

**Interview of John J. Seydow, PhD  
By Frank L. Hopper**

**Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
June 26, 2009**

Hopper: This is an oral history interview with Doctor John Seydow on the History of La Salle University. The location is Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the date is June 27, 2009. What is your full name and current title at La Salle University?

Seydow: I think it's the 26th today, right? Am I right?

Hopper: You're right. I am sorry. Good way to start.

Seydow: But you have got my name right, Frank. It is John J. Seydow. I always put PhD after my name, just for professional reasons. It has more impact when I am writing a letter of recommendation for a student, and I am a Professor of English.

Hopper: Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Seydow: Yes, you do.

Hopper: We'll start with just a few preliminary questions. When and where you born?

Seydow: I was born in Philadelphia, in 1941, July 19th, in particular. Born in St. Mary's Hospital, I believe, which is in the Fishtown section of Philadelphia. I don't think that hospital is in existence, anymore.

Hopper: Did you grown up in a certain section of Philadelphia?

Seydow: I grew up in Olney. My mom and dad got married in 1940, and they bought a row home on the fifty-nine hundred block of Franklin Street, 5904. I arrived approximately ten months after they got married. And I lived in that house until I got married in 1965. So I lived there for twenty-four years. That's the only house my mother and father lived in as husband and wife. After my father died, probably about eight years after that, my mother moved in with us. We were living at that time in East Oak Lane, and she lived with us until she went into a nursing home. And I guess she died about three years after she went into the nursing home.

Hopper: I would like to ask you about your parents now. What were their full names?

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Seydow: John Herman Seydow was my father. Elizabeth, what was my mother's middle name, Elizabeth - it might have been Mary - I'm not sure. Ryan was her maiden name. They were both born in Philadelphia. My father was born in 1900, in Philadelphia. My mother was born in 1904, in Philadelphia.

Hopper Starting with your father, what was he like as a person?

Seydow: A very interesting combination of serious and funny. So he was a very witty person but he tended to be very quiet, and if he didn't know you, he could - he would not open up to you and would not even smile at you. Oh, six-one, 170 lbs, drank a case of beer and fifth of whiskey every week of his life - two packs of cigarettes a day - never gained an ounce. My wife always said that my mother was my saving grace because my father was very direct. And, if you asked him a question like, how was dinner? He would answer honestly. I remember his saying to my older half sister, "Everything's cold," and she sat there and started crying at a Thanksgiving dinner. So I have a side of my personality like my Germanic father's. But my mother was very soft. My mother would never want to hurt anybody's feelings for any reason. It was an interesting dynamic, seeing the two of them grow up because my father was a German. He was a Republican. And he was a Presbyterian. My mother was Irish. She was Catholic. And she was a Democrat. So I grew up in a real schizoid household in which you could never be right, no matter which side you took, because somebody else was always standing on the other side.

Hopper: Were you close to your father?

Seydow: I was, considering that he was forty-one years old when I was born. So my father was sixty-five when I got married, and I was twenty-four at that time. My father didn't have any formal education. So he dropped out of school in the seventh grade. My mother, the same thing, she dropped out of school in the eighth grade. He was very bright, but he didn't understand some of the things that I was interested in. My father was a very successful semipro baseball player in the 1920s and into the 1930s. I just saw there is a new book on Satchel Paige that came out. My father pitched against Satchel Paige when Paige was barnstorming in the old Negro Leagues. He also had a sinecure at the Reading Railroad; his job for the Reading Railroad was primarily to pitch for their baseball team. After he threw out his arm in the 30's, he got a legitimate position with the railroad. Then years later, he had what would have been a difficult decision; he had a white collar job without any education. He managed a warehouse down on Delaware Avenue. I can remember a phone call at three o'clock in the morning where somebody said a gauge registered high, and he got out of bed to go down and check it out to see what was wrong. The men who worked for him were unionized and probably made more money than he did. I remember cashing his paycheck - a hundred a week so he made five thousand dollars a year, in say 1955, cashing his paycheck at the corner Mom and Pop Unity Frankfort grocery store. The best thing that I can think of, Frank,

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reminiscing about my father was, I can remember, when the Giants and the Dodgers went to the West Coast, sitting in the kitchen listening to a Phillies game with my father at 1:30 in morning. Listening to a ball game he'd be sitting there drinking a beer, and I'd be sitting there drinking a Seven-Up. We would sit and listen to the game and have very little conversation, but we just enjoyed being with each other in that respect. But again, my father couldn't understand when I was in college to major in English - that kind of baffled him. He did live long enough to see me get my Masters Degree. He and my mother came out to Ohio University, and he was already sick at that time with what was subsequently diagnosed as pancreatic cancer. He died the March, on the Saturday before Easter, of the year after I got my Masters Degree. I realized last spring that I have outlived my father. He had not gotten to his sixty-seventh birthday, and I am on cusp of my sixty-eighth birthday. I look like my father too, although I am about forty pounds heavier than he. But everybody always said that when I was younger, and you can see from the one picture how skinny I was, "Oh, you're Slim's son." That was his nickname when he was a ball player back in the thirties. I have to correct them then into the seventies and eighties; when I started to bulk up. I am also Betty Ryan's son because that's whose metabolism I think I inherited.

Hopper: Moving to your mother, how far did your mother go in school?

Seydow: She dropped out of school in the eighth grade.

Hopper: How many children were in the family?

Seydow: I have a sister thirteen months younger, named after my mother, Elizabeth, and I am named after my father obviously, John, although my middle name is different, I'm Joseph. I had an older, half-sister Dolores, who was ten years older than I. My father was widowed during the Depression. His first wife died of cancer. He was forty and my mother was thirty-six, it was her first marriage, when they got married in 1940. My sister, Dolores, was nine years old at the time. On my twenty-ninth birthday, she died over in Einstein Hospital of breast cancer and left behind three boys. She actually is the godmother of our daughter who will be forty-three next month.

Hopper: Did your parents bring you up to consider certain things were important in life?

Seydow: My father was a church going Protestant, and we didn't have an automobile. My father used to walk two miles to church every Sunday with a suit, white shirt, and tie - that was the way he went to work as well. My mother used to take my sister and me to the Catholic Church which was about one mile away. Religion, while it wasn't preached, it was practiced in our household. You never heard foul language. My father would say damn and shit and hell when he got angry, but you never

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heard the Lord's name taken in vain - never heard other vulgarities. They were very, very proper about a variety of things. That is my father would not allow me to go the church on Sunday unless I were dressed. I remember an incident where, when I was in fourteen years old, I lived in Wildwood, New Jersey for the summer with my Aunt. I lived in a little attic room and I worked renting beach umbrellas and beach chairs seven days a week, eight hours a day, for thirty-five dollars a week. I had to pay my Aunt, I think it was, twelve dollars, room and board out of that. I was saving money because my father was thinking of getting an automobile. If I wanted to drive, I had to have money for car insurance. That was part of the deal. I think they just wanted to get rid of me for the summer, as well, because I was a bit of a pain in the rear end at that time in my life. My father and mother came down and they stayed at my aunt's one weekend. My father was an early riser and he's sitting out on the porch reading the newspaper. And I come charging out of the place. I wanted to get to the eight o'clock mass, and then go directly at work. I had to be at work at nine o'clock, and I was wearing a bathing suit, a tee shirt and a pair of sneakers. My father said, "Where you are going dressed like that?" He knew I was going to church - and I said, "I was going to church." He said, "Would you go to a dance dressed like that?" and I said, "But Dad, I am going to be working on the beach all day and can't dress." He said, "Put on a pair Khakis on, on top of the shorts at least, that will be acceptable" and then muttering something like going into the house of God. My father was not a big fan of Roman Catholicism. But, if that's something I had made a commitment to, then he wanted to ensure that he wouldn't be embarrassed by his son going in looking like a bum. I can remember all the stories about - we had to wear a sport coat and tie to Catholic high school. I remember my father always saying about how sloppy I looked around the neck. Button your top button; pull your tie up. Appearances were very important to him.

My mother's sense of appearances and propriety extended in a lot of areas. We bought all our food at the Mom and Pop Unity Frankfort corner store. And my Mother was the worst cook that ever lived. We had steak one night a week, and she would fry it like shoe leather in her frying pan, because my Father liked everything well done. Bacon you couldn't break it apart. I couldn't even eat it, it was so crisp. I guess that was why I was so skinny. But what was important, I think, to my Mother is she could say that she fed her family steak one day a week. They both had very difficult lives growing up. My mother at one point in the Depression was living with an aunt and supporting five people. In the thirties, she would give her aunt her pay check. She worked as a telephone operator and started with Bell Telephone, when she was sixteen years old, and she had an uncle who was dying of tuberculosis on a hospital bed in the dining room of the house on Allegheny Avenue. She would get in return from her aunt money to ride the trolley car, the old PTC. I remember her telling the story about how, I think it was a nickel, she walked home twenty some blocks, saved the nickel, so she could buy a second pair of stockings. I can remember, as if it was yesterday, her saying, "since the stockings were silk, it was most expensive of a woman's costume." So then she had two pair of stockings. She could wash one out and let it dry. I still have this image of the

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stockings drying over top of the shower curtain rod in the bathroom. She washed them out by hand and left them there. Then, they would have full day to dry, and she have an extra pair to wear.

They both had difficult times and, as a consequence, were always watching pennies, but I never went hungry for food. There was always plenty to eat in the house. [I] never got criticized for sitting down and eating half a box of cookies or drinking two or three Seven-Ups back-to-back. [I] was never criticized for that, because - I think - it was something my mother and father wished they had had when they were kids and were able to give their children. Even though, again, we didn't have a car. We didn't have a whole lot of material kinds of things, but we had a lot of food on the table. So I knew I was loved. I have even done an exercise with students in a writing class getting them to reminisce about their childhood. I go around the room, and I ask them to tell me just a vignette from their youth. Then, I counter with one, and I say, "Now you realize we are in competition. The competition goes like this: I had a happier childhood than you had, and you try to one-up my story about my childhood."

Because my mother, as a much older woman, thirty-seven when I was born, and I being her first child, it seems that she always wanted to be married and have a family. Now she finally did. While my parents were very strict, I don't remember my father spanking me, but I remember the look in his eye. He would terrify me. I would really be afraid that he would discipline me. My mother was the disciplinarian. She would use a broom stick. She would wrack me with the broomstick when I got out of line and threaten me with a belt. I don't remember being beaten that way, but there was no nonsense as far as her behavior was concerned.

But, in many respects, we were really indulged. My sister and I were the first children in the family in about fifteen years because all of her [my mother's] cousins and her sister got married when they were young and they were also older than she. I remember some my earliest memories, my cousins coming back from World War II, but I was maybe four years old at the time in 1945 and 1946. These were all my first cousins, or second cousins, and they then indulged my sister and me. My cousin, Geraldine, would take us to barbeques on the fourth of July; they were very involved in the Catholic War Veterans' Post down in Kensington. My Uncle Harry and Aunt Mame would buy us things like snowsuits and the like because their children were all grown and raised and treated us almost like their grandchildren. Things my mother and father could not provide.

Hopper: Moving on to your sister. Did you play much together as children?

Seydow: In many respects, we were inseparable even when I was in college. We even talk about how, she had very good job at Dunn and Bradstreet at age eighteen coming out of Cardinal Dougherty High School. That was her first job. She was a speed typist, and she got paid per line count and accuracy. By age twenty she was number one in the office and still living at home with mother and father, but I was going to La Salle. We would play Scrabble together for penny-a-point, and she always kids that she helped to finance my education by my beating her in Scrabble. We were inseparable in this

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respect, my mother and father never had a baby sitter. Wherever they went, we went with them. On Saturday nights we would go to my Uncle Harry's house down on Allegheny Ave where my mother used to live. When her uncle died, my Aunt Mame remarried. She married my Uncle Harry, and he's one of the great men in my life. We'd go down there on the trolley car. We would take the "forty-seven" trolley car on Fifth Street and the "sixty" trolley car over Allegheny Ave. Then, one of my uncles would drive us home. But every Saturday night there was a party there and a big basement with a shuffleboard, four or five tables with chairs around them. They actually even had a toilet in the basement. Now, this is in the 1940s, and it was exceptional for that. I could remember going down there every Saturday. My sister and I would be put to bed in the front bedroom, and the trolley car would come right there, it was 244 East Allegheny. We would be lying in bed and - in those days when the passengers got on they just pulled the cord and that registered the fare - I would hear this ding, ding, ding and knew three people got on the trolley car, the old "sixty" wooden trolley car on Allegheny Avenue. So my sister and I in bed together. We were there all the time; we were the only two kids. My mother and father never went anywhere without us. She was my playmate as it were - certainly on those that could have been very boring times for two little kids.

Hopper:           What was it like growing up in you neighborhood?

Seydow:           It was wonderful, wonderful to the point where there was always a ball game going on. I can remember that tension sitting at the kitchen table. When I wasn't very- I wouldn't say - finicky eater, but I didn't eat a whole lot. My mother used to worry during the winter that I didn't have enough fat on my bones and I was going to be sick. She and my father would try to get me to eat. I can remember sitting there with stuff on my plate. I could hear the kids outside getting really to have a ball game. Somebody would even yell "Yo, Jackie!" My father would say you are not going out until you finish eating. That kind of forced eating and there I am caught in the situation. I wanted to go, and I would finish eating, and he said, "you go." I would bolt, just run out the door, and we'd be playing games. Now this was when I was maybe ten years old and up. We would be playing box ball around the corner. We would have eighteen kids playing. The reason you wanted to get out there was so you could get into the game, and you didn't have to be on team that was going to play the winning team. After it was too dark to play ball, we would be out in front of the house. They had the street lights, and the guy would come along and lighted the gas light from the lamp post that was right across the street from us. That gave you sufficient light, so you could sit on steps outside, and we would play games. We would play baby in the air. We would play of all kind of games. It was wonderful because the street was full of kids. We also had Fisher's Park at the corner. It was a very important part of my life because, as I got older, we used to go over and hit the baseball around the park, play tennis in the park. I used to jog around the park when I got in high school. But there always kids to do something with. It was never lonely in that neighborhood. I feel sorry for my grandchildren who live out in the country with no sidewalks, and they have to have play-dates where their mother has to drive them to

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someplace so that they have kids to play with. Now they have found that there is somebody two doors down which means a block away that they can walk down to that house, and there's a little boy and a little girl who are somewhat in their age group. My granddaughter is old enough to walk down the road now at age twelve. She has a girl that she goes to school with who lives on side road. So there is somebody else she can go to see without her mother having to drive her there. But, it [my childhood neighborhood] was one big playground, Frank. It was just a wonderful, **wonderful** place to grown up, all row homes.

