary schools. With his wife Ene, Dr. Andrilli loves to travel and has made many trips to Europe, including a pilgrimage through Italy with two priests and many parishioners. He looks forward to visiting Estonia, which is where Ene’s family is from.

**Audio File:** SAndrilli1.wav

0:00  
Highley: Okay, this is Jane Highley. I’m here in Holroyd Hall recording for an oral history project, History 650 for Dr. Barbara Allen. I have here with me Stephen Francis Andrilli. Do I have permission to record?  
Andrilli: Absolutely. Yes.

00:28  
Highley: Moving forward, would it be all right if I just called you Steve?  
Andrilli: Absolutely.
Highley: Okay, great. Okay. Today is March 6, Wednesday, Ash Wednesday. It's around 3:59 pm. All right, Steve, we'll start from the beginning, and we can stay as long as you'd like on a question or a topic or you can give me short and simple answers and we can move on. Really, you can run the show, and I'll have questions for you when you're done. All right, so you can tell me briefly about your origins in terms of where you were born, who was in your family?

Andrilli: I was born in Bryn Mawr Hospital here in the Philadelphia area. My parents both married young. They did not have to get married, but they married young because both of them wanted to escape the homes where they were in. My mother had a terrible, terrible stepfather and she just could not really live with him anymore. My father was really at loose ends in the house where he was living in and they both just wanted to get married. Once they met each other, you know, fell in love, they wanted to get married and have a home of their own. And then I was born 10 months later and that's basically that. We lived at first in different apartments in South Philadelphia, and then, around the time that I was, I guess, I want to say about 5 to 9 or so, we lived in a project in Southwest Philadelphia. They were very small homes, a group of—

Highley: Row homes?

Andrilli: Row homes, but they were even smaller than row homes, all linked with a common path. It's hard to describe, I have to show you a picture of it.

Highley: That's okay.

Andrilli: But we lived there for many years and then, when I was at the end of third grade we moved to Northeast Philadelphia, partly because it was safer. The project was getting dangerous in those years, and Northeast Philadelphia had nothing in it. It was really empty, it was not even considered by many people to be part of Philadelphia. If you were Italian heritage as I was, South Philadelphia was the place to live and where most of my relatives lived on both sides of the family. But moving up to the Northeast was a big step for my parents because they were leaving a lot of relatives behind, but also, my grandmother, my mother's mother was moving up that way and they wanted, my mother wanted to be near her, to look after her, so we took the plunge and near the end of third grade, we moved up there. I went to St. Jerome's, well, initially, I had gone to King of Peace School, which is closed now. It's in Southwest Philadelphia, and I should tell you a little bit about King of Peace.

I went to kindergarten there, but I knew how to read and write already. My mother had taught me at a very young age, I don't think there's anything incredibly special about it, but I was able to read and write at age two, and my mother used to walk me around the neighborhood in South Philadelphia and I would just as we were walking by different stores and locations, I would read the signs out loud and people would stop and stare at me and they thought this was very strange and my mother whisked me away many times. But she was really bored, I guess, and wanted to have something to do so she taught me my alphabet and then simple words and then moved
on from there. So when I got to kindergarten, this is a Catholic school run by nuns, mostly. So the sisters saw that I could read and write already and kindergarten was basically not teaching me anything. They moved me from there right into second grade. This was a mistake, I think, socially because I was always a year or year and a half younger than everyone that I was in school with from that point on. So I matured later than everyone else as we went on into grade school and high school as students were moving into their adolescence and going to things like proms, I was still too young. I graduated when I was still 16 and started here at La Salle University, which was La Salle College then when I had just turned 17.

Highley: Wow.

Andrilli: And so it was very different and my experience than that experience of other people. I got off the beaten track, though. You were asking, oh, so when we move up to the Northeast, I was transferred to St. Jerome's School, which is near Holmes Circle. I finished out my grade school education there, and then on from there to LaSalle High School. Because I was doing very well in classes my parents were not financially well-off, but they made a big sacrifice to send me to LaSalle High School. The tuition there is astronomical now, it was, but, even back then, it was still higher than going to the diocesan schools. You could go to, most of the diocesan schools like Archbishop Ryan, Archbishop Wood, you know, if you were a girl, St. Neubert’s, for almost nothing because it was covered by the Archdiocese, and there were many priests, nuns, and brothers who taught in those schools and they were not giving them really great salaries. Today, of course, with decline in locations, there are so many lay people teaching in all of the high schools and the grade schools, and so parents had to make a much greater sacrifice financially to send their children there. But anyway, I went to LaSalle High School, and after four years there, I went on, came here to La Salle University, which was then La Salle College. And maybe I should have you ask a question.

Highley: Yeah, sure, I’m going to actually pause because I need to change the setting on my phone so that the display doesn't blackout. Okay, can you tell me about your siblings?

08:24

Andrilli: Yes, I have three sisters. I'm the oldest. Since I went to LaSalle High School and that's an all-boys school, they ended up after St. Jerome's [at] Archbishop Ryan, the next two, my two oldest sisters. And then my youngest sister, for some reason the rules changed and the boundaries of which students were to go to which high schools changed and she ended up at St. Hubert's, and she was very mad that she did not get to go to the same high school that her two older sisters went to, but she went to Hubert's. My two oldest sisters never did go to college although, although my youngest sister went to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York to study there for a couple of years and was involved in theater for a while, but then later she became a paralegal and went to Manor Junior College and finished her paralegal training, and so she has an Associate's Degree.
Can I say one more thing about learning how to read early? I may be biased, but I don't think that this is a special gift that I had or anything, I really don't, I'm not being falsely humble. I really believe that if somebody were to take an interest in children at the age of two and three that they could be taught much more than they are normally taught and they could learn to read and write much earlier. You know, if I had any gifts they're long gone.

Highley: I do think there's truth in that, the earlier the better. Can you tell me about your upbringing in terms of religion or spiritual life, religious values?

Andrilli: My parents were both Roman Catholic. They were not really staunch church-goers. In fact, after my mother started having children, it was really difficult for her to go to church every Sunday, and deal with everything in the house and all the children as well. So, but she insisted that all four of us get a Catholic education which was much more traditional than I think it is now. And after Vatican II, there were a lot of changes in the church and in the ways of doing things, even the way that liturgies are said and as a result, as we mentioned before, many people who were in religious life left their orders, there was a much more lax feeling among the religious, but I came in at the very tail-end of what would be traditional Catholicism, the Catholicism that was maybe taught from the, I don't know, the 20s, 30s, and up until the late 50s and early 60s and and as a result I think all four of us who went through that all have pretty much had an appreciation for that and have stayed Catholic and been observant except for my oldest sister who ended up getting divorced and has an uneasy relationship with the church as a result of that, but the other three of us are pretty staunch traditional Catholics.

