

Pamela Johnson
History 650
April 30, 2013

INDEX

Narrator: Richard Monastra
Interviewer: Pamela Johnson
Time/Date: 11:00 AM/March 2, 2013
Location: Mr. Monastra's home in Wallingford, PA

ABSTRACT

Richard Monastra is a 1968 graduate of LaSalle University. Following his graduation from LaSalle, he accepted a job at Collingdale High School in Delaware County, PA. He worked there from the fall of 1968 through the spring of 1970. Due to budget cuts, his contract, as well as several others, was not renewed. He was then hired at Glassboro Middle School in New Jersey, where he worked from 1970-1972. He taught 7th & 8th grade U.S. History and Geography. Once again, he was laid off due to budget cuts. After Glassboro, Mr. Monastra obtained employment at Interboro High School where he taught a myriad of courses from 1972 until another lay off in 1983. He was called back to work there until 1985, when he was laid off again. He worked briefly at Haddonfield High School for two years, until he was hired at Buena Regional High School in January of 1989 and worked there until his retirement in 2009. He has taught, and continues to teach, at the county college level.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Audio File 1

- 00:01 Interview introduction. Interviewer's name, date, interviewee's name, location, purpose of interview and permission to conduct the interview.
- 00:18 We begin the interview with questions regarding his background. Mr. Monastra was born and raised in Philadelphia. He describes his ethnicity as "all Italian" and was raised Catholic. His mother was Carmella (Dellaratta) and his father was John J. Monastra, He says he is a better Catholic now as he has gotten older. His mother was one of 11. His father was one of 3. Both of his parents were born in the United States but his grandparents were all born in Italy or Sicily, having arrived at the turn of the century. His maternal grandparents arrived somewhere between 1910-1911 and his paternal grandparents arrived somewhere between 1912-1913.
- 1:48 He describes his father as "kind of stern" but after finding some letters from his father to his mother after his father's death, he said he was "generous and romantic", a side he did not see. He says his father was "a very stern man" and "not very driven" and "kind of shy". He died at the age of 56 from cancer. They were not particularly close. He says he thinks this is typical of the time period. He says his dad "transferred" his love of baseball to Mr. Monastra and his sister.
- 4:01 Although his dad was eligible for the draft during WWII, he was turned down. He was considered 4F [someone with a physical ailment that precluded them from eligibility]. Many of his father's neighbors resented the fact that their sons had been drafted but he had not. His father always took that very personally. He made an effort to contribute to the war by taking a job making materials for the war.
- 6:04 Mr. Monastra describes his relationship with his mother as very good and very close. He and his sister were both very close with their mother. It was just the two siblings as his mother lost a child in between. They are four years apart. His mother, "all the mothers in fact", went to all the school functions. He said there were very "defined roles" in Philadelphia at the time. Dads worked, mom dealt with the children. His mother worked part-time when his father got sick. His father insisted that she did not work until they were in at least 8th or 9th grade. He came home for lunch every day which his mom had waiting for them.

- 7:08 He discusses the socio-economic make-up of the neighborhood. Job lay-offs were common. A lot of men worked seasonal work. They worked very hard when the work was there but sometimes they did not have work for 2-3 weeks at a time.
- 7:35 In this section, Mr. Monastra discusses what his parents' relationship was like. He says they were very close. They had their rough spots like most married couples. Divorce was not heard of in their household, family, or neighborhood. "NOBODY got divorced". It was taboo. His parents were never physical with one another. He said occasionally he would find his parents holding hands.
- 8:20 Neither of his parents attended college. His mother quit high school in tenth grade to help support the family. His father finished high school but never had a school ring. Years later, Mr. Monastra and his sister bought their father a school ring. A jeweler was able to find out what his father's school ring looked like the year he graduated from South Philadelphia High School in the 1930's.
- 9:22 Here Rich discusses his relationship with his sister. He says they are "very, very close and always have been". He is 64, she is 60. They had normal sibling fights but as they grew older they grew closer. They both loved rock 'n' roll and the Phillies. His sister did not attend college. She graduated high school from St. Maria Gorretti. [In the 50's, they were referred to as "Gorretti's Gorillas".]
- 10:40 He explains that all the boys that were Catholic went to Bishop Neumann and the Catholic girls went to St. Maria Gorretti. They had a lot of joint activities, but because of dropping enrollment, the two schools have merged. His sister graduated high school in 1968 and went directly into the work force.
- 11:39 He describes his childhood as "fun". He had a lot of fun inside with his family as well as outside with his friends. He described growing up in Philadelphia in the 50's as "absolutely magical". He and his friends were always outside playing. They hit the streets at 8:00 a.m and didn't come home until dinner. He thinks a lot of that peaked around the 60's. The school was the center of a lot of their social and athletic activities. All of the neighbors were very friendly and watched everybody else's kids. He grew up in row home [which he says are called "townhouses" now].
- 13:55 Mr. Monastra discusses the relationship he had with his grandparents. His maternal grandfather died before he was born. He only knew him through reputation. He was very close to his maternal grandmother, however. He was the

first grandchild. His grandmother had 40 + grandchildren. He has a very large extended family which was very close. They all lived in South Philly.