Hopper: Did you have any pets as a child?

Seydow: Did not. The point was it was it was difficult enough to feed three children. My sister, Dolores got married when she was - I guess - twenty years old. It was enough of a chore to feed three and then two children. There was nothing left over for pets. That was pretty universal in the neighborhood. The people next door had a dog, but they had only one child, and he was a teenager when they moved in. I don't remember any of my friends having dogs. I don't remember ever seeing a cat either in our neighborhood.

Hopper: Did you join any clubs like the boy scouts?

Seydow: I did not. There was always something built-in in our neighborhood that organized kinds of things. We just played ball all year long. Organized kinds of things were not what we were interested in. We didn't want somebody bossing us around and telling where we had to be and what we had to be. School was enough for that so we just organized ourselves to play ball even through high school. Two of my friends played American Legion baseball, but the rest of us here played ball on high school teams or just pick up games of baseball and basketball. I never was a member of any group or organization. I didn't even play CYO, Catholic youth organization, sports at the Catholic school.

Hopper: Would you say that religion was important to you as a child?

Seydow: It was and it was fortunate in this respect. I can remember maybe, I was fifteen or sixteen and - I just assumed this universal for young men from my background educated by nuns in a Catholic school - that I started to go to Mass everyday, asking this question, "Do I have a vocation?" I remember, my Father, I told you before he didn't have a whole lot of time for Catholicism and its practices, saying to me, "I hope you are not thinking of becoming a priest." While the word sexuality would not be part of his vocabulary, I am not quite sure how he expressed it, but what he basically said it was a terrible waste of your, and again then he wouldn't have said sexuality or masculinity. But I think he would have thought the concept of celibacy was inane. I think he would have resented my becoming a priest. Just as my my older sister who was raised as a Presbyterian, she converted to Catholicism when she was eighteen or nineteen, and he

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said, "You're doing that only because you are marrying a Catholic." He was not going to give her away at her wedding that's how important his religion was to him. I still recall father listening to my catechism for my religion classes in grade school and kind of scoffing, and I not knowing why. I remember making a comment once about you're not a Christian, in my confused mind thinking Christian and Catholic were synonymous. I remember his response being rather testy in which he said, " You go to church because you have to; I go to church because I want to." He stayed true to the end. When he was buried, the minister from his church came and said the prayers there were no - ninety percent of the people there were catholic- but there was no official Catholic presence at his viewing or at his funeral. My sister, Dolores, became an extremely committed and conservative Catholic after she converted. She would put her finger in my face every once in a while because she thought that I was a little on the cavalier side about Catholicism. Yet I would never miss mass on Sunday. It doesn't matter where I'm vacationing. I would find out where the nearest church is. As a consequence, I would visit some very beautiful churches in other places that if I would not so committed at least to that ritual, I would have missed out different tours and trips.

Hopper: Moving along to your formal education. Where did you go to elementary school?

Seydow: To St. Helena's Elementary School, the tuition was free. If they charged, I would have had to go to public school. My older sister went to public school and to Olney High School. But I went to St. Helena's. All you paid was a book bill. I went there for eight years taught by the Sisters of St. Joseph approximately seventy-five kids per class.

Hopper: Large classes.

Seydow: Some of the brothers here can tell you they had ninety in their classes in West Philadelphia. Seventy-five.

Hopper: Was it an all-boys school?

Seydow: No, boys and girls were mixed from first grade on.

Hopper: What did you think of the school as an educational institution?

Seydow: Retrospectively, there was no place for people who were slow learners, and there was no place for people who were fast learners. If they taught to, I am not sure it was the lowest common denominator, but they taught to the middle of the class. I feel real sympathy for these nuns: women in their thirties, forties, and fifties who did not have their degrees. On Saturday, they would go up to Chestnut Hill College as they were trying to complete a course each semester. Trying to maintain or, at the same time, give

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us the skills and information that we needed in order to move to the next level of education. They were really dedicated. I can to this day name every nun that I had from first grade through eighth grade.

Hopper: That's very impressive. They really did a very good job. Were they strict with the students?

Seydow: Extremely strict. It was a world in which they used capital punishment. I can remember a nun slapping me right across the face in front of a whole class of students. I can remember a nun hitting me with an umbrella right across the side of my head. I deserved it in those cases. I would never go home and tell my mother that I had been hit by a nun. But my sister would hear about it and would tell her. Because I knew that I would be big trouble, the nuns could do no wrong. They were extremely strict. I just saw the movie *Doubt* and that is set in 1964. I went through grade school from 1947 to 1955, and it was every bit as strict as that school. I remember being in church on a Friday, the first Friday, the whole school went to mass. Processed over to the church and I can remember the nuns walking up and down the aisles. If you didn't sit up straight, they pointed a finger at you. If you would be so stupid as to try talk to somebody next to you, they come over and swat you in the back of the head. They were absolute fascists in the way that they ran, in a totalitarian way, their classrooms. They had to. Every teacher knows the rule basic rule, only one person can talk at a time. In order for them to talk, that is to say teach, they had to have absolute silence. They had to enforce that discipline. You never wanted to be sent to the principal's office.

Hopper: Did you feel the school prepared you well for high school?

Seydow: I was not that interested in education. I was, according to what some people in the family thought, was very bright, even precocious in some respects. They'd get me to sing songs when I five years old, very involved and long songs. They just thought I was cute as could be and very bright. My grades in elementary school suggested that. But, I came from a house in which my joke is we only got one periodical, one magazine. It was the *Reader's Digest*, and we got the condensed version. That is a joke. But my father read the newspaper everyday, did the crossword puzzle every day. My mother used to do the cryptogram everyday in the newspaper, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. He would read the *Bulletin* when he came home as well so we got two newspapers, but there were no magazines. There were no books in the house. Neither of my parents ever read a book when I was growing up. After my father died, my mother got a library card and she used to read three books a week. Some of the stuff was pretty good and pretty impressive. My older sister, Dolores, got her GED from Olney High School. She did not finish high school. Yet later on, she was reading biographies of Sinclair Lewis. There was a kind of subconscious hunger for learning and education, but I never expressed it in any outward way. I was never conscious that that would be something I would be doing in the future. Finishing eighth grade, I had surpassed my

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mother and my father as far as education was concerned. High school was just the next step that I had to endure before I went to work

Hopper: Where did you go to high school?

Seydow: I went to North Catholic High School my freshman year. It was an interesting situation in that they hadn't had freshman at the high school in maybe twenty years, four thousand males at that school. I don't know whether this was a sign where they were starting to loose population, or what. But they brought in two freshman sections as an experiment. They picked, I found out afterwards, people based on IQ. All the friends I went to St Helena's with wound up going to St. Joaquin's, which was an annex for North Catholic. They went to school there for their freshman year. But I went to what we called "the big house" at North Catholic proper for my freshman year. Cardinal Dougherty High School opened the following year. I could walk to Cardinal Dougherty. It was about a two-mile walk from where I lived in Olney. And I was reunited then with my friends from St. Helena's grade school. And most of them lived on the fifty seven hundred block of Sixth Street. And so I would stand on the corner of Sixth and Nedro in the morning to see them coming down. Then we could all walk to Cardinal Dougherty together and then walk home most of the times in the afternoon. I finished Cardinal Dougherty High School in 1959, so I went my sophomore year, junior year, and senior year. This year is our fiftieth anniversary and we are the first graduating class of Cardinal Dougherty. We had five hundred twenty two in our graduating class, males and females. It was a co-institutional: females were in the south wing, all the males were in the north wing. We each had our own gym, and the only thing we shared in common was the Chapel. I spent a lot of time in Chapel because since it was the only time I could get to see a female. We had our own cafeteria. The cafeteria was one huge place. There was a wall down the middle with door in the middle, and so people could go back and forth but never students. These were for teachers. Most of whom the males had were priests. Most of whom the females had were nuns. My sister graduated the following year in 1960. She is in the first class to go all the way through, all four years. There were eleven hundred in her gradating class. Cardinal Dougherty became the largest Catholic high school, as I was told, in the world. At one time, they had six thousand students in the one high school, and this was in Philadelphia, in the Olney section of Philadelphia.

Hopper: Did the school have a dress code?

Seydow: Yes, had to wear a coat and tie. My sport coat came down the middle of my forearm as I went through a growth spurt, and there was no money to buy me clothes. Again tuition was free. You paid a book bill, a nominal amount. I don't remember what it was, but I'd be surprised if it were more than thirty dollars. As long as your family contributed to the Sunday collection, it was the parish that got billed then for the tuition. St. Helena's Church basically paid the tuition for me and for my sister.

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But you had to wear a shirt, and a tie, and a jacket to all your classes, and that was strictly enforced. Nobody would think of walking in without a tie. Some of the disciplinarians, there were two priests that was their job, would even tell you to button the top button of your shirt. No sloppiness was tolerated.

Hopper: Did you have any lay teachers?

Seydow: I had one lay teacher in my, at North Catholic my freshman year, a man named Gillespie who taught me English. At Cardinal Dougherty I had a lay teacher named Edino Varani who taught me history my senior year. I think every other teacher I had for academic subjects was a priest. Jack Sinclair was a gym teacher and he had somebody who was an assistant to him. And that was the only time [I] really saw lay teachers on a regular basis when I went to gym.

Hopper: Did you have any particular aspirations as a high school student?

Seydow: Nope, my whole idea was to get through and get a job. That's what was expected of me. When I graduated from high school, they had a big family party at my Aunt and Uncle's house. While they would never use a term like this - that was the American Dream - I had graduated from high school. Something my older sister had not done. Something my parents would have loved to have done, but they didn't even graduate from elementary school. That was the process: you graduated from high school and then you got a job. I had a job right away at the Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company at Sixth and Walnut, and I went to work there immediately upon graduation. I would get on the subway every day and take the subway to work. [I] did that for full time for two and a half years.

Hopper: At what point did you decide that you wanted college?

Seydow: I can almost remember it to the day, Frank. I was in computers. This was the ground floor of the computer world. I worked on peripheral equipment: printers and card readers and worked on the last vacuum tube computer which was, I used to remember the name of this, the IBM 950, I think, and then the first transistorized computer came in, the IBM 1401. The Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company sent me to computer school. It was mainly for programming software, right across the street, at what was then the Curtis Institute, the old publisher of the *Saturday Evening Post*. Then, when I came back in, the idea was that was that they were going to train me to be programmer. But I didn't appear to have the greatest amount of aptitude in that field so I just worked in their computer area again, using the peripheral equipment: the printer and card readers. And, here's the changing moment of my life. A fellow, whose name I am sure I have repressed, came to work. He had just graduated as a math major at Rutgers. He maybe was two years older than I. And he came in, and I was told that I was to teach

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him everything I knew and what my job was, because he was going to be my boss. And I thought, what's the difference between him and me? He's got a college degree, and I don't. So, I decided that I would start going to college. I went to night school one semester at La Salle, and I took a British literature course and an American literature course. I had been doing a lot of reading, riding the subway everyday. Some of my high school teachers would have been amazed at that, because I was more of a math science person, not a humanities person, at all. I didn't care for things like history. Literature there was something about it that I liked, but I never took it seriously. I started reading all these books. I used to read the pocket library hardback editions. I would buy them at Gimbel's bookstore for a dollar-a-piece. I would read them, and I would even read them with a pen and keep little note cards about the words that I didn't know. That was part of how the process got started. I went and took two courses at La Salle at night, and my insurance company paid for it. Once I got a C or better, then they'd compensated me for that. I applied to La Salle then to go as a full time student. [I] was accepted and started the following September, that would have been the fall of 1961. I kept my job at the Insurance Company. I worked thirty-two hours a week. I worked the night shift and from five at night till one in the morning on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. That allowed me to earn enough money to pay my tuition and to pay room and board to my parents. I remember a conversation my father and I had, in which I said, "None the other guys that were all in college have pay room and board." My father said, "You have more money in the bank than I. So that's only fair." And I said, "You're right." I paid - I don't know what it was - twenty-five dollars a week. Still had to pay my tuition, but I had a room to sleep in. My mother used to make me three cheese sandwiches to take to work with me on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. I'd get home pick up my cheese sandwiches, get on the subway and go down to work. I'd get there by 5:05 every night. I could hear the bell in Independence Hall, the clock chiming, as I went around the corner to Sixth and Chestnut Street. And I'd go into work and relieve the person there who did on the day shift. He filled me in as far as what had to be done at night. I kept that job for two and a half years.

Hopper:           What was the tuition at the time at La Salle?