I had two wonderful parents. My father was away a lot for work because he was a tile setter and his work was seasonal. In the winter there wasn't much to do because you really need to be able to mix materials, to get in and out of houses, you don't want to deal with bad weather so in order to work during the winters, he'd often have to travel and he would go down south with other members of his union and they would have large construction jobs that he would work on, then he would come back to the Philadelphia area for, not that he was away for the whole winter, or anything like that, but he was away for weeks, a week here, a week there, a couple weeks here. So my mother really took us more in hand than my father did, and was kind of like more of the boss of the house, I suppose you would say.

Highley: Okay. Do you have a favorite memory growing up, either vacations or trips, or even just family routines, not routines, I guess, traditions, that is, that is very unique to your childhood, family of origin.

Andrilli: Every weekend we would get together on Friday night, we would as a family play a game called Pokeno, which is kind of a combination of poker and bingo. And you get a Pokeno card, and as numbers are called out, you fill your card, but the cards are actually made up of, instead of bingo cards, where you have B1 to B50, they would actually have playing cards in each row and column. And you had to match the playing cards that were pulled out from the deck. Anyway, this was an attempt to have my
grandmother who had by this time moved near us so that we would see her every week and she would come over for that. We would have pizza every Friday night as well.

After we all left and got married and all of us luckily stayed in the Philadelphia area. We would get together every Sunday, just about unless there was something unusual, at my parents’ house for dinner. We were usually there for about several hours and it was a wonderful time for all of us and we all stayed very close, my three sisters and I and my parents until sadly my parents passed away. My father, 10 years ago this year and my mother, two years ago, 2017. And then the house was sold. Until then, we had many, many wonderful memories almost 50 years in that house. It’s sad to me, I can never, ever go back there again. I walked through it for the last time, took pictures. Many Christmases there, many Easters there, we would celebrate every birthday, every major holidays we would get together. My father later in life became a sports fanatic, he wasn’t so much when I was young, but we would watch, would go there, a game was always on in those later years.

Highley: Something earlier you said about being in an Italian family, and having Italian roots. How did that become evident, either with effort or passively as a kid and as youth?

Andrilli: It’s hard to say, I guess. Italians are known for caring about their family, not that other people don’t, but it’s a big thing with them, common meals that we would have and shared. We would have a lot of Italian dishes, pasta, a lot of pasta, spaghetti and meatballs, those kinds of things.

Highley: Did you have a favorite dish from family members?

Andrilli: Ravioli. We would have ravioli on Christmas and Easter. It was a special thing. There were many other Italian customs. At Christmas time, for instance, they have what they call the Feast of the Seven Fishes. We never did that that partly because I was not really a seafood fan and I was the oldest, I suppose.

**TRANSITION FROM TRANSCRIPT TO LOG**

In his childhood, almost everyone they knew were Italian in South Philly. In the northeast, half of the people in the neighborhood were people of different Christian denominations, protestants. the other half were Jewish and most of them went to public school, which was very close to our house. What they learned was so different than what he learned at St. Jerome’s. It was interesting to compare what the public school students were learning and what the Catholic schools were teaching.

I asked about a photograph that was sitting on a shelf behind him in his office. Photograph of Steve and his wife at Pennypack Park on our wedding day. They were married in late October; it was gorgeous because the leaves were turning. I asked to take a picture of the photograph; he also offered to give me a digitized version of the photograph.
I asked him at what point in his childhood when he realized that he was good with numbers and enjoyed working with numbers. I asked him when he remembered that lightbulb moment regarding math. His aunt Helen on his father's side took him to the store where she kept the books and she showed him in a ledger that if you add the numbers going down, you'll get the same numbers if you add the numbers going up. This was a novel and brilliant idea to him. He was about 10 at the time. But what really developed his interest in math was his high school geometry class. His teacher was Brother Gratian. He thought that math was "beautiful" to be able to prove things with something you know and liked that the proofs were so "ironclad and logical." He fell in love with math in that course. At that point, he had a strong feeling that he might want to be math teacher and this was confirmed further along. Unfortunately, during his junior year, he had a terrible math teacher. He did not want to mention his name. He was a brand-new teacher at La Salle High School; he was brought in to coach as well. He was young and this was his very first year teaching math. This teacher was "really at sea" and Steve thought that had regressed a bit because of this teacher. At the end of his junior year, five boys were chosen to take calculus at La Salle University because the two institutions are so related to each other. He was not one of those five because he was not doing as well as he could have because of this teacher. That turned out to be a good thing for him because those five students had to interrupt their whole day because they had to take an early-morning class on the college campus and then take a bus back. They missed a lot of what was going on at the high school. He had calculus during his senior year at the high school with Brother Ralph Asher who was "phenomenal." I interjected to say, "So math was redeemed." And he said "Yes" and math was what he decided to major in when he attended La Salle University.

He thinks Brother Ralph is still alive, but he doesn't know how to get in touch with him. He would like to thank him. He had many wonderful teachers in high school. LaSalle High School was run by the Christian Brothers and that is where he learned how the Christian Brothers teach and the emphasis on teaching and learning and the love that they had for helping the working-class students, of which he was one. He said that his family never starved, but that "we were always worried about our next paycheck and somehow we just always survived." He said that his parents made great sacrifices for him to attend that high school.

I asked him if the experience with that bad teacher during his junior year planted a seed in him to do something about it so that it does not happen to someone else. He said that he will never know, but that he always wanted to not to be a teacher like that. In graduate school, he had "many terrible teachers, absolutely terrible teachers." He realized at that point the need for good math teachers. "I hope that I had been one, but I guess that's really for the students to say." He did not apply to any other colleges because most of his friends were going to La Salle; it was "a natural transition." La Salle College was an all-boys college when he started and ROTC was mandatory the year before he started. When he was a freshman in the fall of 1969, the school removed the ROTC requirement due to the strong opposition of the Vietnam War on college campuses. It was all men to begin with except for a group of nurses who were taking classes in the old Holroyd building. By the time he graduated in 1973, the student population was half and half, half women and half men.
I asked him how he felt about that change. He did not have any strong feeling about it one way or the other. It was unusual to have women in his classes after having four years of high school with no women, but the women math majors were really interesting people to talk to and became friends with many of them. There were not many of them in those days. Unlike then, 60% of the students at La Salle today are women, campus-wide. In his current class, Foundations of Math (for second-semester sophomores), there are more men than women, about 2/3 men, 1/3 women. That ratio can vary from year to year, but it seems pretty typical for that class. La Salle was also different because it was a commuter school and he lived at home. Most people did that. He estimated that more than 80% of students were commuters. By the time he graduated, there were a little bit more residents on campus.