Seydow:           Tuition at La Salle in the 1961 and 1962, I think both those years, I think I'm right about this, it was eight hundred dollars a year. I believe I'm right about this Frank, it jumped my junior year to 950 dollars. Off the top my head I want to say an 18 percent increase in tuition, and I remember thinking how am I going to afford the extra 150 dollars a year. Now, in my senior year - I was not working at the insurance company - so I got a National Defense Education Act loan. That program just came in around 1964, and it was wonderful because you could borrow the money. You didn't have to start paying it back until after you graduated, and I wound up not only getting a deferment because I went on to graduate school, but when I came out of graduate school, the

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Federal Government paid, because I went into teaching. It paid ten percent of that loan off every year for the first five years. So I think, when I graduated I had maybe nineteen hundred dollars in government loans, I only had to pay back nine hundred and fifty dollars of it. Then paid it back at such low interest I used to joke to people, "Take out the loans and pray for inflation because you're paying back that money with really cheap money." Later on, I still remember when I paid off my government loan. Dave Fleming, at that time was the, I think, Assistant Controller at La Salle. He was the person who gave me the signed note after I had paid it off. He said, "Well you are one of the few who have done that," which wasn't true. I think the default rate was very slim on those loans. But it was a wonderful program for people like me from homes that, while they valued education, my father always used to say, "Get a good education, your shoulders will wear out before your brain." But they didn't have the money to support that, and it allowed "outs to get in" as it were, to go to good schools, to get a good education. Then doors would open for you down the road.

Hopper: What was the campus like in those days? (laughter) We do have some pictures if you would like to look at them.

Seydow: Very different, very different, from the way it is today. First of all, it was all male. It was very Catholic. What I mean by that was we would have during Holy Week, a required retreat. All students would attend that retreat that was an absolute requirement. We took a religion course every semester. They were two credit courses, sixteen credits in religion when I graduated, eight courses that I took over a four year period. You took six courses in philosophy, so I had eighteen hours in philosophy. It was very Catholic in the way that it was taught. It was taught by priests in some cases. Even metaphysics had a very Catholic slant to it, very Thomistic, Saint Thomas Aquinas, in its orientation. The brothers were an extremely strong presence on campus. These were men that you wanted to model yourself after because they were intellectual giants. [They] worked very hard and lived the monastic life. Student brothers, even played a role when I taught at La Salle, used to be bused back into Elkins Park where they lived. Taken back there for their lunch and then brought back in the afternoon. You never saw them in any kind of a social context. Very hard working, very bright lay teachers as well. The beginning of my intellectual life was really my freshman year at La Salle. The brothers created an environment that I express my gratitude for that kind of educational climate. You wanted to learn, and I was particularly motivated because I was older. I was two years older than the rest of the freshman, and I was paying my own way. I wanted my money's worth from the classes that I was attending.

ROTC was a requirement. You had to take two years of ROTC. Every Wednesday was drill day. You wore a uniform. You would see two thousand males marching around the McCarthy stadium track. At that time, the science building, which, of course, has just been newly renovated, there were no classrooms in the basement. It was just a cement area. On rainy days we would drill in there. So you could walk around this rectangle, the center of the building. A cinder block was in the middle, and you just paraded around that. [You] had to clean a rifle once every month. You had to take a

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ROTC class for one credit with an instructor, take tests and be graded. It was part of your requirements for graduation.

As faculty member, I organized a couple of times a talk called *The Way We Were*. I got a La Salle faculty member who was a student in the thirties, one who was a student in the forties, one who was a student in the fifties, I was the representative of sixties, and then one of my former students who was a student in the seventies. We gave this presentation, two maybe three times in the dorms and talked about the way we were - mainly those images that came to the fore. The main one, of course for us, before La Salle became coeducational, it was all male. In the library - which was then the Lawrence Office Building where the administration is [now] housed over there - there would be female librarians and that's the only time we saw females on campus until, I believe, I was a senior. There were one or two females who would come in from Chestnut Hill. They would be taking literature courses because we had such a big English Department with so many more courses to offer. That we had a kind of reciprocal arrangement with them and some of our male students would go up there to take art and music courses because they had a larger selection of offerings in Chestnut Hill. But other than that it was an all male place, 99 percent testosterone.

Hopper: Do you recall any freshman initiation traditions that you experienced?

Seydow: Had to wear a little beanie, a little dink cap. Now I'm twenty years old at the time walking around campus with this silly thing on, you were supposed to have memorized the school song. If any upper classmen saw you with the hat on, they could stop you at any time and ask you to recite the school song. I never saw that as harassment. I saw it as kind of high school like, and, again, I had a whole life outside of La Salle because I was working thirty hours a week and had responsibilities in that respect. But I never remember anybody even asking me to recite the school song. We did have to wear a coat and tie. All students of La Salle were supposed to do that. Now, it was only enforced by the Christian Brothers and the ROTC. Lay teachers did not use to enforce that. So you knew when you didn't have to have a tie on. I can remember coming to school a couple times forgetting that I had a class where - I had a tee shirt, a kind of a tee shirt on, and a pair on of slacks. I would borrow a sport coat and put a tie around the top of the tee shirt. Absolutely, I had forgotten that was the price of admission. You would not get into a Christian Brothers' class unless you had a coat and tie on. I don't recall if that were for all four years, but I think it may have been.

Hopper: Were that a problem from the administration point of view with when you had the Christian Brothers and the ROTC enforcing one standard and lay teachers being lax, or having a different standard?

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Seydow: It was a very happy, functioning family. I never saw it as dysfunctional that way. The only comments that I every heard were against the administration which was all Christian Brothers, there were no lay deans or lay vice presidents in those days, had to do with salary. I remember a guy named Jack Gallagher who was a charismatic political science teacher. I had him two semesters of my sophomore year. I think he had five or six kids; he was always complaining about how under paid he was. He actually left La Salle and went to Parsons College, one of the start up places for supposed rich peoples' kids who couldn't get into any other school, somewhere in the Midwest. He went out there, doubled his salary, and then became the dean at a community college out on Long Island, afterwards. His father-in-law ran our mailroom. His name was Mr. Becker, I remember, and he would fill me in every once in a while about how his daughter and his son-in law, Jack Gallagher, were doing. A couple a faculty members here would hear from him every once-in-awhile but other than that I never, **never**, ever, heard any complaints.

The Christian Brothers were wonderful in this respect. If they didn't like what you were doing they just keep their mouths shut. If they liked what you were doing, they let you know. They pat you on the back and applaud it. So they are not confrontational. They wouldn't get in face of somebody and say, " You got to stop those kids from coming in without coats and ties; it's bad for our image". They never did that. One of the jokes used to be that the Christian Brothers' commitment was to teach the poor and then what they did was they hired the poor to teach and found out ways to keep them that way." So these people [lay teachers], these men, were really dedicated. I knew years later what their salaries were, and they not paid a really good salary. Everyone [lay teachers] who were married taught an extra course at night, and taught one to two courses during the summer, just to make ends meet. I'd see the cars in the parking lot and they were pretty beat-up. And the students by and large again were from row-home Philadelphia. They did not have the means to pay their tuition. We all had part time jobs, I shouldn't say all, but all of my friends had part time jobs. Most worked twelve to fifteen hours a week. The only way I could keep my job was to work thirty-two hours a week. It was too many hours, but that wasn't an option. What else was I going to do with the time? I had no social life, but that wasn't important, I was really committed to getting an education.

Hopper: How did you spend your time between classes?

Seydow: I spent mine in the library. I never went into the cafeteria until my senior year, (telephone rings) and, as I recall, not until my second semester, senior year. I used to eat my lunch in the stacks of the library. My mother would make my lunch for me. Again, just a cold sandwich and to this day, I eat sandwiches without ever having a soda or a glass of water with it. My wife can't understand that I don't want anything to drink, but those were the circumstances of what I was doing. I went to class, I went to the library, and I went to work. That was my routine and ritual. I never did anything of a social nature here until *Lambda Iota Tau*, the English Honor Society, and I actually

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became president of that group in my senior year. But I left the job at Penn Mutual Life Insurance half way through my Junior Year, and then I had other jobs. I worked at UPS, let's see, from about six at night till three in morning. I worked summers selling Good Humor ice cream. One of the best jobs I had I was a checkout clerk at Penn Fruit on Front and Cheltenham Avenue. Why it was such a good job was? I was able to engineer my schedule for my senior year to where I had no classes on Friday. I used to work from nine in the morning till nine at night. So I could get twelve hours in on one day in the Penn Fruit and that was wonderful because I paid a good hourly rate there, as well. Then I would work maybe two other nights during the week, but just for three or four hours. I was on a pretty tight budget so far as time was concerned until the end of my junior and senior year which allowed me to at least be involved with *Lambda Iota Tau*, but that was basically my only activity at La Salle.

Hopper: Do you recall some of the activities and productions that the club put on?

Seydow: I remember one in particular. We did Edward Albee's play, *Zoo Story*. We built our own platform for that show to be done on and we acted it out. So two of our members, I think it was just a two-man play, two of our members were the two actors in play. We showed it in the basement of the science building, the area where we used to process on rainy days in our ROTC uniforms. One of the things I remember was that we had a lot of student brothers who were living a rather monastic life. They weren't allowed out on the town. They all could come to this because it was a cultural thing, the production of *Zoo Story*. They thanked us they were so happy they could get of "jail," I'm putting that in quotation marks, for a Friday to come and see the play. I don't remember how we got the stands set up there, but we had stands. You could look down on this platform that was built maybe two feet above the floor. We set up the lighting, and we did everything. For all of us that was a first time adventure with the carpentry, the acting, the lighting, et cetera. But, as I recall, it was wonderful.

Then, I do remember Dan Rodden whom the Rodden Theater is named after. He had taught me in a couple of courses. His real talent, I think, was in putting together some of these productions. I remember his doing *Hamlet* when I was an undergraduate. I thought it was spectacular. Some of the student productions in the Masque<sup>1</sup> were very good that they had, and I remember attending them as well. One of the things that was nice, it was always a teaching experience because after particular shows, Dan would come out on the stage and answer questions that students had about the production. Why he did this or that. The play we would have read in class so we were on top of the text. Then we found out something about the real nuances of how you'd translate that text for on the stage. Plays are meant to be seen, not meant to be read, and this really enriched our lives, because if you were from my background, you very seldom even got to go to the movies, must less to see a play. The first plays I ever saw were as a student at La Salle.

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<sup>1</sup> Theatre in the Student Union

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I remember being required to go up to Girls' High once to see, - I'm blanking on her name - but a famous African-American female singer, Marion Anderson, was speaking at Girls' High. It was Brother G. Francis who built that in as a requirement in the course that we would all to go and see that. It cost five dollars for a ticket, which I thought was outrageous. But, as a consequence, I went out and bought her album, because I was so impressed by the quality of her presentation. Again, the parochial life most of us had led, and this was extending our boundaries into something not just academics per se, but something cultural.

Hopper: Did you ever go to any sports games such basketball?

Seydow: Four years at La Salle I never went to a basketball game, and this phenomenal in this respect I was a real jock. I loved basketball. It was my primary sport, and I loved to play. But I didn't have the time. I didn't have the money to go to these games so I never saw a La Salle basketball game. Even when I went to graduate school, they had a football team. I never saw a football game. I never saw a basketball game. So in seven years of undergraduate and graduate education, I never saw a single sports event in those seven years, and yet I loved sports.

Hopper: Do you recall any administration or student activity in celebration of La Salle's one hundredth year anniversary in 1963?

Seydow: I remember John Kennedy having been here. I remember the write-up in the *Collegian*.<sup>2</sup> Again, I didn't participate in anything. When you had mentioned to me the anniversary coming up, you noticed I knew exactly what year it was going to be because I knew that 1863 was the year that La Salle was founded. I do remember I would have been a freshman, sophomore, sophomore, I guess, at that time in 1963, maybe a junior, when the celebrations took place. I can still picture Kennedy's being in the *Collegian* itself. But I don't remember anything else about that sort of thing.

Hopper: Do you recall where and what you were doing when President Kennedy was assassinated?

Seydow: Absolutely, I was taking the Peace Corps test. Third floor of the Connelly Library; the Political Science Department had its classes there. I was sitting in the classroom taking the test when there was slight interruption. The woman, who was a federal employee and I assume an ex-Peace Corps volunteer, had to leave the room, and she came back in crying in and said the President has been shot. Now my black humor side kicked in when I told this story to other people. They asked, "What did you do?" And I said, "Well, I really resent that interruption because I'm taking a test right now." But I didn't at all. I don't remember how I felt. I was just then a very strong Kennedy

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<sup>2</sup> La Salle's Campus Newspaper

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person, and I thought of him as a godlike figure. The coincidence of my taking the test for the Peace Corps at the same time that he was shot is amazing.

While I don't remember comments from people who found out, my father didn't like Kennedy. My father thought that whole election was rigged. He said they were sending buses over to take the nuns, who first of all were bussed to get them registered to vote and then bussing them into the polls to vote. It was all rigged so that a Catholic could be elected President of the United States. Of course, the Catholic happened to be a Democrat. My father only voted Democrat once in his life, he said, for Roosevelt in '44 and because he was forty-four years old, my father. He liked the idea of Social Security, but he never voted, he said, for in a presidential election other than for a Republican. You as a historian would love this story. He must have been conflicted in 1928, because I told you about my father's drinking habits. Al Smith was running as not just a Democrat but he was Catholic, but he ran as a wet as opposed to Herbert Hoover who wanted keep prohibition was running as a dry. My father voted for Herbert Hoover even though he was voting against something that he valued very much, the freedom to drink alcohol. Anyhow back to the situation, I don't remember much comment from other people in the family. I don't remember tears. I don't remember what people said, what people felt.

Again, I don't think I was the greatest citizen in 1963 because my world consisted almost completely of school and work, school and work. Even during the summer after school was over, I would try to get in as many as hours as possible. I could get sixty hours in. I worked double shifts. I would go in five at night and work until nine the next day so I covered the five-to-one shift and the one-to-nine shift because I'd make that extra money. The way that job worked is they used to give you meal money. They would give something, \$2.50 if I was working the five-to-one shift, because you got free meals at the Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company. When I'd worked there full time for two and a half years, you went into the dining room for a lunch. You had a salad, entrée and dessert every day with a beverage, and it was free. So they gave you the \$2.50 and then, if you worked the one-to-nine shift, I think, they gave you \$4.00. I lived off that money. I used to bank my paycheck, and I lived off the \$2.50 because my expenses were really cheap. I used to walk back and forth to school. I had to take the PTC to work. I don't remember what it cost at that time to take the subway into center city, but it may not have been more than a quarter at that time. I lived a very, frugal life, but my needs were taken care of by paying my mother room and board. She'd have my sandwiches for me, and I didn't eat that much. I was pathetically skinny. Another good thing [was] I had no vices. I didn't smoke. But I think my father was suspicious; first of all his son is majoring in English, he doesn't drink, and he doesn't smoke. Where had he gone wrong? But I was a good athlete so he didn't care.

Hopper: Did you feel that well prepared for the academic challenges that you found here at La Salle from your previous schooling?

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Seydow: You know, I don't know, considering again how underpaid and overworked some of these people were in high school. Of course, they were priests so I guess the salary didn't mean that much to them. How well prepared was I? Excellent languages - the two priests who taught me French - excellent math, science. One of the people who taught me in English had a PhD, Fr. Tom Loughery. He got his PhD from Notre Dame. Another guy named Bill O'Donnell, who just retired as pastor a couple of years ago from a church up in Warminster, was a wonderful English teacher without any pretensions though about it. He just knew how to teach. I found out years later that these guys were told in August what they were going to be teaching in September. One of the best math teachers I ever had a guy named [Fr.] Bernard Herron, whom I ran into when he became Monsignor and we reconnected. He said he was no more two days ahead of the students. Maybe that's why they were so good because they just learned it themselves, and then they were passing it along to us.

But the other side of it, Frank, was a tremendous hunger for upward mobility through education. I was surrounded by people who were really bright, and I never made the count of how many of my classmates went on to get their PhDs. But I'm still in touch with one, a guy named Jim McBrearty who went here and got a PhD in Economics. He's still teaching at the University of Arizona, and we see each other maybe every other year. A guy named Frank White got a PhD in Political Science. Frank also went here. Joe Beatty just retired from Randolph Macon. He taught here for a while but he only had a master's degree. But from Williams, a good school, and he went to La Salle as an undergrad. He was a teacher. A lot of really bright students, they pushed the teachers. The teachers pushed the students. It was a very good dialectic that way. I was a trouble maker in high school. I tell people I was the original inductee into the Cardinal Dougherty Hall of Shame. Part of it was, I wasn't going on to college. My family didn't have the money to do that. I had to go out and get a job. I never thought of college as being in the future for me. I gave you the example of the epiphany I had, what spurred me to go to school and get my degree, and made the sacrifices that were involved in that.

I was extremely well equipped, without ever noticing. Knowing I didn't pay attention in high school, I was listening with one ear, looking with one eye, but it stuck. I really did well as a student at La Salle and was able to distinguish myself by my junior and senior year despite working all those hours. But, while I really wanted to get good grades, what I really wanted to do was learn, and La Salle gave me a wonderful opportunity to learn. The teachers that I had knew so much, and most of them knew how to present it. Students, they would follow up on things. We didn't learn for the sake of doing well on the test.

We learned and then went and learned more from that. The Jack Gallagher, whom I referred to before in political science, I remember he said on the first day of class, "You are responsible for anything I say". One day, he made some comment about Surinam and said it's up there in the north-eastern corner of South America. I don't even know what the example was; I remember going over to the library and pulling out a glossary of maps to see where Surinam was. I walked in for his second test he gives us a

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map and asks us to point, pin point, where these places are, one of them was Surinam. And I remember his calling me aside and said, "How did you know that? You are the only one who got that answer right." And I said, "You said I was responsible for everything you said in class!" That's the kind of hunger that a lot of my classmates had. Some of them were real luminaries getting eight hundred <sup>3</sup> college board scores in English [and] graduate record examination scores that were phenomenal. Some of them went on to top notch Ivy League institutions so that this was a real power house for learners at La Salle when I went as an undergraduate.

Hopper: At what point did you decide you wanted to major in English?

Seydow: I came in here thinking I might want to major in math. [I] had done a lot of reading, so I think I declared myself as an English major because of all the reading that I had done for the last two years. But I talked my way into a four-credit math class. Brother Christopher, who was head of admissions, didn't want to let me in. I said to him that I was a good student in math, and I didn't want to take the regular course. I went in and took a class in which there were thirty some of us in the class. Only eighteen finished the class. Only one person got an A, Carl McCarty, who got a PhD from Temple. [He] has been my colleague at La Salle for the last thirty some years. Here's what I learned: That I was not a good mathematician. I was an excellent arithmetician and I was very good in algebra and trigonometry, but it saved me from a life of mediocrity. I could have gotten through and gotten a degree in math, but I would have never been good at it, the same way as if I had gone into computers. I could have made a living as a systems analyst or a computer programmer, but I would never been able to excel. Literature was a nice fall back because I enjoyed reading. I had taken the two night courses at La Salle, did very well and really liked them as well. That's what led me with the idea that I would major in English and down the road I would teach.

Hopper: Did you have any particular mentor that guided you as far as your English aspirations?

Seydow: I did, John Keenan, who passed away, I guess, two years ago. He taught me American literature, and I subsequently taught three of his four children at La Salle. He had a wonderful way about him. He was not the most dynamic teacher in the classroom, but he knew all his students, he knew what they knew, and he knew how to encourage them. We had very good relationship. He wrote for me for graduate school and then, when I came back to teach here, he and I were very close for years. It wasn't a father-son relationship because he was only ten years older than I. It's just that he was the person who saw a lot of potential in me and encouraged it. They're the kind of people you like to hang around with because they're people who helped you get where

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<sup>3</sup> The highest possible college board score for verbal aptitude at the time.

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you wanted to be and knew ways of encouraging you without patronizing you. He was just a wonderful, wonderful man.

Hopper: What graduate schools did you apply to?

Seydow: I applied to Ohio State, to the University of Mississippi, to Notre Dame, [and] to Ohio University. I think that's all. It was just those four schools. I had got a scholarship from the University of Mississippi. I applied there because I had done my senior thesis, four twenty page papers on William Faulkner. I was interested because of his growing up in Oxford, and they had a lot things "Faulkner-like" there. I was interested in Notre Dame because it was Notre Dame. They offered me a scholarship as well. Ohio State because I had gone through a book and I had seen how many graduate assistantships they gave out. They gave me a graduate assistantship, and I don't remember what the amount of money was. Then, Ohio University was one my four choices, they were a new kid on the block. I had read an article in *Time* magazine where the president, Vernon Alden, - they showed a picture of him in the gym playing basketball with students. I said, "I think I'd like to go there". It also the oldest college in what was called the Northwest Territories. That was Athens, Ohio, the Northwest Territories. But, of course, it was founded in 1804 before the Erie Canal opened. Then west of Alleghenies was considered the hinterlands. I thought here's a school that's really got a history to it. I had also read some things about how they had just won a very important case with the state of Ohio where, since they were the original land grant college, they should have been getting a greater share of the budget than they were. Ohio State was getting all the money, and Ohio University was getting what was leftover. This Vernon Alden hired, stole faculty from top-notch schools, brought them in there paid them really good salaries with the intent to build up the program. I was still thinking of Ohio State during the summer between my graduation from La Salle and my going to graduate school in September.

I should back up a little on a couple of things. I had been in the Peace Corps program between my junior and senior year, and I really liked it. But I was dating seriously a female whom in February of 1965, I proposed to. She was a sophomore at Chestnut Hill College at the time, and she said she would leave college and go to Ohio with me. But, to cover myself, I went out in the job market and applied for jobs. I actually had three job offers so I was balancing them against graduate schools. Waiting to see what was going to happen; Ohio University had also offered me an assistantship. I was working a playground at southwest Philadelphia, 54th and Whitby. I had job in the morning over in Frankford. I was a bookkeeper for a company that made dyeing machines, talk about a dead industry. Then I would get on the EL and go out to West Philadelphia and I worked from twelve to eight. I ran a playground out there. My father, who bought a car when my mother went back to work at the telephone company for four years, they finally got a car. I saw my father's car pull up. I wondered what was wrong. And he comes over and said, "You've got a phone call from Ohio University. You have to

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call them back today. They said 'call them collect.'" So he drives me to the corner where I get on a pay phone, and I call them back. Well, what they were doing was they were offered me an NDEA Fellowship (National Defense Education Act Fellowship) which would trump my assistantship because I didn't have to teach. All I had to do was go to school full-time. They would give me money for my wife. If I had any dependents while I was in school, I would get money for each dependent. They would give me money during the summer, and it was all tax free. Now here's what I think happened, Frank, there was somebody ahead of me on the list who turned them down to go someplace else. I was the next person, and they offered that to me. Well, that made the decision real clear. The only glitch was I wanted student housing, and they said they had two-year waiting list. I said, "That's not fair because I didn't know I was coming until the summer." They wound up bumping me up on the list. In August, my wife and I found out that we had an apartment in student housing, forty-two dollars a month, all utilities included. So we got married on September fourth. I went out there on September eleventh, started school that Monday on September thirteenth, ensconced in an apartment there, and July ninth of the following year my daughter was born.

One thing of interest that intervened was I received my draft notice to go to Vietnam. Because of the Peace Corps involvement, I had already had a physical done, and I was in top notch physical shape. I had had a deferment through La Salle. Here I was now twenty-four years old, and they were going to draft me. I went to the draft counselor who said to me, "Well, can you be a conscientious objector? And I said, "Possibly. But my Father would kill me. So that's just not a something that would be probable." He said, "I see you are married." He saw my wedding ring. He said, "Do you have any children?" I said, "Well, I don't." But I said, "My wife found out two weeks ago that she was expecting." He said, "Do I have good news for you. They are drafting married men, but not married men with children." So all I had to do was to contact my draft board tell them what situation was. They wanted a copy of the Baptismal Certificate, certified, when my daughter was born. She was born July 9th, 1966, and that kept me out of Vietnam which was wonderful. I mean with one side of my being, I felt bad that somebody went in my place, but with another side of my being I sang the "Halleluyah Chorus" that I was able escape something like that. I really didn't have moral or philosophical problems with the war. I didn't -don't think of myself as a coward. It was just that I had something else that was part of my game plan. I wanted to get my degree, wanted to get a job. I didn't want to be sidetracked by two years and something worse that could happen if I were pulled away from my wife. She was only twenty years old at the time when we got married - five hundred miles away from her mother and father, a very difficult decision for her to make. We will have our forty-fourth wedding anniversary on September fourth of this year.

Hopper: While you were at in Ohio was there a particular professor that was particularly influential with you?

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Seydow: There was and it's real irony, because he was not a good teacher. As a matter of fact, he was soporific. I remember a summer class where I could barely keep my eyes open in his class. His name is William Kenneth Bottorff, a real maverick. [He] came from a background like mine. When he graduated high school, he went in the navy. When he came out of the navy on the GI bill, he wound up going to Bowling Green University and got a graduate fellowship to Brown University. [He] worked with one of the top scholars of American Literature, Hyatt Waggoner, while he was there. He was ten years older than I. I was twenty-four; he was thirty-four years old. He was new at Ohio University. He was an absolute character, this guy. He used to have students over to his house. His office door was always open. He said to me that this is lesson to all teachers "keep your eyes and ears open". When I turned in what we called a pro-seminar paper, it was a substitution for a Master's Thesis. I had to take 30 credits for my Masters, and I got six credits for this pro-seminar. I took the seminar with him, and you produced a really substantial paper at the end of it. Turned in the paper to him, he gets back to me in two days. The turn around, this guy would read the papers right away. He said to me, "It be would be a terrible thing to just leave this go at this". And, I said, "Well, what do you mean?" I thought he was talking about sending it out for publication. And he said, "Well, you could build a whole dissertation around this." Three days later, I had for him an outline of a doctoral dissertation. He became the director of my dissertation. I flew through Ohio University. I finished all my course work in two years and set up something for the summer after my second year where I took two courses. I moved back to Philadelphia with my wife, who was pregnant with our second child at that time, and our baby. I took two courses while in Philadelphia so that they were courses I could take in absentia; all I had to do was read material and write a paper for them. [I] started work on a doctoral dissertation, finished it in approximately eight months. [I] finished both my language exams, took my comprehensive examinations, and gave a public lecture. I had a PhD about twelve days short of three years from my bachelor's degree. So I got the Masters in twelve months and the PhD, twenty-three and half months after that.

He's the one who is responsible for that. When I gave my public lecture for my dissertation, a group of faculty and students were in a lecture hall this was part of the defense of dissertation. He got up and introduced me and explicitly in the introduction said, "Anybody who gives this guy a hard time will have to answer to me". I mean, he was my protector. Although I remember during an oral examination he asked me a question, I still remember the question about Emerson as a Transcendentalist. I was treading water in my answer. Now there were four faculty members there. I could pick the committee. I picked two faculty members, the dissertation director, and then the university took somebody from out of the discipline to be the fourth person, kind of quality control thing, I guess. He stopped me in the middle of my hemming and hawing and says, "This question has to be answered, and it has to be answered correctly." [He] brought me right back to the task. He wasn't going to give me any help on it.

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I started talking about Emerson's mysticism. I saw the expression change on his face how pleased he was with whole thing. He was convinced that he had put his imprimatur on somebody who earned it and was not going to embarrass him or the university. A remarkable, **remarkable** person!

I wrote my dissertation out the basement in that row home in Philadelphia. I would go down every day and just work for eight hours. When I finished a chapter, I would send it to him. I would get it back in about five days with all these comments and corrections. The bottom line was good work, keep going. His thought was to get the dissertation done, and then worry about some of things you don't know later on. When you have to prepare a class to teach, that's when you learn the rest of rest of the stuff that hadn't be taught to you in graduate school. The other thing that he told me that was so important was, when you write a paper, you're not writing for the teacher, you are writing it for a larger academic audience. So, I had a couple of publications under my belt when I graduated Ohio University with a PhD. I had what I thought was a very good publishable paper which never saw the light of day. But I'd send it out, and some people at Ohio University were impressed just because I got comments back on this paper, of something that I sent out. What he let me know was you belong in that kind of elite called university professors, university teachers, a wonderful man. He just passed away last year. He would have been seventy-seven when he died.