I asked him what campus was like during the heat of the Vietnam War. In those days, most students and faculty were more left-leaning and liberal. Over time, the faculty has become more liberal, while the students are “half and half” or slightly more liberal than conservative. During the war, he mostly went along with the crowd. Most of his friends were liberal, which he pointed out meant something different back then compared to what it means today. He was not strongly against the war; he thought that we needed to help the South Vietnamese and to help keep it as free as possible. He remarked that the war was tearing the country apart. The LIFE magazine issue that was dedicated to photos of all the men who died seemed to have changed people’s minds, especially those who might have been for the war or not as upset about the war. The nightly news was against the war. His draft number was 20. That meant that he would most likely get drafted because his birthday was selected among the first 130 numbers and his birthday was the 20th one that was selected. This meant that anyone born on his birthday would be drafted. He really wanted to go to graduate school, but he did not think that that was likely because of his draft number. This was even more evident when Nixon ended the graduate deferment program so he could not defer as the previous class had done, those who graduated in 1972. He was planning to enlist in officer training school because he thought that his talent in math would make him a better officer. He said that he "would have made the world’s worst soldier" due to a lack of training. "Luckily," he was never drafted because Nixon ended the draft because of the pressure upon the administration. Steve then felt that his life had been freed—"I can go to graduate school after all!" So he went to Rutgers University to pursue his graduate degree in math.

I asked him if he knew anyone who came back from the war. He said he knew one or two people in his La Salle College class, but he did not know anyone who served in the war with whom he was close—nobody in his family or extended family. I asked him if there were any rallies or protests on the La Salle campus. He said that under the leadership of then-president Daniel Burke, he "made no bones about it." Burke was against the war and encouraged students to protest against it. Steve recalled a day during the fall semester of his freshman in 1969. Burke had called a "moratorium day on campus" on which "students were encouraged not go to classes and to protest the war." That was the only time that Steve had cut class—French class—and on the next day, his French teacher called him out and showed such "displeasure to the class" that he never skipped a class again. But he said that he did not skip class to protest the war. On a personal note, he thinks that if the war had been conducted differently, that if President Johnson and Nixon had allowed the generals to end the war quickly, the war would have
been over and "South Vietnam would have been preserved and we would not have had the angst in the country for a generation over this."

35:48 I mentioned that in my AP U.S. Government class we had talked about how certain events, like Vietnam, 9/11, the Great Depression, have a generational effect on people. So in connection to that concept, I asked him if the war has changed his view of government. He said that the war has made people more skeptical of what the government tells them because the people had been told that the war was going well. The release of the Pentagon Papers, he noted, was another major factor in turning people against the war at that time. He reflected that his peers were "into the whole protest thing" and that they were "wearing the wild, crazy fashions of the 60s and early 70s, the long hair and the beads" and protesting by wearing blue jeans, which was symbolic at that time. He was only interested in his math studies.

37:26 Because he took almost every math course that was offered at La Salle as an undergraduate, he was fortunate to have taken courses that students from "better" schools did not have. He said that he was "spoiled by LaSalle High School and La Salle College" because of the high quality of teachers there. His teachers were "fantastic...dedicated, hard-working, caring, trying to get students to improve their minds, think for themselves, and become better citizens." He said that because La Salle had an emphasis on the working-class, the school tried to bring such students into the mainstream and make them more productive in society. At Rutgers, however, Steve said that "it was an entirely different ball game." Sitting in an auditorium with about 40 graduate-school peers on their first day, he recalled a speech in which they were told that only one among every three first-year graduate students would still be in the program at the end of that year. Steve was surprised by this comment; he thought that he was coming to graduate school to learn, not to "be put through the hoops again." He believed that he had proved his academic abilities with his good grades throughout high school and college and did not feel the need to prove himself again. But what he did not know at that time was that Rutgers was trying to compete more closely with Princeton, which was "stealing away all the very best math and science students." Rutgers at that time had received a huge grant from the National Science Foundation to attract more students than usual so that they can effectively "buy a class"—bring in a large group of students and then "winnow out the one they thought were the worst." He commented with notable sarcasm that the remaining students would be a "wonderful testament to Rutgers and would go on and get wonderful degrees." This announcement was not well received by the 40 graduate students. Steve clearly recalls that on that very first day at Rutgers, "all of us had a hatred for what they had done to us and for the fact that they were essentially using us—without telling us what they were doing." Steve had offers from other schools, such as Lehigh and Ohio State, but he picked Rutgers because could easily get there by train and go home when he needed to and also because it offered him the most money.

40:51 Evidently, Rutgers was able to give him the most money because it got the National Science Foundation money "that they were throwing around." Steve and his classmates also had to take four courses in both semesters of the first year, which was unheard of. Other full-time graduate students only had to take three. "My teachers were absolutely terrible." He shared a few stories about them. His very first class was Set Theory, in
which the professor walked and talked as if he were drunk. He later realized that this was his normal behavior. Steve mimicked his former professor with a very funny voice. "It was just awful." This was a shock to Steve after having teachers who could teach so carefully and well. Dr. McCarty, whom Steve taught as a student and is a current faculty member in his department, is an example of excellent teaching. Steve recalls Dr. McCarty starting at the top-left of the board and remembered how he would "write so beautifully and carefully" everything exactly; he had provided examples to prove various theories and reach the other end of the board. Steve said that one could take a picture of what he had written on the board and "publish it." He said this to make the point that, without exaggeration, that was "how good the teachers [at La Salle College] were," with Dr. McCarty being an exceptionally good teacher. In addition to the first instructor, Steve also encountered another bad instructor in his second course called Real Analysis. His professor came to class with the same outfit, namely, a sweater with a hole in it. Steve recalled that this instructor did not seem to care much about how he looked. The book that he used was called Royden's Real Analysis. Steve had worked through the entire book with Samuel Wiley, who was his teacher during his senior year at La Salle College. He knew that material really well, but very few people were as familiar with that book as he was. He had done most of the exercises in that book so he felt fairly confident. On the first day of that class, the professor walked in and said, "Okay, here's our textbook. I want you to go home, I want you to read chapter one. See you next time. And walked out of the room." And that was it. The next class was not too different. The professor asked if everybody had read the chapter and upon a silent audience of students who were reluctant to ask any questions, he told them to go home and read chapter two. End of class.

Steve and his classmates realized that if they wanted him to teach, then they would have to ask questions. Steve lamented that the class was not very organized and was beyond frustrated because of his positive experiences as an undergrad with Dr. Wiley. "I knew how well the course could be taught if you would just teach it!" A third teacher at Rutgers University was one who screamed at students. Steve made funny impressions of this teacher. He said that he was not exaggerating at all. Even though he asked a few questions to this teacher, his response to Steve was discouraging enough that he did not bother asking anymore.

This professor ended up being on Steve's defense committee later, but that discussion will come later in the interview. I asked him if he and his peers ever decide to do something about the situation with these professors.

He said that because Rutgers required only 10 courses for a Master's degree, many students took the required 8 courses in the fall and spring semesters and then completed two more in the summer and then left Rutgers. They either left and went somewhere else or just stopped altogether after getting their Masters. Upon reflecting this, he said, "I was either too naive or too stupid to realize that I should have gone somewhere else because suddenly there were so few of us left going into the sophomore year that they had money for me to continue his studies there." Without any false modesty, Steve said that he was not one of the best among the 15 students

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1 This math professor was Dr. Daniel Gorenstein.
who had remained. But when I asked him if staying at Rutgers ended up being a good
decision, he agreed because he eventually met his wife at the end of his second year.
They started dating at the beginning of this third year.

Another positive outcome from staying at Rutgers was that it gave him opportunities to
teach very different kinds of courses, such as algebra, trigonometry, and calculus.
Teaching those courses gave him opportunities to make mistakes early on. He also had
an opportunity to teach math to adults; these were students who were coming back to
classrooms after having been away for some time due to raising a family or for some
other reason. Such students, who were "scared to death about math" compelled him to
become a sympathetic instructor.

48:24 He did balance out the discussion, though, by saying that there were some very good
teachers at Rutgers who were teaching undergraduates. He sat in a few of their classes
and picked up some good instructional skills. I commented that it was interesting how
Rutgers had relegated sub-par instructors for its graduate students, and Steve guessed
that perhaps the school thought that graduate students, being older, would be able to
handle it.

49:10 His wife was a graduate student at the library school. He was living in the graduate
dormitory; each dorm had room for two guys or two women. She was living on the floor
above him. "Of course, she was always above me." Even though they had met at the end
of his second year, they did not start dating seriously until later in the fall because he
had spent that summer studying for his comprehensive exam in September. His studies
consumed much of his time. He shared that he had failed that exam the first time
because he had "studied all wrong." He realized later that what he should have done
was to prove that he can do research, but he had memorized everything related to
algebra, topology, and analysis, which were the three exams that he had to take. The
analysis exam was twice as long as the other two. He spent the entire summer
memorizing every theorem, knowing every example of every theorem, and how to
prove every theorem. "But that was not what they wanted," he recalled. All three were
oral exams which were administered by different groups of faculty. They had asked him
some basic questions until they figured out what he knew and did not know and then
asked him questions about material that he had never seen before. He was asked, "Now
how would you tackle this?" He was confounded because "he had not studied that way."
He took the exams again in January; he did not exhaust himself physically and was able
to think more clearly during the exam and passed. When I asked him if the first attempt
has any bearing on the second, he said that the panels consisted of different faculty
members each time. But having a second chance gave him an idea of what to expect in
terms of the questions.

52:36 During his topology exam, the panel gave him a question that he did not know how to
answer. He wrote the question on the board to bide some time, but he was frozen. The
panel offered him a hint or two in the form of questions, which suddenly triggered
something that allowed him to figure out the problem. He knew that he had done well
when he put the chalk down.
I asked him about his courtship years with his wife, Ene. Even though he had started his program earlier than she had, Ene finished before him because she was in a master's program and his program took about six years. They were waiting till he was finished before they got married. His advisor, Dr. Charles Sims, had left for Australia to work with other group-theory mathematicians for a year, but did not have enough funding to take Steve. Because this was before email and access to instant communication, he had no way to communicate with his advisor while he was away. So he lost a year, but he did return and Steve urged him to help him finish his Ph.D. Realizing his absence was "not a good thing" for Steve, Dr. Sims compensated by giving him a lot of his time and attention to help him finish. Steve worked hard that summer in 1978 and then taught at Mount St. Mary's College for a year, and then came back to Rutgers the summer to finish his dissertation and had only his defense left to do.\(^2\) He went back to teach at Mount St. Mary's for a second year, but went back to Rutgers for his defense in October 1979. He had married a year ago in 1978. After they had married, his wife went to live with him in Gettysburg where he was teaching. She left Lafayette before they had married. She did work at first while they were living in Gettysburg, but eventually got a part-time library position at the Mount. There were very few opportunities in that part of the state for her, so when Steve got a call in 1980 from La Salle University to teach full-time, he "jumped at the chance not just for me but for her because there were so many more opportunities in this area for her."

He did not want to leave Mount St. Mary's because it was a beautiful small town; they loved living in Gettysburg. Among Gettysburg College, the historic battlefield, the Eisenhower farm, most people who lived in Gettysburg were involved in one of those three institutions. We moved back to Philadelphia in the summer of 1980 and La Salle gave them some money to help with the move.

He shared a story about this dissertation defense in October 1979. There were four finite group theory professors on his dissertation committee; Charlie Sims, his advisor, was on this committee. They were eager to see Steve finish because they wanted to publish the results of his research and cite them in their own publications. Steve had filled several chalkboards during his oral defense and asked the panel for questions when he was done. He was questioned by one gruff-voiced professor (whom Steve had mentioned earlier) regarding how he had arrived at his results. Dr. Richard Lyons pointed out how Steve had done so with various theorems presented on the chalkboard. But that professor brought up another point of contention: "Now, this thing over here. I don't see this thing over here. Where did you get this thing over here?" As Steve was about to respond, another panelist, Dr. Michael O'Nan jumped in to explain how Steve had proved other theories to arrive at the conclusion he did. Steve was elated to see that the other professors were doing the defending for him because they were so eager to be finished. Finally, the contentious professor asked one more time: "The thing that really bothers me is this thing over here...where does that come from? I don't understand that" to which his advisor Dr. Charlie Sims quipped with, "Oh, Danny, that's obvious." And that was enough for the professor to say, "Oh, okay, where do I sign?" And that was it. I asked him if he felt undermined at the time by the other professors for defending his defense. But he felt glad and relieved. He said that math is

\(^2\) Now Mount St. Mary's University.
different than any other subject because a math dissertation means that you are proving something that has never been proven before. "Anything that's already ever been proven is still true, centuries and millennia later. It kinda makes getting a dissertation in math difficult because you have to come up with something that nobody has ever proven." He credits much of his dissertation success to his advisor who helped him pick a problem and "shepherding" him through the entire process. And to clarify, I asked him if that one professor was just "busting his chops" during his defense just to pick on him, but Steve said that the professor was asking to make sure that what Steve had presented made sense so that he can publish the findings in his book on group finite theory. Steve also mentioned that some students whose advisors are not careful and "not looking out for them" will find themselves before a dissertation committee that will find holes in their research or findings. Fortunately, Steve was confident in his work because he had been running computer simulations and the results were coming back just as he had predicted and expected.

1:05:29

I asked him what is the title of his dissertation. It is called "On the Uniqueness of O'Nan's Simple Group," named after Michael O'Nan who discovered this group. Steve explained that there are 26 families of groups that are called "sporadic" because they do not belong in any other group, and O'Nan discovered this specific group and explained what its properties were and that there was none other like this particular group.

Audio File: SAndrilli2.wav

00:00
This is the second interview with Steve Andrilli held in Holroyd Hall in his office on March 25, 2019. Steve wanted to start with a list of "fast facts" that he thought people should know about himself.