Hopper:           What was the subject of your dissertation?

Seydow::         It's esoteric, as esoteric as can be. I know there's a copy of it sitting here, someplace. It was called the *Objective Aesthetic in American Literature, 1828 to 1838*. You as a history person know exactly what's involved in that. It was the Age of Jackson. I defined a new literary period between the Knickerbockers and the Transcendentalists. So I had chapters on two major figures, one was Emerson and one was Poe. The other three were on minor figures. One was Emerson's essays. One was Poe's criticism. One was on a Philadelphia playwright, Robert Montgomery Bird, who wrote all these nationalistic plays in the 1820s and 1830s. One was a real esoteric Philadelphia poet I found his manuscripts in Penn's rare bookroom. What would the fifth chapter have been on? A novel called *Rachel Dyer* which was about the Salem witchcraft, by a semi-obscure American novelist. A couple of things were written about him. There was a Twain author's series written about him. But, they were the five chapters. It was extremely workable because no one had written about that.

When I went to Ohio University, I wanted to write a dissertation on Faulkner. On campus Roman King, who was chairman of the department, interviewed me. We had never met before and during the interview he basically said, "Well, I'm going to tell you something right now about your aspirations with Faulkner. I will to make it a point to discourage any of my faculty from directing that dissertation." I remember looking at him, bemused, absolutely confused by what he had to say, and he then explained he had just finished directing a dissertation in Faulkner. It was too much work for the student,

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and too much work for the faculty member, because so many things were being published. He said the student he directed had to resubmit his proposal two different times because books came out basically about what he was interested in doing. So, when I picked this area, it was so esoteric I didn't have to worry about somebody stealing my thunder with a publication while I was working through it. It was a whole field. It was interdisciplinary between history and literature. Bottorff was a real history person so he really encouraged that. It wasn't great literature I was dealing with, but it was a very doable dissertation topic.

Hopper: Was the dissertation ever published?

Seydow: It was not, but my first publication was the third chapter of that dissertation modified just to stand alone on its self. It was published, and I got paid for it. It was published in a Dutch publication called *Costerus Essays in American literature*. They had sent out a notice to academics telling them that they were starting this venture and they were offering to pay for original articles. I sent this to them, and they accepted it. I got paid in Dutch guilders at the time for my first publication. I published that, well, I guess, my first year at La Salle, 1968-69, as a faculty member.

Hopper: After getting your, your PhD, you applied to different universities for employment?

Seydow: I did. I had a made a promise with my wife that, if possible, I would return her to Philadelphia. She was very close to her mother. We moved back here for my third year at Ohio University while I was writing the dissertation. My son was born at Nazareth Hospital. We had very strong roots in the Philadelphia area. My father was dead by then, but my mother was basically by herself. My sister was here with her family. My wife had a brother who lived in Philadelphia. She had one who is in the service and lived in the Norfolk area so that wasn't so much of a consideration. It was her mother and father and her younger sister whom she wanted to be close to.

I applied to a variety of schools. In Philadelphia, I applied to Drexel, to St. Joe's, and to the Community College. I did not apply to La Salle. I didn't think it was good for me to go back to the place where I got my undergraduate degree. I didn't know quite what the relationship would be with people who had taught me. I applied to Georgetown. I remember Georgetown because they actually offered me a job, but they offered me a job that was conditional. It was this. It would be a three-year position with no hope of my being considered for a tenure track position, and their argument basically was that they wanted to bring in new PhDs. They thought it was healthy for the place, but they didn't really have the flexibility to tenure those people. From my end it would be a good place to leave saying I had taught there, and they would give me recommendations to find me a job someplace else. I applied to Franklin and Marshall. They turned me down right away. I went to Drexel for an interview, and they did not make me a job offer. I did not

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even get a response from St. Joe's. Found out years later why. It was just funny situation and the guy who was chair became a very good friend, Bill Lynch. But there were some politics going on, and that's why I wasn't even invited for an interview. Philadelphia Community College offered me a job without even interviewing me. At which point, I called John Keenan at La Salle and said to him, "I am in the job market." This is maybe the spring of 1968, I guess. He said, "Austin App is leaving. We are going to have a position open." Charles Kelly was the Chair of the English Department at that time, Grace Kelly's first cousin. I said, "Charles had taught me one course." He said, "I'll talk to Charles about it." (Laughter) John Keenan calls me back a week later and says, "You've got the job if you want it." That's the way things were done then. "It pays \$8500. You'll have four courses and there's an opportunity for you to teach an evening course." I think that they were paying \$1200 for an evening course, although I'm not certain about that. I said, "Damn, let me talk to Peggy about it and see what she thinks." Well, she was ecstatic. So I called back and I said, "I'll take it." I still hadn't talked to Charles Kelly. Charles Kelly calls me about a week later and in a very formal way, says, "Well, we have to take care of a couple of details about this and that and the like. Can you come in and just talk to me?" So I went in and I don't even remember what he asked me, but I had already had the job. It was just pro forma filling out of some things.

Brother Emery was the Evening Division Dean at the time; I was there for a month and now hired to start in September. I am finishing my dissertation. They set me up in a classroom or in an office in Benilde Hall that had an air conditioner and an electric typewriter. As a two-finger typist, I typed the final version of my whole doctoral dissertation. I used to come in and sit there everyday, Claude Koch and John Keenan had the office. [laughter] I found out in August that they put in a new pay scale and I got a raise from \$8500 to \$8800. It was slightly more, after I had to pay taxes, than what I was getting on my graduate fellowship because by then I had gotten an increase every year, and it was tax free and money for each of the children and for my wife. I was doing very well, but now I would have buy Christmas presents for my mother and father and things - but for my mother anyhow. I wasn't going to be netting that much more, but I had my first job.

Now I was going to tell you one other footnote, Brother Emery. I remember this as if were yesterday. I came in one day to pick up something; I had been painting. Charles Kelly, said to me, "Brother Emery wants to see you." And I said, "What for?" He said, "He just wants to see you. You are going to be teaching a course in the Evening Division in September." I said, "Can I go over like this?" Paint-splattered shirt and shorts I went in and met him. He spoke to me very collegially for five minutes. I had never met him before, but I knew who he was because he taught one of the seminars when I was an undergraduate. But he just wanted to look me in the eye and make sure I didn't have three heads, I guess. He has become my best friend on the faculty over the last ten years, or so, since he's back teaching in the English Department after he had become Academic Vice President and subsequently Provost of the Department.

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Hopper: When you returned to La Salle in the summer of '68, did you notice any difference in attitude of the students towards the college administration and faculty, because of the Vietnam War and the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy?

Seydow: Good point. I remember it was more like 1970 when we had sit-ins and a lot of disruption of the campus. I remember an incident in which a student broke a window, he said, "Unintentionally," in the office of Dr. Tom McCarthy, who was Vice President for Student Affairs. Took place in the hallway of College Hall, the students were sitting in. I remember a disruption that occurred. John Cimino, who was a Norbertine priest, [and] the head of Campus Ministry, was involved in supporting the students in the sit-in. I remember it coming up in a faculty meeting.

I can remember very pointedly and specifically a situation where I was speaking to freshman in an inter-disciplinary program – a very informal program where students had much more latitude than they would have in the regular curriculums. Very experimental, as times were, it was a pass-fail program which meant that some students exploited it and some students really took advantage in the best terms of what it had to offer. That is, to learn without having to worry about formal grading. And I can remember two students in the classroom wanting to turn the whole class into a discussion of the war. I remember my putting the "cabash" on that. Saying to them that war is important, it's important to you and it's important to me, but we have different jobs right now. I am teaching you literature, and you're a student learning literature. That stays outside the classroom. I remember this student being furious at me, as I think if I were the student, I would have been furious with the teacher as well. But I had a job to do, and all that was doing was taking time away from the job. I knew from experience the way those things go. Meaning it would open the door for students now to substitute something else about their own concerns for my syllabus. And I'm still really ambivalent about that. That had to be 1970-71. It's thirty-eight years later. Ambivalent about how I handled it. Whether I discouraged the student, whether I acted as if I was just one of these narrow minded people who was not so good a citizen and didn't understand what was truly relevant to their lives?

Because in those days it was tantamount to - a failure was tantamount to sending a kid to Vietnam. I have a colleague, who wound up going to Vietnam. He said because he failed freshman calculus, and he would have had to repeat that course. I guess he had fewer than twelve hours then. He was drafted right out of a college in, I think it was West Virginia. He went on to get a PhD from Penn in Philosophy, but that's the kind of situation that occurred then. A lot of pressure on the students. A lot of pressure.

There are other kinds of vague memories about that. Realized that La Salle whatever people think it's a very conservative institution. The students radicalized the faculty rather than vice versa. This was no Berkley, nor Cornell. This was no Wisconsin. It was no Kent State. La Salle was much more orthodox in the sense of lot of first-generation college students still. Their parents expected them to knuckle down and get good jobs

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when they graduated. The parents were making sacrifices for that. Students knew that. So while we weren't Ben Franklin University, we were supposed to learn things that could get you jobs. It was important that you knew the subject matter and that you got good grades.

Hopper: One the big changes in La Salle in '70 was the introduction of women into the student body.

Seydow: One of the healthiest things that ever occurred at La Salle. Like it or not, women are an extremely important part of the world. This is unfathomable that in a four year period of development, and I'm not talking about social development, I'm talking about intellectual development that women would be excluded from that kind of conversation that's taking place in the classroom. My wife of forty-four years keeps telling me women are different from men. They have a different perspective on things; they bring something different to the table than what the male agenda is. Then, talk about it in just a kind of healthy way. I can remember sitting in Benilde taking a class and one these of these females from Chestnut Hill would walk by and thirty-three guys heads would turn, and the teacher would have lost everybody in that class until she was out of sight. That's not healthy. So when women came to La Salle, they were smart. Most of us had mothers who we never thought as smart. We thought of them as housewives. We thought of them as subordinate to their husbands. We didn't think of that consciously. That's just the way we acted. All of the a sudden we're finding females who can think and can think not only as well but better than we. The females that I had in the early years were just terrific. They had to be, because, I think I am correct about this, they had to have higher credentials than the males who were admitted. They did have higher credentials (laughter) than the males who were admitted. They were in many respects smarter than a lot of our male students. Never saw any problem through that changing dynamic.

I think it was more of a problem for the Christian Brothers than it was for the lay faculty because, as I believe, the Christian Brothers were proscribed by some of their earlier rules from teaching females. I think in the post-Vatican II world, 1963 on that changed and they were then permitted to teach females. But females were not part of their monastic life. I remember joking about one of my of the Christian brothers who is a colleague saying that females walked all over him. No male did, but he didn't know how to deal with this different species. He just kept saying "yes" when he should have said "no" or "maybe" to them. He would have said "no" outright to some of the males. But that was just one isolated case. Later on we had female administrators and he didn't know how to deal with them either. [He] was always making concessions to female administrators; I don't know whether they batted their eyes at him. I don't know whether they came in with a kind of aggressiveness that he didn't expect, but he was constantly kowtowing to them.

I think that was the main change on campus. The rest of us, at least, we had sisters, we had wives, and we had daughters. It just seemed perfectly natural for women to come in. By the way, my wife got her degree from La Salle at night. She had been a

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classics major at Chestnut Hill when we got married, and she came back to La Salle at night. Our kids were not in school yet, and she went to school two nights a week. Charles Kelly offered to tutor her in classics if she wanted to continue with that degree, but she switched to Humanities. He gave her credit for all those Latin courses that she had: a course in Plautus and Terence, and a class in Vergil and a course in Greek literature that she had taken, toward her Humanities degree. She was one of the first graduates of La Salle who was a female. She graduated in 1972 with her Bachelor's Degree in Humanities, still an overwhelmingly male school. ROTC had gone as a requirement by the wayside, by then. It was still here, but it was an optional program. A lot of the males went on and became professional soldiers made that part of their lives. But it was no longer a requirement for all the graduates, and that was one of the agreements that came out of the sit-ins during the Vietnam era.

Hopper: When you returned here in as a faculty member did you have any difficulties with the transition from student to teacher?

Seydow: I thought I would and I didn't. I made a conscious decision that John Keenan was not Mr. Keenan, he was John; and Claude Koch was not Mr. Koch, he was Claude; and that Joe Flubacher who was the revered dean of the faculty was not Dr. Flubacher, he was Joe. There were people in the Economics Department who were ten years older than I who called Joe Flubacher, "Dr. Flubacher," and I called him Joe. He used to refer to me as a "Young Turk." I was twenty-seven years old when I started teaching here. "You're one of those Young Turks," and I think he really loved me. When he went into an assisted care nursing home, my wife and I used to go and visit him. I took him out to lunch once or twice, and he seemed really to appreciate it. This was so alien to my background. I had called everybody mister and missus. I had Aunts and Uncles who were not related when I was a kid growing because we saw so much of them. They were friends of my parents, that it would be bizarre to call, them, him Mr. Murphy. I called him Uncle Bob; he was no relative and to all the family. And here I am, with the temerity to call Charles Kelly "Charles" but I never called him "Chuck." But I called him "Charles." I had to make that decision, and it was perfectly welcomed. A couple of faculty remember me as a slightly better than mediocre student. Some others remembered me as a luminary, depending on how I did in their classes. And I never had problem. Part of that may be my personality, as my wife said, "You really don't care what people think, do you." "Well," I said, "only certain people, the ones whom I really revere." They couldn't have been nicer to me, kinder to me, patient with me. I looked back at some of the faux pas I made my first couple of years as a teacher. They were along my side supporting me. Don't worry about it; you won't make that mistake again.

Hopper: As a new English faculty member, what courses did you teach?

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Seydow: I can remember being given my first semester two courses in freshman composition, being given somewhere in my first year. I don't know if it was in fall or spring semester, a course in the contemporary novel, and then teaching a course in American literature. Now, the course in American literature was the one I was equipped to teach. It was 19th Century American literature, and that was my field. The composition course, I'd had never taught a writing class in my life. I had taught two literature courses while I was on my fellowship at Ohio University. The contemporary novel course (laughter), I had Charles Kelly who had taught me. I couldn't teach it the way he taught it because, first of all, he seemed to have read every novel that was ever written. Secondly, he was like a walking encyclopedia. He had note cards in front of him in the classroom, but he barely ever looked at them. His style of teaching was very different in that kind of course. Now, I remember teaching this course, and I had President Bro. Mike McGinniss who was a senior English major who was in that class. The Brothers were outstanding students at that time and there were a lot of them. So you'd see the graduation list of the magna and maxima cum laude and FSC, FSC, and FSC - brothers all over the place. But, I remember maybe being a week ahead of the students in those courses with the preparation that I had. I remember teaching the senior seminar and that might have been the first year, but probably the second year. I taught that two-semester course in which I was reading a book a week just for that course because of what the students were writing. I remember reading four Henry James novels in, no, it would have been two Henry James novels in one semester, two in the next semester, four Henry James novels in a year, and that was one-sixth of the preparation for the course. Four novels I had never read before in my life. It was it was a lot of work, and, in retrospect, I wonder I got it all done. Except as my wife keeps telling me, "You were younger then. You could stay awake longer. Your concentration was better." Of course, I was a non-tenured faculty member, so there's a good incentive to work really hard. I think I worked harder my first couple of years than I did when I was writing my dissertation. That was just nine to five; this was five in morning till nine at night and I always worked Saturdays and Sundays.

Hopper: What were the expectations for tenure and promotion when you were a young professor?

Seydow: When I was in graduate school, we had a man named Oscar Cargill who was a visiting a professor at Ohio University. And in my university he came into our class and said, "I have taught more courses in American Literature than anybody alive". We invited him to a graduate forum, and we asked him to talk about how to succeed in the profession. And I think he had his eye on the bar that we set up in corner. So he kept it really brief. "Keep your hands off your students. Keep your names out of the tabloids. Do not be ironic with freshman." Well, I went in naively assuming if I worked I would get tenure. My ethos was, I thought, perfectly in line with La Salle's. There were, I did not think, explicit expectations of publication, because it was a quote "teaching university." If you're teaching five courses every semester, four during the day and then

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an overload at night, there's not a whole lot of time to publish. But I think I was hired with the expectation that I would publish something. So I did have the chapter from the dissertation published. I did write an article about the interdisciplinary program that I wound up directing for a couple years. That was published in a nowhere journal called *Inscape*, but it had a lot of circulation in the Philadelphia area at the Community college and high school level as well as something about Philadelphia teachers of English. I know I published something else during that period but I'm not quite sure, not sure, what it was. Anyhow, I was very lucky in 1972, when my wife graduated, I won the Lindback Award for distinguished teaching. That was something that was nice on my resume because to this day, I think, the people you want to tenure are the people whom you know can do a good job in the classroom. I may be wrong about this, but you can always buy scholars. You can't always buy teachers. It's not fair to the students to have somebody who just loves this discipline, but doesn't know to translate it for them. It's unfair to students to put those two together in a classroom because students are not the object of that person's primary attention, his discipline is. Students, if they are lucky, come second. It's more like they are overhearing the nightingale singing in the tree for its own edification than being directed toward them. So I just assumed that if I did a good job teaching that would be what was important.

I was by, I think, inclination a joiner in this respect. La Salle was very collegial in that the faculty had a real voice in the way that the University was being run. We were represented on key committees. We were represented on University Council. We had the ear of the President and the Academic Vice President. So if you want to be represented, then get involved in those committees. I was involved a couple of key committees. Actually served on the University Council, I think it was before I was tenured, that I served on the Faculty Senate, and then the Faculty Senate put me on the University Council. I know, I served on Council under three different presidents.

Anyhow, I came up for tenure, presented all my material. There were five of us who came up. I was the only one who got it. A fellow with a PhD from Harvard didn't get it; a fellow, whom I shared an office with a PhD from Penn didn't get it; a male with a PhD from Purdue did not get it, and then a female who was ABD, All But Dissertation, at the University of Pennsylvania, she didn't get it, but was subsequently hired as an administrator in the Evening Division. I think, Frank, I shook for two weeks. I thought as long as you did your job and kept your nose clean you would get tenure. Evidently, there was something in the winds that said that private colleges were going to have a hard time attracting students. It was getting more competitive. You had to stay flexible. You couldn't afford to tenure such a high percentage of your faculty. You can't get rid of them later on, blah, blah, blah. But anyhow I got tenure, and it was very important for my family. We really felt safe and secure. I think that's when I started to gain weight. One of my red-neck cousins said to me, "You'll never have to read another book for the rest of your life", as if this was a chore. But I said, "Yeah, imagine that," and I can remember the whole experience. Brother Emery used to go around and tell people personally, when you were promoted and when you were tenured. He also came and talked to you personally that you did not receive sufficient votes for promotion, that you did not

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receive sufficient votes for tenure. So everybody knew when he was coming around that day. It was right after they met that weekend. It was right after Thanksgiving. You'd get the news on Monday morning. One of the happiest days of my life!

Hopper: What year was that?

Seydow: I guess it was 1973 when I got tenure. I think you are five years in place, and then it kicks in. No, it must have been 1974 because then it kicks in at the end of your seventh year when you get the formal letter from the board of trustees and the President that you have what's tantamount to a lifetime contract.

Hopper: In a 2002 interview, La Salle's President Bro. Michael J. McGinniss commented that, "looking back on the professors that he had as an undergraduate here that you showed him how to combine being a friend and a teacher." Is this friend and teacher concept fundamental to your interaction with students?

Seydow: I think so. As I have gotten older, I'm more just literally detached from them. But I will tell you this: I was younger than now when I taught Mike McGinniss. I was only six years older than he. His father had been my eye doctor. Mike and I went to the same grade school although at different times. He went to La Salle High, and I had gone to Dougherty. We used to have, maybe two times a semester; students come over to our house on a Friday night. Now, can you image this in this day and age, but I would have a case or two of beer that I would serve them, and we have potato chips and pretzels. We would actually play word games. I can remember this game, "Fictionary" that we used to play. Sometimes we'd have just a group of student Brothers. They were allowed to go to a faculty member's house for something social, but they wouldn't [laughter] be allowed to just to go out to the movies. I can remember he and Bob Wilsbach who came from Holy Child right over here and who was one of his classmates, coming to the house with some of the other student Brothers. It wasn't like I was doing something that was being kind to them. We had two kids who were in bed, and we didn't go out. We didn't get baby sitters. It was social for us. We enjoyed their company, these bright young men with these kinds of values and commitments that they made. I mean it just was edifying to spend as much time in their presence as possible.

In years later, I would still take some students out to the Winterthur Museum on a Saturday. We'd get a couple of cars together, and we'd go out. Afterwards they'd come back to my house, and they have, I called it, deep immersion in American culture. We'd have hard-shell crabs and Schmidt's beer. It just stuck me as education is something that transcends the three fifty-minute periods a week that I am contracted for. Now, as I got older and as my kids got older, I didn't do that nearly so much. But there's a group that I am still in touch with at least once a year. Just got two phone calls from two guys in that group, they are all fifty-two now. I taught them in their freshman honors class. I think of the fifteen students thirteen became either doctors or lawyers. Pete DeBattiste just called me and e-mailed me about a baseball game. He went from La Salle to Harvard,

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and he went from Harvard to Penn for cardiology. He's a Vice President at Johnson and Johnson right now. There are four of those students from that class and me who are going to go to a baseball game around July 27th, I think. One of them serves as my attorney. He lives in York Pa. I called him on his birthday which is the same as my wife, June the first. Just got two calls from him about Tiger not winning the Masters Open. I have golfed with him a couple of times. These guys have stayed together and every year they have a get together. And the only "adults" invited are my wife and me. We have gone to something like twenty-five out of twenty-seven of these annual reunions that they have. They always held at Pete DeBattiste's house. Tom DeBerardinis and his wife, I taught them both and they are both MDs, were over to our place in King of Prussia back in the fall for dinner one night. They are all fifty-two years old now, so that's something which I enjoy, being with these people. They are interesting, they are smart, and they are good people. They - in some respects - made a real impression positively speaking on our world. There was a vacuum there when my children were growing up, and we didn't do that very much. Now, because of where we live, we can't invite them back to the house.

Although I have thought of bringing a group up to King of Prussia in the fall, going out to Winterthur maybe, now that I teaching this American Lit survey course. We are dealing with this period. Winterthur, as you may know, has the best collection of 18th century furniture in the United States. I am doing something with the 18th century in this course, and they think that there's nobody with any grace or intelligence back then. They read Benjamin Franklin. They see this furniture. They realize that for an upstart nation we had an awful lot of skilled people who lived here, skilled with words, skilled with furniture and the like. So I may do that in the fall. I just - we just don't have the room. I have thirty-six people in that class. If they all say "yes," I'd have to rent a hall someplace in King Prussia to bring them to.

But, to get back to Mike McGinnis, Mike McGinnis is a special kind of person. He's got to have one of the hardest jobs in the Delaware Valley. It's awfully hard to please a bunch of self-starters, and that's what the La Salle faculty is. We are not prima donnas. But we are all self-starters, and every single one of us thinks we know better than the person who is doing the job how it should be done. So he's got potentially one hundred fifty faculty members who are critiquing every single thing that he does. Like all of us he does lose his cool every once in a while, but he never does it publicly. He always says the right thing publicly. And then, when he makes some comments like that, he's got you for life. You've really done your homework to have disinterred that statement, but I know when I read it, I felt very, **very** good about it. He's a very kind person.

Hopper: In 1976 La Salle University was recognized as an American Revolution Bicentennial College. One of the activities that helped La Salle earn this distinction was a lecture series that you participated in with Dr. John White of the Religion Department

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and Dr. Joseph O' Grady of the History Department. Was this one of the highlights of your career here at La Salle?

Seydow: I don't think so. I was glad that I was invited to be a part of it. I'd created a course called "American Dream/ American Nightmare" back when we had a curriculum revision around '72. I did write an article, "America: Dream or Nightmare?" for the *La Salle Magazine*, and I know you unearthed that as well. So it was an interest of mine. I've never been much for seeing my name in print, or getting up in front of the stage. The nice thing about being a teacher is that you get to do that on a regular basis, twelve hours a week. You don't want to show up in social situation and have people asking you questions about literature. You don't want to, at least my personality doesn't like getting on stage, and giving lectures, and having people taking notes and doing things of that sort. But it was just something that I was interested in. I enjoyed it. If that's the one that the Kellogg Foundation sponsored, I think I even got money for it which was always nice, particularly in those days. Every two-hundred dollars helped. And a guy like Joe O'Grady, who was a top notch scholar in American History, it was nice to participate in anything with him.

Hopper: The course that you mentioned, "America: Dream or Nightmare" became a popular general education literature course at the college.

Seydow: It did, I tell people it saved my job [laughter] because I got two sections of it, semester after semester after semester.

Hopper: How did you come up with this idea? How did you develop the course?

Seydow: When I was in graduate school. Somebody in an American literature class wrote a paper about Fitzgerald and the American Dream. Honest to God I had never heard the term before. I was twenty-six, twenty-seven years old and never heard the term, "American Dream." When I started to look into it, I realized how relevant a term that was and in those early 70's one of the demands that students were making, and this was not Vietnam per se, but it was one of the ramifications of this that they were going to be more involved with their education. It was the demand that their studies be relevant. Now, I always thought the sign of a good English teacher is to make the seeming irrelevant, relevant. A good teacher can teach *Paradise Lost* and make it really exciting. The idea behind the American Dreams course was the title itself, I thought it would catch their attention and capture them, particularly when you just proposed it to what appeared to be at least its antonym, American Dreams-American Nightmares. I thought it also a way of injecting, in a subtle way, a kind of moral and social issues into the curriculum. One of the things that had bothered me for years about La Salle, and it stems from my own background was a kind of implicit racism. I grew up in a neighborhood where everybody was white. My graduating class from Cardinal Dougherty High School was five hundred twenty-two, two black males. This is a school in the city of Philadelphia.

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Five hundred twenty Caucasians never really knew black people. Certainly didn't have any as close friends. That's how that the kind of almost subconscious racism perpetuates itself. One of the things that I always maintained about the key to the American Dream and makes it qualitatively different from opportunities in other countries is that one's birth was something that was independent of one's worth. So we don't have kings and queens who have their positions strictly on the basis having the right birthright. Benjamin Franklin, the fifteenth child in his family, can be, even more than Jefferson and Washington, the most notable American in the 18th century - somebody who didn't have an opportunity to go to college, except the college of hard of knocks, et cetera. So it says something about the character of America, particularly people like me from row home Philadelphia who insinuate themselves into a position of tremendous respect and physic income. That's something that I was really close to. The more I read, the more I saw, a lot of great works of American Literature, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Death of a Salesman* have an intimate connection to "dreaming American style." At the same time, all of this, I guess you'd call it "economic injustice" which showed its real ugly face in the last couple of years. Greed is not good. It's one of the seven deadly sins. That's the nightmare side which I know I still have very strong social feelings about. Like everybody else, I'm a materialist, but I have seen too many people make it the "end to all" and "be all" of their lives. This is a way of teaching literature with a kind of almost subversive side to it where students come to realize the American Dream is not about money, it's about something else, that has to do with freedom [and] that has to do with opportunity.

Hopper: In your 1976 article for *LaSalle Quarterly Magazine* entitled, "America: Dream or Nightmare?," you wrote that "One of our chief challenges to America in its third hundred years will be to protect vigilantly the inalienable right of all people to pursue that happiness freely, and to guarantee particularly that opportunity for all its citizens." How do you think America is doing thirty-three years into that third century?

Seydow: (Laughter) Boy, you are really asking a tough question.

Hopper: Yeah, that's a big question.