00:49
Growing up in an Italian family, he had a love for music. His family owned a record player and his parents would play soundtracks of movies and musicals and famous stars of the 50s and 60s. He was in the choir in 7th and 8th grade. He also took organ lessons; his family owned an organ which was unusual at the time because most people have pianos at home. He rode his bike to go to his lessons on Saturdays. He admits that he "never really got terrifically good at it because I never really developed my left hand independently." He learned how to play fairly well with his right hand; he can make tune "sound decent," but cannot play classical pieces. He was introduced to classical music in high school because there was a music room in the library, where he listened to reel-to-reel tapes of classical albums. Other kids were listening to rock, but he preferred to "Victory at Sea."³

He really got a "full-blown introduction to classical music" in college during his junior year by an Iranian student who loaned him two LP records: Tchaikovsky's 4th Rachmaninoff's 2nd piano concerto. "That was a turning corner in my life...where has this music been all my life!" he said about such music. He started learning more about classical music and has amassed a huge collection. Now in his 60s, he has become a cantor at his parish. He sings parts of the Sunday mass about every two weeks. That role came about when the organist, who has become a good friend, said that she did not

³ A soundtrack by Richard Rogers.
have anyone to sing one Sunday morning, so Steve volunteered to do so. "I'll do it. How hard can it be?" He realized that it was much more complicated than it seemed at first, but singing has been something that he has done for the last four or five years and getting paid for it occasionally.

03:42 Another thing to know about Steve is that he was an "actual nerd." Because he was up to a year and a half younger than his classmates, he did not have as much of a social life with them. Rather, books were his life. He recalls that when his family moved out of South Philadelphia (around third grade), there were very few children around his age in his new neighborhood of new rowhomes. He was the oldest kid on the street; there was no one else to play baseball or football with; the next oldest kid was nearly two years younger than him. He was never involved in sports; there was no one to push him or play with on a team. He did collect baseball cards; he owned a "fantastic collection" that he discovered his mother had thrown out when he came home one day. "It would have been worth a fortune today," he said about his collection.

05:02 In high school, there was one period a week for swimming. All the boys were expected to undress in the locker room and swim "au naturel." Steve already knew how to swim because he and his family were members of the swim club near their home. They also took many vacations in the summer near Beach Haven, NJ, to see his father's relatives. During those week-long stays at the shore, he was able to swim in the bay and in the ocean, but swimming naked at the school pool was a new experience for him, especially because he was around the older boys. We kidded around each other about [being naked for swim class], which he said would never happen today for so many different reasons.

06:09 Brother Joe Taylor was probably the greatest source of influence during his school years; as a religion teacher, he taught Steve during his senior year of high school. Brother Joe taught at St. Joseph University after Steve had graduated; he ultimately left the brothers and got married. He taught a senior-year course on love, marriage, and the family; he taught "what true love really is, what marriage really is" and "how to look for the right person in life to be married to and the sacrifices that are needed." Steve reflected that the course made him more mature. Because he was younger than the rest of his classmates, he was not interested in dating. He was happy with his books "and [his] little world." He attended neither his junior or senior prom, but he did eventually go to prom later when a girl asked him out. This June will be the 50th reunion year for his graduating class; he will walk with the 2019 graduates and will also receive special golden diplomas. He tried to keep in touch with Brother Taylor after he left to go to St. Joe's; Steve wanted to thank him for all that Brother Joe had done for him and his classmates; he was like a father-figure to all of them. He had sent Brother Joe Christmas cards for many years as well.

08:01 Another thing to know about Steve is that his father was a tile setter. But in the course of learning that trade, he also picked up on other skills, such as electrical work, plumbing, and construction. He would bring home tile samples and Steve would play make-believe with them by setting them in different patterns. He and his sisters would make streets, roads, and bridges; there were different color tiles and recall having lots of fun with them. He thinks he was given the gift of an extended childhood in that he
was not forced or expected to grow up so quickly because there was no one in his neighborhood pushing him into adolescence.

08:45

His mother stayed at home for most of his childhood, but eventually went back to work as a bank teller. But because she was home all the time, Steve and his sisters had a stable home life, which was wonderful in those days. His family took two vacations besides the one in Beach Haven. One was in Washington, DC. His mother wanted to see John F. Kennedy's grave and the eternal flame; they also visited lots of other famous sites, like the White House and the Washington Monument. The other vacation was to Canada, to which Steve “dragooned” his entire family to visit the World's Fair in Montreal. His school took a trip in 1964 for the World's Fair; he had not visited and the fair closed in 1967. But it reopened as "The Man and His World" in 1970. He and his family went to visit that summer and Steve recalled pushing his "poor parents" to see exhibit after exhibit. Finally, his father sat down on a bench and declared that he was not moving any further because his feet hurt so badly. Shortly after that, they left Montreal. He enjoyed remembering the fact that his parents took all of them on that trip.

10:30

His wife is Estonian; Estonia is the northernmost country among the three little Baltic countries: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania; Estonia is the closest one to Finland. Estonia has been controlled by many other countries for the last thousand years but was independent for a brief period after World War I. But after the outbreak of World War II, the Russians controlled the Baltics until 1991 or 1992. Hopefully, Steve said, it will remain independent for a very long time. Even though his wife and her family emigrated to the United States, they still kept many of their home-country traditions, such as the language and heritage. His wife had attended an Estonian school. She was originally an evangelical Lutheran, but around the time they had met, she was already interested in converting to Catholicism. Steve was with her when she entered the Catholic church. Her mother lived with them for the last four and a half years of her life; during that time, Steve had learned to speak Estonian through daily practice. Even though they had met in 1975, they did not get married until October 1978. One of the reasons why they waited was because Steve was afraid of having children before he had a full-time job. He felt more ready to have children when he started teaching at Mount St. Mary’s. But ironically, they ended up not having any children. He and Ene got married in the same year that his two sisters got married; one sister married in February, he married in October, and then his second sister got married the following January. His said his "poor parents" went through three major weddings in which the siblings were in each other's weddings. His parents had to buy different outfits and go to all the fittings. "It's a wonder that they still spoke to us after those 11 months."

13:46

This is all the "little things" that Steve had thought of to mention before we began with my questions. I commented that it was a very thorough list of things he wanted to add from our first interview.

14:17

One more thing he wanted to add about his childhood was his Catholic school teachers, who were mostly nuns and priests. Most of the classes were taught by sisters; he had sisters of St. Joseph who were tough because they had classes of 80 students. To keep order and maintain discipline, sisters kept the boys in the front "because the sisters had
to keep an eye on us." The girls were able to sit in the back because "they were less trouble." In terms of discipline, the sisters practiced corporal punishment: pulling on ears, hitting with rulers, etc. Such actions would never be allowed today, never. But they kept the students in line and were able to teach so that all the students could learn.

Steve remembered them well for being good teachers. He said that he got a "terrific education" during the grade-school years, and his high school gave him a "wonderful education" as well.