Seydow: Maybe because you are right on top of that. That's has an echo of something that I would have written. It's certainly something that I subscribe to. I am not an ACLU<sup>4</sup> member, but I was very happy to see the recent court decision that the schools went too far in strip-searching that twelve year old girl in the suspicion that she had illegal drugs in the school. This balance between freedom and the law is a delicate one, a very delicate one. I know I was furious with Michael Chernoff and the Patriot Act Laws and what I thought was very arbitrary use of government power to suppress people who

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<sup>4</sup> American Civil Liberties Union

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didn't think and act the way they did. What was going on with judgeships across this country while George Bush was President was absolutely unjust.

So many of these things I've seen the end result of. My wife and I were in New Orleans on Easter Sunday afternoon. We were in Jefferson Parish in the ninth ward and saw the devastation that Katrina took and heard some anecdotal evidence about the government's response, FEMA,<sup>5</sup> and the State of Louisiana. This was outrageous. We were just in Florida in June. No, we were there in May when the terrible rains hit the whole Daytona and Orlando area. We had rain eight straight days, fourteen inches where we were in the Ocala area of Florida. It's always the poor who are living in the areas that are most vulnerable to being besieged by those freaks of nature. They're the ones who lose their homes first. They're the ones who don't have insurance. They're the ones who have to depend on the Federal Government to bail them out. If the government doesn't help these people out, then these people are not going to survive. Sure, people worry about revolution and the like, but I'm just talking about basic justice. This is what the government should be doing.

Now, we know that justice is not blind. We know the person who can afford the top-notch, marquee lawyer has a much greater chance of beating a serious crime than the person who is stealing milk and bread because his children are starving. Now, I know that's almost a sentimental hyperbole that I just indulged in, but it's something that raises my hackles and gets me angry that the rich, until the last couple of years, do get richer and the poor have more than children. They're having trouble keeping their heads above water. When the gas prices were just back up until a week ago, I don't know how some of these people get to work. I see immigrants, whether they're legal or illegal I don't know, but I see what they're driving, and I know what they're getting paid. I don't know how they can take care of their families. So the nice thing about government is that it does provide free education, and we've got to demand that it be quality education. My children didn't go to the public schools, my wife and I didn't go to public schools, but I'm strong advocate of good public schools. I think the city of Philadelphia is a disgrace with the public school system. I think all the good teachers have run to Central High School or to the suburbs to teach. And I don't know how these kids are ever going to get from being "outs" to being "ins". So that's a long sermon, Frank, that I just gave based on that, but these are things that I care very strongly about and that my only power is with the ballot. Every once in a while it does have some positive consequences.

Hopper: Moving to one of your major projects in your career here, the development of the English Curriculum, and the changes which have occurred over time that you have help to implement and institute. Would you want to comment broadly on that? I was thinking in terms of what is required and what options are available for an English major today than when you were an undergraduate.

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<sup>5</sup> Federal Emergency Management Agency

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Seydow: I have not been a leader in that field. I have been somebody who has made recommendations and put some things in writing and have argued just as one of person in the department for this rather than that. Some other people like Brother Emery who has been a real leader over forty years having to do with the quality of the curriculum at La Salle. More generally about the curriculum, I get upset on a weekly basis about what I think is a watering down of the curriculum. And I always thought of curriculum as - it's a concrete example of what the faculty think constitutes an educated person. Now, I look at the curriculum at La Salle, and I look at what people don't have to take. What they can dodge on the way to getting a bachelor's degree in English is troublesome. I mean we had a language requirement when I was an undergraduate. What was great about that was I passed two language exams in my first two years of graduate school on the basis of the languages that I learned as an undergraduate at La Salle. I didn't have to take a prep course. I just walked in and took the examinations. That's still a requirement for the PhD. If we are not requiring that for English majors, what we are saying is we have almost abdicated that they are not going to go on to take graduate degrees at good schools that are going to require a language other than English for proficiency. Even if it's one language rather than two, how are they ever going to do that?

I think there's been a softening in too many areas. I've seen too many multiple choice examinations, true-false tests. I know that for people in education that it's a way of gauging people's knowledge, but knowledge of facts is not understanding. It strikes me they have to express themselves in essay form. The essays: they have to be written, they have to be responded to, they have to be corrected, [and] they have to be returned. I worry that sometimes we are not delivering those four components. You find out that students are taking a whole course, but they're not writing a paper or they are not reading a book, other than a text book. That the tests are all end of chapter kinds of tests. So, I am concerned about some of those things.

I'd be careful about trying to insinuate my perspective into what's going on at La Salle in 2009. I am not going to be here forever. I keep kidding that I have got another twenty good years left and ten lousy ones on top of that. But that's strictly a joke. I'm semester to semester. It's the younger people who are the ones who are really invested in what La Salle is and what it's going to become. I have to trust them that they have maybe a more mature way of looking at curriculum, rather than my, what might be dowdy and old-fashioned way. They are also closer to the students, to the point where they know more about what they know, what they don't know, what they want them to learn, how to equip them for the twenty-first century world maybe more than my more classic approach to curriculum is.

I am impressed by the quality of the young people that we have. I am impressed by how smart they are. I am impressed by how hard they work. Again, it's La Salle's place in this to respect the freedom that we have and exploited by so few people here. Instead, most people take advantage, in the best sense of term, of all the freedom

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[that] they have to have an impact on the students who are paying a lot money for this education.

Hopper: How do you view some of the courses that been instituted in recent years in many schools: like for example like basic writing, basic reading, really remedial courses that, you know, wouldn't have been in colleges a couple of decades ago?

Seydow: That's again a tough question. And you might be asking the wrong person about that. We used to have at one point in the Evening Division a 00 English Course. So it was remedial English which you did not get credit for it. Students were paying to take a course that would bring them up to the level of the regularly matriculated students, in the old English 101/102 course, now 107/108 course. I have a lot of sympathy for high school teachers whom I think are extremely overworked. Now, some of them who are in good school districts are very well paid, paid better than I am paid. They have my credentials, but very over worked in the sense that they are teaching five classes. They have thirty students per class and if they give them all papers that is one hundred and fifty papers they have to grade. How much close attention can they pay to everything? What happens is the weakest students get some kind of attention, they get sent to a writing lab, or the teacher spends extra time with them. The outstanding students, they get bumped into an advanced placement class. But, what about the rest of the people? I didn't get into the honors program when I went to La Salle, so I would be part of that other group. I want my attention as well. I want somebody to correct all my stuff and respond to all my stuff. They're coming in some respects better prepared and worse prepared than I was for college.

You never know exactly who they are. I give a diagnostic on first day in class of my writing class. And they look okay. Then what you are trying to do is get the B students and turn them into B+ students, and the C students into C+ students. Get them to go past where they are presently are. Every once in a while, an A will jump out, and then you feel successful or you feel you have created a context in which they learned. I've not taught any remedial courses in years, and therefore I don't want make a judgment about the students or the way they're taught.

I do want to make one public comment though. I think there is a lot of grade inflation going on, and I think it's inaccurate. I understand questions having to do with self-esteem, but I think the evaluation that you make of the student should be independent of anything other than what that student has achieved by the end of that semester. That's what it should be a reflection of. I've written letters of recommendation for students whom I gave a D to and said that I thought down the road they would attain a certain kind of academic maturity which would be compatible with the maturity that they showed in my class. It's just an intellectual mismatch. They didn't get good preparation in high school, but I thought they were good people. I have refused to write letters of recommendation for people whom I have given an A to because I thought they were lazy bums who were just really bright and had a great education that they came in with and had no problems at all with the standards that I set in course. So that it's a real complex

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situation, and I know a lot of very serious scholars have thought a lot about this. I haven't.

Hopper: According to a ranking published in January 1998 by Franklin and Marshall College, La Salle was one of the nations leading institutions producing graduates who later earned doctoral degrees. Robert S. Lyons, Jr., a graduate '61, had argued in an article that he wrote for the *La Salle Magazine* that La Salle's emphasis on the development of writing skills in all the academic departments is a key explanation. What do you think?

Seydow: Bob Lyons is good writer. He was an undergraduate here and sent his children here. One of whom I know is an MD, and I've heard he was very good writer. I'll give you an anecdote. It's one that I have cited a couple of times now. Of course it's one case. My dentist went to La Salle and was a biology major here. His uncle who was my original dentist who just passed always last year, was also a La Salle graduate. Well, when my dentist's son was ready to go to college, he wasn't interested in La Salle and wanted to go away from home. He went up to Boston University, majored in business. Didn't like business his first year, so he switched to English. After his sophomore year at Boston University, he transferred to La Salle. When his father asked him, "What's the big difference between La Salle and Boston University?" He said, "They care more about your writing at La Salle". Now I had this young man in two courses at La Salle as an English major - by the way he's now a dentist and he's joining his father's practice next year with a Bachelor's Degree in English. And he was a very serious writer. He really cared about and took to heart corrections and suggestions that I made about his writing. I don't know how universal though that is. I don't know how strongly the message gets back to the students about how important writing is and what a key it is to their success.

I hear stories come back every once-in-awhile. There was a lawyer who came to speak to the Saint Thomas More Society here some years ago. He asked the question, "Is Jack Seydow still on the faculty?" And one of the people said, "Yeah, I have him this semester." And he said, "He taught me how to write." Now that's not really true, all I did was again create a context in which, I think, he learned some things that were being presented and he applied. Then he told the student he had just won a contest in the State of Delaware for attorneys, and it had to do with writing. He came out number one in the state. I looked back at my grade books [laughter]. He got a C from me in freshman writing. He just liked me I think is what it comes down to. But you hold a gun to their head and say this important, and I am going to hold you accountable. Then they learn the rule for the semicolon, and they learn to write with, not just clarity, but with a certain kind of rhetorical flourish that makes their prose sound interesting not just communicating data at the most dull level. I think more people realize we're all in this together. How you express yourself is a very important part of what La Salle values, I think, in its curriculum.

[A five minute rest period was taken.]

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Hopper: We're back for the second section, and we are going into the research and publications. How have your research interests and publications evolved over your time with La Salle?

Seydow: That's an interesting question. Something I wrote back in 70's, one the things I maintained was that from my perspective, anyhow, as a teacher exclusively of undergraduate students that I expected my publications to grow out my teaching. I was not interested in going off on a hobbyhorse that was not going to be so relevant to things that I would be presenting the students just for the sake of mining that for publications. So in a nutshell, I write about what I teach; and therefore, I moved away from the material of my dissertation which really was so esoteric I didn't have a chance to teach into things that I did teach. [I] always had an interest in 20th century American literature so that became the area of publications. Papers that I gave, then afterwards I would turn into articles, or at least try to turn into articles, that would be published. So I moved in the direction of people like John Updike, William Faulkner, and then found a niche in Hemingway studies. The article that you referred to before about "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," that was in *The Hemingway Review*, would have been the most substantial of any of those, Frank. Then a couple of other Hemingway pieces that are a little more popular that were in the *Hemingway Newsletter* that I had published after that.

After I got promoted to Full Professor in 1981, I started to move in a different direction, more in the realm of the English 218 course that I was teaching: Advanced Expository Writing. What I wanted to do was try to model for the students what I thought constituted an interesting piece of expository writing. Scholarly writing, by and large, is not very interesting, so I started to write about other things. I came to the pieces that I had done in *La Salle Magazine* now the first one is quasi-scholarly, the piece about the American Dream that I wrote. I wrote a piece called "Marathon Man" about a man whom I greatly admire Maurice Schepers, who is a Dominican Priest. He and I team taught back in the early 70s in the interdisciplinary program. Then, he was the chaplain at the school in Wyncote that my children had gone to. He and I were just very close friends over the years. So I wrote an article about him based on an interview that I did with him and the symbolic centerpiece of the piece was his running the Boston Marathon when he was fifty-one years old and running in fewer than three hours, an amazing achievement. He's now a missionary in Kenya and has been for over ten years. He was home one summer, and we had an interesting conversation. I said to somebody I should interview him for an article. We sat on my front porch, and I did. Then I had the piece called that I did, "Into Africa" that was in the *La Salle Magazine*. It was an interview with this man who had learned Swahili and would give his homilies on Sunday to an all black audience in Swahili, one of the few white people in the whole area that he lives in.

Then that sort of moved me into other directions. I had a piece in the *Montgomery Record- Doylestown Intelligencer* about my granddaughter entitled, "Molly

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and Me." I had been her quote baby sitter unquote for a year, three days a week for one semester and two days a week for another. I had been on a sabbatical at the time. She was three months old when I assumed that role, and she's just turned twelve. And I wrote this article and I think more people read that article than anything that I have published. I got more feedback from it. Then, I had a piece on the Phillies that I got paid for. That was in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* after they blew the World Series. A couple of former students had seen it and sent me very nice letters about that. I had a piece on women and voting that was in *Daily News*, an Op-Ed piece that I published, I guess about two years ago. That's the direction, in answer to your question, that I moved in, away from what I used to write, the kind of stuffy, scholarly things towards something that's more readable, more interesting, reaches a larger audience and gives me a chance to talk about things that I think are eminently more interesting than literature.

I still think that kind of scholarship is important. But I think it's important, maybe, for the younger people who making their way up-the-ladder and are more recent PhDs than I. Also, for people who are at, not teaching institutions like La Salle, but places that have big graduate schools. I remember, I was up at the Hemingway Collection. It's in the Kennedy Library right out on the point, outside of Boston, Massachusetts - beautiful I. M. Pei designed building. I was up there working in the Hemingway Review looking at some manuscripts which at that time had not yet been catalogued. I ran into to a guy named George Monteiro who teaches a graduate course in Hemingway at Brown University. He was there with thirty graduate students. What they were doing was they were combing through these uncatalogued manuscripts looking for one thing that he was trying to track down for an article that he was working on. And what you realize is all institutions are not created equal. He had thirty graduate students helping him with his scholarly work, and I was there by myself [laughter]. He teaches a graduate course in Hemingway every semester and only one other graduate course, that's his schedule. I realized it's very difficult for somebody like me to compete. Not that I am competing against him, but I am competing to get a spot in a journal against him with the limited resources that I have available to me. Again, my interests have shifted toward other kinds of things. The World War II thing that I got involved with grew out of a Depression project that I was working on. What I found out is these people were dying off and, what they remember, you go and check it, [laughter] and it's not accurate. They've made up too many stories, and that's the problem with the World War II people that I have been interviewing as well. But I am playing around with that. It's still on a back burner now that I am back teaching full-time. It's still an active area of scholarship. I'm still in touch with these people. So that's the way I think I have evolved with my scholarly interests and writing interests over the last twenty five or so years, Frank.

Hopper: Thank you. Do you have any personal or professorial goals at this point that you hope to accomplish?

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Seydow: [Laughter] Interesting that you would ask. One of them is an avoidance goal. The day I read my evaluations, and students say that I am boring, that I am irrelevant, that I'm a nasty old man, that's the day I stop teaching. I still am idealistic enough to think that there's somebody sitting in front of me every semester who has the chance to make the world a better place. Here's the problem, you don't know who that person is. So you treat every single student as if he or she has the potential to change the world. And you hope that you don't get in their way. You hope that maybe what you can do is help them along the way, so that they can open some doors, get in the right position and do something that we'll all benefit from.

Those are rather vague goals. But that's about it. I don't have any great desire to write the great American couplet. I'm not interested in being acknowledged by this or that. I had a couple of book reviews that I had published in the last few years, At one point, I thought I was going to, on a regular basis, be a book reviewer for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* but we ran into an intellectual property disagreement about something that infuriated me. I basically said, "That's it." No more book reviews for *Philadelphia Inquirer* which I think sometimes is a joke when it comes to being a newspaper, particularly one that thinks they are serious about books and reviewing books. While I am always open to invitations to write something, but I wouldn't write on spec any more. I'm not going to write something, send it out and have somebody say that's not quite what we looking for. My motivation would be that if there's an audience there that says this is something we want you to do then I'll do it. But, I am not going to write either where they will pay me a kill fee. I want to make sure that if I put the time and effort into it it's going to see the light of day.

Hopper: How do you thing students have changed over years? Are they still the same?

Seydow: I want to a go on record to say this. I hear comments about there are too many kids going to college who shouldn't be in college. I don't think that's true at La Salle. Last year, I had two students whom I would think should not be in college. One of those two was equipped, but it's just that he wasn't willing to do any work at all that had to do with something intellectual. The other one was ill equipped. I don't know how such a person will pass his courses and get through a place like La Salle.

That having been said, I think it's much more difficult for students going to college in 2009 than it was for me going to college in the early 1960s. There are so many distractions that we read about everyday from the Twitter [and] Facebook distractions, to the internet distractions. [These] are wonderful tools when properly used, [but] something that is so easily to abuse and to be addicted to in all the wrong ways, not in knowledge ways, but in other kinds of ways. Too many distractions in terms of what's available to them at the level of having fun, having sex, just socializing to the max from the moment they get up in the morning, to the moment they go to bed at night. Those were not things that were available to me as an undergraduate. I think one of the

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reasons why I did well as an undergraduate, considering my background, is I didn't have any distractions. As I said, all I did was: I went to school and I went to work. I didn't have any money to indulge myself in anything else. I didn't drink. I do now. I never did drugs. I think I am one of a few people my age who had never even been in the presence of somebody smoking a marijuana cigarette, much less had one. That whole world is absolutely alien to me. I see what the kids have today, and people who are yelling out of one side of their mouth "poverty." But they have got a cell phone, and the bill on it has to be more than my twenty-nine dollars a month for my cell phone bill. I can well afford twenty-nine dollars a month for it. But I don't have a Blackberry, I think they are interesting, but I'm not going to spend the money for an internet access and text messaging on a piece of equipment where I don't need to be connected twenty-four hours a day. I think that's one of the problems with being a student today. They're not as savvy consumers as you would think they are. I always thought they knew much more about consuming than I - meaning they know how to buy their books on-line at 50 percent of what we charge in the campus book store. But there are so many other ways that they throw their money away. I just have trouble believing it. Every time I see a student with a cigarette in her or his mouth I want to grab it, throw it on the ground, and step on it. From an economic point of view, it's outrageous. From a health point of view, it's outrageous. If they are so smart, why are they killing themselves with things of that sort? I understand addictions, but why would they even start at nineteen years old smoking cigarettes because they are away from their parents' observations.

La Salle students are wonderful human beings even though you might think I am implying something else. I have been on the record and was quoted in a Provost article about saying that I had the best job in the world. I have a group of really nice, really smart individuals who sit in front of me. They don't just take notes, they laugh. I have an audience, a built-in audience who are respectful, relatively enthusiastic about what I have to present, and I get paid for that. In that respect it's a great job. I don't have any problem with students and their attitude. I have a couple who, I think, could work harder, but couldn't we all. I have some who are sort of lazy, a little slow really, but never run into problems with disrespect. I think in many respects their parents are getting their money's worth at a place like La Salle. I think I understand how, when they don't do as much work as they should, how difficult it must be for them. They've got so many things available to them instantaneously, and that sometimes money can hurt you rather than help you. I didn't have the money, so I couldn't indulge in any vices. I had to keep my nose to the grindstone. I didn't have a choice. They have a lot of options, an awful lot of choices.

Many of them are much more mature than I was, and I was two years older than most undergraduates. They can talk to me. They have a way of talking about things like a grade they got in a paper, that's really impressive. That is, they can talk to you without whining, they can talk to you without begging. They know how to approach people and that's very mature, very impressive coming from them. So what I would tell you is that I like our undergraduates, and I will defend them when somebody who's

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having a bad day starts to make generalizations about them. I think they're wrong. They are not so bright as the Jack Rossi(s) and the Jack Readon(s) and the Jack Rooney(s) of the world when they went to La Salle in the 40s, the 50s and 60s were. But they'll do what you tell them to do, they'll do it consciously, and they'll do it honestly. That makes my job great.

Hopper: How have the faculty members changed over the period?

Seydow: You know there's very interesting inversion that's occurred in my impression in the last, let's say, forty-five years at La Salle. I think the faculty in 2009 are better than the faculty whom I had in 1965. I think they've got degrees from better schools. I think they're publishing better and more things than that faculty was publishing. I think the students are not as good as they were in 1964 though. There's a disconnect here. We had students who pushed the faculty in 1964 because we were so bright and upward mobility-bound. I think it's the faculty who are pushing the students in 2009 because I think there's a much greater gap between this faculty and the students in terms of their academic abilities than there was back in 1964. There were some occasions in 1964 where I got the impression that I was smarter than the faculty member. I think in 2009 that doesn't occur. I think the faculty members are much smarter than the students that they have. So that we have in some respects, a faculty better poised to teach top-notch students.

I don't think we are getting as many top-notch students now, as we got forty years ago. The evidence might be that article that you mentioned from Bob Lyons. How many of our students are going on and getting PhDs now? The English Department and the Economics Department had national rankings in the top ten percent in the amount students relative to size of the school who went on and got their PhDs in Economics and English. I only know of two of our students who are proceeding toward a PhD right now in English. So there's a big change there.

One of the other ironies may be too though these men who taught me back in the sixties were extremely effective teachers. Now maybe I have romanticized that a little bit. Maybe it's I was so motivated that anything they had to offer I was hungry to take. I'm not that sure that the teachers whom we have in 2009 are as effective in their communication with the students. Now part of it may be that gap that I alluded to. They are so aloft, with their heads in the clouds in terms of their own intelligence and degrees, and the students are still not at that level where they can absorb what these people have to offer.

Another consequence of that is that as we move and evolve from a college to a university, from a teaching school to one that values very much research and publication, these teachers may be more committed to the things that the institution may be valuing more. How much scholarship are they engaged in than the other teachers who weren't publishing, but whose students were the sole focus of the time they spend on the campus. I think the evolution of La Salle to a two and three day teaching schedule has also not

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helped. It used to be these people were here all the time, They were teaching five days, more than four days, but they were here and available, accessible four days a week. Today's faculty is not. Again, that's a terrible generalization to make, but it seems that a lot of rewards are going toward people who find there is a disincentive to spend too much time with students. They get in the way of your other work.

Hopper: Can you offer some thoughts on how the Christian Brothers' role in the University has changed?

Seydow: Well, it's changed quantitatively, just look at the numbers. I think of all the Christian Brothers who taught me when I was an undergraduate and who were in real key positions. Vice President of Student Affairs was a Christian Brother. The Dean of Arts and Science was a Christian Brother. The Dean of the Business School was a Christian Brother. The Academic Vice President was a Christian Brother. And the only thing that has endured through all the changes is the President of the University is still a Christian Brother, and that's by constitution that that exists, not that Mike wouldn't be the president if they said you could take anybody at all. So, they've diminished in terms of just the numbers. I think it's very difficult for the Catholic Church, just generally speaking. How do you staff these positions? The Brothers have had to retrench. I'm sure in terms of some of their high schools, and they have since Vatican II many more options for the Brothers, other kinds of ministries that they can go into. I think they have a little more choice involved. They not just by their provincial "go here". They discuss that and decide what the best situation for them at the time is.

I think it is a definite loss for the university that the Brothers can't be as visible as they once were. I'll tell you a 20th and Olney reason why. I disagreed, and disagreed very passionately, with a couple of things that happened with the way La Salle was being run in the 70s in the 80s. I disagreed with Christian Brothers, two of them in key positions, about the way they were running things. Never once, though, did I ever disagree with them as far as their ultimate strategy. They wanted what I wanted. It was the way they employed their tactics, their approach that I disagreed with. Never once did I ever suspect them of doing things for their own edification. There was no doubt in my mind, that everything they did was for the good of students at La Salle and to perpetrate La Salle as a quality institution.

There is a temptation to be so cynical about the motives of some administrators in our modern age. That when you see how they are constantly feathering their nest, looking for their next job, a Provost who wants to be a President and so does things that make him look good and gives rewards to people who make him look good. It has very little to do, from my perspective, with enhancing the quality of education at La Salle. It has to do with something that looks real good on paper which he can put into his annual report and then use it as a basis for securing a better position or holding on to the job that he has, or trying to get more money from the Board of Trustees for the job that he has. That comes off as being very cynical. I mean it more as skeptical. I have seen too many examples of this occurring at La Salle. I've seen people get promoted, who don't

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share my values having to do with students as our *raison d'être*, "reason for being." The moment that it becomes something else, that's the moment that we should go out of the business. That's what a college is in business for. That can be at any single level. When the sports program gets out of whack, I start to mouth off. This is something that can be a disgrace at La Salle, rather than an enhancement. That's my second or third homily, Frank.

Hopper: La Salle has been a big part of your life. What has La Salle given to you? What have you given to La Salle?

Seydow: Well, all I can say is La Salle has given me much more than I have given La Salle. They are not concrete things. When you want to go work everyday, when you want to go the work even when you don't feel good, when you want to go to work even though you are not as well prepared as you think you should be, well, that's one of the things La Salle has given me. It's given me a real context of meaning. So outside of my family, this is the place that I feel very at home with. And you're right. I have spent a lot years, forty years in a classroom, five years as a student, counting my tenure in the Evening Division for a semester so that's forty-five years of my almost sixty-eight years. That's a substantial amount of time. Even when I get really "ticked off" at some of things that should not occur at a place like La Salle with its history and at least expressed values. It's still a wonderful place to be.

Now, I realize I am going around and pruning the trees in the Garden of Eden. It's been the perfect fit for me. When you look at "the road not taken"- you know my wife will make comments about, well like you could be retired with a pension of such-and-such now from so-and-so, and look at what you would have made. And I said, "I would have been in jail, if I had taken that job. Somebody would have offered me a bribe, and innocently I would have taken it and not realized this." There's never been a problem at La Salle as far as my sense of, "Is this is a place that I should not have come to and should have not spent so many years at?"

I am very proud of my affiliation with La Salle. They gave me an opportunity. They let an "out" in to go here as an undergraduate. Then, they gave me a second opportunity to come and teach here. Still a kind of nobody from Ohio University, not a prestige graduate school, and they gave me tenure. Then, I got promoted. If that happened, what it says is what I value is something that they value, meaning that I did not have to compromise anything. I did what I thought was right, and they came in and endorsed it. Like a student, rather than try to get an A in a course, aims for excellence, and the teacher recognizes that and gives the student the A. That's the way I feel about my affiliation with La Salle.

Again, I don't want to sound like Pollyanna, because I think there're some dysfunctional things that occur on a daily basis at this university. But, I don't have to be part of that. I go into the classroom, and I teach my classes. Nobody micro-manages me. Nobody interferes. The Chair lets me teach what I want to teach. And, sure I'm not happy about teaching two composition classes in the fall. I am all the way back in 1968

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when I was a new hire. But, consider the alternate, not teaching anything? Maybe that's the kind of thing that gets you into heaven, meaning you doing something where you're not getting anything out of it. I don't get any intellectual satisfaction out of teaching a freshman composition, but I do get a lot of satisfaction when I see that I might have made a difference in some student's life. You read the evaluations and say, "I wonder who wrote this" because this is a really kind, nice observation. It's a good job.

Hopper: Thank you. Is there anything additional topic that you would like to comment upon?

Seydow: Boy, have you covered the whole gamut and given me a sort of a basis for both my vituperation and editorializing. I just can't think of anything, Frank, that I would want to talk about.

Hopper: Thank you, professor, for participating in our oral interview on History of La Salle University. The interview will be deposited and preserved in the La Salle Archives.

Seydow: Well, thank you. You were very prepared and very thorough with the trigger questions you asked. All the background information that you had at your finger tips just in case this fell flat. You were ready to stimulate me to remember some things with that. I think I remembered most of the things I wanted to talk about. So thank you, Frank. I am honored by this.

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