15:31  Teaching at Mount St. Mary's for two years before joining the La Salle University faculty was good because he made all his mistakes there. He felt more prepared and had become a better teacher when he joined the department in the fall of 1980.

16:39  John O'Neill was the chair when Steve came to La Salle. Samuel Wiley took over as chair in 1982. Steve had both of them as teachers when he was a student at La Salle, so they knew each other very well. 1980 was a "banner-shed" year because the department had hired eight full-time teachers because computer science was a new major. With the advent of personal computers and computing becoming much less expensive and more accessible, the field of computer science "skyrocketed." The faculty had to learn more about computer science because there was so much change every year—hardware, software, textbooks, computer languages, etc. Steve had started out teaching computer science and computer math and eventually settled into teaching math. He praised the computer science faculty who taught during the 80s, 90s, and the 2000s because they had to keep up with the constant changes in the discipline. Math, he said, changes with new technology, but does not change that much. New applications for math can be found, it does not change as much as computer science. During the 1980s, he filled in for faculty members needed to get their PhDs—Jane Turk, Ray Kirsch, Peggy McManus, among a few others. While they were gone, teachers like Steve filled in until they returned with Master and Ph.D. degrees in computer science.

20:57  When Sam Wiley's term as department chair ended, he was nudging Steve to become the next chair, but Steve did not want the position because of all the responsibilities attached to it in addition to keeping up with computer science and teaching math. Eventually, Steve took some computer science courses in the late 80s to keep him current. Charles Hoffman became the next chair; Steve had taught him as a student. Around 1993, Rich DiDio became chair. Steve said, "Again, I escaped" becoming chair of the department. In 1996, the chair position became vacant again and Rich asked Steve to consider it. Steve was not in favor of becoming chair because, in 1995, Brother Hugh Albright retired; he was in charge of the math education program and had been supervising the math education students. Steve stepped into that role of coaching math education students. Therefore, becoming chair as well as continuing to supervise the math-ed students would have been two huge roles that would leave him no time to teach. This is especially true during the spring when Steve had to visit lots of different schools where his math-ed students were placed for their student-teaching assignments.

24:29  Linda Elliott, who had been a member of the department since the 1980s, wanted to become chair. Steve was "not thrilled about Linda becoming chair" because she had not finished her Ph.D. After she got tenure, she stopped working on it. She was "stuck" in
the rank of assistant professor, but after she became, she would, to some degree, have some control of all the tenures and promotions in the department. La Salle University was unwilling to move her up to the rank of an associate professor because she had not finished her degree.

25:45 Back then, it was possible to teach full-time at the college-level without a Ph.D. Because computer science was such a new field, "in its infancy," there were so few with Ph.D.s who were coming into academia. Also, because computer scientists were in such high demand in private industry, schools like La Salle could not afford the kind of salaries that they were making in the private sector. It was better to hire and then train people in-house by letting them earn their degrees.

26:52 Linda applied for the position of chair. Steve did not support her because he thought that it would not look good for the department to have a chair without a Ph.D. and at the rank of assistant professor. But the department voted for her instead of Steve, in part, because it would be too challenging for him to be both department chair and math-ed supervisor. Also, since there were major changes coming on the horizon in computer science, it made more sense for Linda to be the chair since that was her area of specialty. She was more of a computer-science person and not a math person, whereas Steve had experience in both. But he thought that the decision was ultimately the right decision because the math-ed program consed his life for 19 years.

28:03 Every fall, he taught geometry or history of math, which was part of the required course load for math-ed majors. He knew his math-ed students very well by the time they were seniors and ready to do their student-teaching during the spring semester. In the spring, Steve led a two-week "boot camp" for math-ed students before they stepped into their student-teaching classrooms. Math has to be taught differently than any other subject due to its linear nature; it is very technical, specific, and orderly. Also, a math teacher has to have a better command of the classroom because there is more writing on the chalkboard required in a math class than other subjects. This means that a math teacher's back is to the classroom more often, which could provide more opportunities for students to take advantage of the teacher. Steve emphasized discipline in the classroom more than anything else to his math-ed students. "If you do not control of the classroom, all this other stuff you learned in math and all this other education...that you're ready to bring to your classroom is useless because the students will not pay any attention to you, they will act up, you will have to say everything two, three, four times." He told his math-ed students not to be harsh, but to be strict to the extent that they have control in the classroom.

31:19 Referring back to the discussion about Linda Elliott, she served as chair for 10 years. She left in the middle of her third term because La Salle had offered her an early opt-out "deal," but she wanted to retire at that point. Very few people came up for tenure or promotion during the time she served as chair. Steve Longo was one who got tenure during that time. Steve (Andrilli) did not see eye to eye with Linda. He is very conservative and she was very liberal, but they were very cordial with each other. He did not think that her style of dress was professional; she wore shorts and sandals. He
believed that the person who led the department should dress accordingly. He felt bad to say this because she cannot defend herself.⁴

34:10 But to her credit, Steve said that Linda was an excellent teacher who "knew her stuff" and she really cared for her students. She helped Steve in that she would schedule classes earlier or later in the day during the spring semester so that he would be available to travel in the middle of the day to the high schools for his math-ed students in the afternoon. Linda’s friend Marijke Wijsmuller (also went by the name Marijke van Rossum, who had been helping her with the math. But after Linda had been chair for a year, Marijke got a buyout from La Salle; La Salle started offering buyouts around 1997 or 1998. Charlie Hoffman also accepted a buyout at the same time. So Linda and Steve had to work together so that he could advise her on the math side of things for the department.

35:33 The two things that he is most proud of as a La Salle faculty member are the Honors course that he taught for many years and serving as the math-ed supervisor in the Education Department. It was like a "baptism-by-fire" kind of experience in his first year as a supervisor because he had to learn how to do it by simply doing it. He had much to keep track of: where each student taught, what course he or she was teaching, who the coordinating teachers were, reading their student-teaching journals, make notes on each student-teacher's progress, effectively addressing issues that each student was having in his or her classroom. Jack Sweeder from the education department was a great mentor throughout early years of Steve's role as the math-ed supervisor. Jack and Steve worked well together and became good friends. Although Steve thought that he had things under control by April of his first spring semester as supervisor, Jack reminded him that things will get worse before they get better. As his student-teachers took on more teaching responsibilities, from taking over one class to three, they became more frenzied. His role was to give emotional support to those students and to advise them on various teaching techniques and strategies. He had supervised about 89 math-ed students during the 19 years he served in that role. Among those, only about six students were problematic in that they did not do their work or they were simply not capable of doing the work.

39:48 His mentor Jack was right: The students did become overwhelmed when they took over the teaching role in three or even four classes. Their "fifth" class was their teaching portfolio, which consisted of summaries of their student-teaching experiences during the entire semester. To Steve, reading their portfolios was a huge responsibility and took copious amounts of time to read drafts and suggest changes, but he loved the work nonetheless. Those student-teachers, to some extent, were like his children. He witnessed their growth as they were "shaking like a leaf" at the beginning of the semester and then finding more confidence after 12 weeks. Seeing that transformation in each of his students in such a short period of time was really rewarding to Steve.

40:55 Many of those former math-ed students, as teachers, have kept in touch with him throughout the years. Some of his former students, after the student-teaching semester, pursued other career paths. But others have embraced the vocation "like fish

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⁴ Linda Elliott passed away in October, 2015.
to water." He lost two students who passed away: one was a Christian Brother who taught at West Catholic and was loved by his students. Sadly, he was killed in a bicycle accident in California. Steve remembered that he had so much potential as a teacher. Another former student died from an infection after childbirth. Though the baby was born healthy, the mother died soon after birth.

43:41 After a couple of years of supervising math-ed students, Steve felt like "this is what [he] was born to do" because he loved doing it and had created a reliable network of Philadelphia-area schools that would be good matches for his student-teachers. He said that private schools were not in favor of accepting student-teachers primarily because the parents objected to their tuition money being spent on them instead of certified and/or experienced teachers. Whenever he could, Steve tried to place his student-teachers into Catholic schools because, even though the class sizes were larger than public schools, the classes and students were more disciplined. One of his former students found lots of success, though, at Northeast High School, which is a diverse public school. Even though many of her students were non-native English speakers, she used various creative strategies to teach math.

46:46 He learned a lot from sitting in lots of different classrooms to observe his math-ed teachers, which required a lot of paperwork. He only recalled one student-teacher whom he had to "put on notice," meaning that he had to make sure all of his lesson plans and journals were up to date and that he could be observed and evaluated on any day without notice. Steve had pride in the fact that La Salle math-ed students were sought after and quickly hired after graduation.

48:34 In 2014, this successful program that Steve had devoted so much time and energy "came to a crashing halt" because the education department's chair, Mary Williams, had been implementing changes that Steve thought were not good for the student-teaching program. Mary is no longer chair today, but she is still teaching at La Salle. Steve and Mary disagreed on many different issues regarding the education program. The breaking point between them was when she placed all of his math-ed students in elementary schools, not in middle or high school classrooms. At that point, Steve "hit the roof" and "was livid." He never received a coherent explanation from Mary for this change, but he suspected that she wanted to place the best education students into the elementary schools that were connected to a grant that she had received. Steve was very frustrated because she was placing students who wanted to be secondary school teachers in elementary schools, and therefore, depriving them of a crucial opportunity. Steve asked Thomas Keagy, the dean at the time, to convince Mary to promise not to put his math-ed students in elementary schools. Steve noted that she did not make that promise to other education students, though. When Steve plainly and repeatedly asked Mary why she was implementing these changes, she did not give him a coherent explanation. In August of 2014, Steve told her that, with regret, he would step down as the math-ed supervisor because he was afraid of even more unfavorable changes in the future and could not support the direction that she was taking with the teacher education program. He told Mary that he would finish out the school year through Spring 2015 because Jon Knappenberger, the current chair of the Math and Computer
Science Department ("a wonderful chair"), did not have time to find a replacement for the spring semester.\(^5\)

**53:35** However, in November 2014, there was another conflict with Mary.\(^6\) She announced that she would force all the education students to do their student-teaching in public schools. She claimed that there was a rule in Harrisburg that "if students have not done any of their field placements in the first seven semesters in a public school, they must do their eighth and last semester of student-teaching in a public school." Steve objected to the idea and counter-claimed that there was no such rule in Harrisburg. Having been in a supervisor for 19 years, Steve was absolutely certain that there was no such rule and demanded that she send him a link that shows documentation of that rule. She told him that she would send him the link, but she never did because there was no such rule and no such link. He emailed the woman in Harrisburg who was in charge of field placements and asked her directly if there was such a policy about the public school requirement in the Department of Education and she replied, "No, there is no such policy." He was told that students are free to do their student-teaching in any accredited school. In November, all the student-teacher supervisors, including Steve, gathered for their regular meeting. Towards the end of the meeting, Steve announced that he wanted to challenge the policy of placing students only in public schools. Mary pointed out, yet again, that there was a rule. But Steve said that there is no such rule and that he had a letter from Harrisburg saying that there is no such rule. He distributed a copy of that letter to everyone in the room, at which point Mary announced that "this meeting is terminated" because Steve had dared to contradict her and had proven that she was either lying or was misinformed. Steve said, "Let's be charitable and say she was misinformed." The next day, he received an email from her to let him know that he was fired as the math-ed supervisor and that she would replace him with an adjunct in the spring for his students. And since then, adjuncts have filled the role that Steve had held for 19 years. He said that he was "the last man standing."

**56:50** One of the strengths of the education department was that full-time faculty from other departments were serving also as supervisors for the education students. Steve served the math-ed students; Brother Tom McPhillips was the supervisor for science-ed students (until he suddenly passed away).\(^7\) During the three years that Mary was in charge, she slowly replaced every full-time faculty supervisor with adjuncts. Steve was sad for his math-ed students who expected him to be their supervisor for the spring semester of 2015, but Mary had terminated his position before he could finish out the school year with those students. Eventually, Mary was removed as chair and was "offered a deal to move up" and to return to full-time teaching and become "the Harrisburg liaison" for the education department. Laura Roy became the new chair. Lynn Texter, who served as interim dean after Thomas Keagy stepped down, was the one who had that conversation with Mary and arranged that deal.

**1:00:09** By that time, Steve had been away from the education department for two years. He said "it was too late for me." He did not want to return to that position even if the

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5 Jon Knappenberger replaced Linda Elliott as chair in 2007.  
6 This was the same month during which his mother-in-law was dying.  
school offered it to him because he was now so close to retirement and wanted to see that position filled by someone younger and by one who would commit to it for five or 10 years and "grow into the role." He misses being the coach, but does not miss the work that comes with it. For 19 years, he felt that he had done something that he felt he was born to do.

1:01:00 His other major source of pride was his Honors course called "The Eternal Golden Braid: Gödel, Escher, Bach" based on a book by the same title and written by Douglas R. Hofstadter. There was no honors course offered in math and science; Bert Strieb from the Physics Department suggested to Steve to teach a course based on that book. He has offered this course 10 times since 1991. He was very proud of this course because of its interdisciplinary perspectives into art, music, literature, and math. He and his students read the annotated version of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* called *The Annotated Alice* by Martin Gardner. He talked about the structure of Hofstadter's book and the ways in which it weaves math, science, music, and literature throughout each chapter. He loved the course, but he said it was exhausting to teach it. When he was teaching this course for the first time, his wife noticed how much he needed a vacation because he was only "one step ahead of the students" and was "barely getting enough material together" for his next lecture. At the end of that spring semester in 1991, Ene arranged a trip for them to visit Canada, which Steve appreciated and felt rejuvenated upon their return. The course is no longer offered; he stopped teaching it a few years ago.

1:06:34 He wrote a paper about teaching this course and submitted it to a British journal and the journal accepted it with great enthusiasm. The paper became a "blueprint" for how to teach the course using the Hofstadter book. He gave a copy of that paper to Brother Michael McGinniss, who is in charge of the Honors program. He has also given a number of talks at various conferences about teaching course based on the same material that he used at La Salle.

1:09:33 Steve is ready to retire because he is "too old to teach four courses a semester anymore." He knew he had several options at this point: he could apply for a grant reduction and commit to teaching a few more years as full-time faculty, he could not apply for the grant and teach four courses as usual, or retire outright. He did not like the third option because he knew others who regretted retiring so abruptly. Fortunately, La Salle's half-time option provided Steve the best option. So in the fall of 2019, he will begin the first of three years as half-time faculty status. His wife is also looking forward to this retirement so that they can travel together more often.

1:11:47 This decade has been very sad with many losses for Steve and Ene. His father passed away in 2009, Ene's mother died in 2014, and then his mother died of stage 4 lung cancer in 2017. As much as he would like to have all three of them back, he and Ene are now able to travel again. They traveled frequently when they were younger; they visited many countries in Europe. They visited Italy twice, one of which was a pilgrimage with two priests with whom they were friends. Ene and her friends arranged the trip to visit famous churches in Italy and for the priests to say mass every day. They have yet to visit

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8 Bert Strieb retired in 2009.
Estonia but hope to go in the near future. He said that Ene would want to visit where her mother went to church and the town in which her father grew up.

1:15:23 Since Steve has been on La Salle's campus for over four decades, first as a student and then later as a professor, he has seen many changes. The biggest change was that it went from all-male to co-ed while he was a student here. When he graduated in 1973, the student population was nearly even among men and women. He said that the change in that sense has been good. Because women mature faster, the female students at La Salle were academically better and effectively forced their male counterparts to improve and to compete with them. To further make a point, Steve mentioned that he was president of the Math Club in his senior year, and the next president after he graduated was a woman—Frani Parrotto. Other changes made La Salle more professional in that instructors without Ph.D.s could never be hired for full-time employment today; they would only be hired as adjuncts. Now La Salle has earned the AACSB accreditation for the business school and a new building for it.  

1:17:50 He is not sure if he likes the new core of classes that students are required to take. The old core included two courses in History, English, Philosophy, and so on, but now the trend is for students to meet new learning objectives and Steve is uncertain as to "how things will shake out" since this is the first year of its implementation. He is concerned that graduates will lack good knowledge in the humanities like history, languages, and art. Steve lamented that La Salle's strength in its liberal arts programs is diminishing.

1:18:54 Steve is disappointed about other changes from recent years, such as the faculty dining room, the book store, and food services. He said, "I wonder if we're becoming more of a business..." One of the hallmarks of La Salle is its focus on excellent teaching, thereby hiring teachers who cared deeply students. A lot more changes are on the horizon, but Steve is not sure that they are all good for students and teachers. He did acknowledge that the campus "has been beautified" and appreciates that change. He was "very unhappy about the sale of the works from the Art Museum," as were many other faculty members. He felt that that transaction was done without consulting the art history faculty. As a result of the sale, La Salle's Art Museum is now blacklisted by the museum community. Steve witnessed the work of Brother Dan Burke, who spent many years amassing the collection. The most valuable part of that collection was recently sold off, without any information about where the money would go or how it would be spent. Suspecting more unfavorable or uncertain changes on the horizon, Steve is relieved that he can enjoy anticipating his retirement rather than become "more agitated" if he were to stay for 10 or 20 more years. His half-time employment can last up to three years, after which he would have to give up his office. He would get full benefits but half the salary for teaching half time. He could also opt to go on quarter-time status and earn a quarter of the salary, but he thinks that by the end of his third year at half-time, he would be ready to fully retire. But if he really missed teaching, he can always come back as an adjunct or go somewhere else. He has three years to think about all of these options, but he said he also has three years "to clean up this office."

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9 AACSB is the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.
I asked him how his career has impacted or influenced his home-life and vice versa. Ene knew from their courtship days that Steve would pursue a teaching career. During the nine academic months of the year, his wife knew that he would be busy and understood the implications of being married to a professor. He is sad that they never had any children, but he also wondered if he would have been a wonderful father. He is not sure, though, if he could have balanced having children and teaching full-time. He is also glad to have gone "straight through" from undergrad to earning his Ph.D. because he is not sure if he would have been able to manage to teach full-time and doing coursework at the graduate level. Steve thought that he would enjoy the summers off, but he soon realized that he would have to work during the summers (e.g., writing textbooks, submitting to journals) to be promoted and get tenure. He and David Hecker, his former roommate from Rutgers (also a La Salle alumnus) wrote a textbook together on linear algebra together and published five editions, which helped him get promoted. Together, they also co-authored an algebra textbook for non-math majors.

Before they married, Ene took a job at Lafayette College while Steve was finishing up his dissertation. After they got married and moved to Gettysburg, Ene worked in the library at Mount St. Mary University. When they moved back to Philadelphia, Ene got a job at Holy Family University; she worked there for about five or six years. Afterward, she worked at St. Joseph’s University for 20 years. Then she worked as a librarian at Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary, where they train diocesan priests. She was there for almost five years, but that was her favorite job. She loved working with the priests-in-training and helping others with their research. So while Steve was teaching math, Ene was able to use her master's degree in library science wherever they lived. She had to put aside full-time work so that she could care for her mother, especially when she came to live with them.

Even though Ene’s mother knew English, she was more comfortable with speaking Estonian. At dinner, Steve would practice with his mother-in-law with an Estonian reader (e.g., primer). Steve offered some interesting trivia about the Estonian language. It is not part of the Indo-European family, but belongs to the Finno-Ugric language family.

I asked him if he has something under the categories of "greatest pride" and "greatest regret." He would have liked to teach a second-level course in abstract algebra, but it always conflicted with the same semester during which he taught geometry. On the bright side, he had to teach the history of math, a course he had to build from scratch. He had never taken a math history course as an undergrad or graduate student, but when the state made the course a requirement for all math-ed majors, he had to learn the course to teach it to his students. He found the topic very interesting as he finds history in general interesting as well. "If you don't know where you've been, you don't know where you're going." Due to some rather unfortunate timing, he lost his sabbatical because the first time that the course was offered to students was during the fall semester of his sabbatical, and no one else was as prepared as was to teach the course. So he taught it and spent all of his sabbatical building the course from the ground up. That course, along with the honors course and abstract algebra, was one of his favorites to teach. "Geometry was a close fourth." And geometry was what inspired him to become a math teacher. He was fascinated by the fact that math can be proven so
logically. Fortunately, he will continue to teach geometry and the history of math in the next academic year.

1:42:41 Interview ends.