- 15:18 Mr. Monastra said his grandmother¹ gave him his “first lesson in politics”. He spent a lot of time at his grandmother’s. One day when he was off from school, he questioned his grandmother about the pictures on her mantel. She had a picture of the Virgin Mary, a picture of his deceased grandfather, and a picture of Franklin Roosevelt, each with a votive candle in front of it. FDR’s picture left an impression on him. His grandmother had what he calls a “beautiful lilting accent”, half English, half Italian. When questioning his grandmother about FDR’s picture, his grandmother said “that is a Frankie Roosevelt. He’s a good a man for da workin’ man. When you get ready to vote, you remember, that the worst Democrat is better than the best Republican for the workin’ man”. He said he still considers this even today when he votes. Mr. Monastra considers his grandmother his hero.
- 19:40 I questioned him about the role of the Church in his childhood. He says the Church is not like it is today. He feels it [the church] took advantage of people’s lack of education. People put blind faith in what the Church said and what the priest said. It was a big part of his life. He says it was very rigid and very strict. As part of my follow-up question, he says he believes the strictness of the church caused a lot of people from his generation to turn away from the Church. They got tired of the ritual and tired of literally being “beaten”. He has a scar on pinky finger from Sr. Mary “Cruelty” who hit him with a ruler for writing with his left hand.
- 24:00 I inquired about the specific gender roles of the time period and specifically in his neighborhood. Dads worked and moms stayed at home. There were exceptions in some cases like widows who had to work to support their children. He says now that he looks back, he can remember the resignation on some of the mens’ faces as they “shucked” off to work. He said most of the jobs were blue-collar: cops, firemen, and mailmen. Most of the mothers stayed home. If the mothers did work, it was usually part-time, in which he calls “clean jobs” such as sales girls. They only worked if it was needed to help support the family. Their main job was raising the children. The church used to reinforce this idea that it was a woman’s role to have babies and that they should not be put in day care. It was not the school’s job to raise children; it was the mothers’.
- 26:03 Mr. Monastra discusses the schools he and his sister attended. They both attended St. Edmond’s Parish School from K-8th. He attended Neumann High School and then finally LaSalle for his undergrad work. He discusses what Catholic school was like in the 1950’s. He says he received a good, solid education. Class sizes were large, sometimes upwards of 50-60 students. They were taught a lot of math

¹ Mr. Monastra’s maternal grandmother became a widow quite young. She raised 11 children on her own in a row home in South Philly.

and language arts. Reading was emphasized but not a lot of science. He said the nuns were very good teachers. He also said it was the first time he realized nuns were women.

- 28:57 His neighborhood was primarily Irish and Italian, a few Polish and one Jewish family. There was also a synagogue in his neighborhood. He also said that German immigrants arrived in his neighborhood after WWII. He learned they were refugees from Nazi Germany. He remembers that they always looked like they were hungry, that they always had a sick look about them. There were no black families at all.
- 32:00 Here Mr. Monastra describes what he did for fun as a young child. They swam at the public pool. They made up games like street hockey before it was an “official” game. He says the kids were very creative and resourceful. He says that he has spoken to elementary school teachers today and one complaint they have is that children are not creative or resourceful. Because the families had no money, the children had to be resourceful. The kids also used to ride the subways for fun. His favorite childhood memory is being with his grandmother.
- 34:42 In answer to a question, Mr. Monastra said he rarely keeps in touch with anyone from the old neighborhood. He is however, still close with three of the men. They all attended LaSalle together. He goes on to discuss how his high school and his generation lost so many men in Vietnam. Right after high school, many of the men were drafted. Two from his neighborhood never came back. He specifically discusses a friend from high school, Bob Burlte. They were close in school. Bob had just gotten his draft notice and was leaving for basic training the following week. The next thing he heard about Bob is that he had been killed.
- 37:17 The military was taking guys right after they graduated from high school. Men went from basic training, to advanced infantry training, to Vietnam. He discusses how Vietnam affected U.S. foreign policy, our psyche as a people and as a nation. Men were having draft physicals and receiving draft notifications a week before college graduation. He said the draft physical was like a class reunion, running into men he went to elementary and high school with.
- 39:20 Mr. Monastra worked several jobs while he was in college as well as in high school. He delivered papers and worked at a drug store. He worked there in the summer. During the school year he worked evenings and every weekend. He made \$12.00 plus tips delivering medication. He also worked at a grocery store. He only made tips delivery groceries.

- 40:34 In answer to a follow-up question regarding work and activities, he said he did participate in track in high school as well as baseball. He played first base. He said he wasn't fast enough and only won one track meet, beating a student from Gloucester Catholic.
- 42:34 I questioned Mr. Monastra regarding his parents' expectations for him and his sister regarding college. His mother instilled in him that he had to go college to get a good job to be the "provider" for his wife and children. It was stressed to his sister, on the other hand, that she would get married and have children. His father was willing to "let" his sister go to college but she was not interested. Mr. Monastra thinks she may have internalized the message that it was her role to get married and have children. His mother was very insistent that Rich attend college. He believed it stemmed from his parents' generation wanting their children to be better off than they were.
- 44:10 LaSalle's tuition at the time was \$500.00 a semester. His parents paid for the first semester. \$500.00 was a lot of money for them. From the second semester on, Rich had to pay for college himself. He worked as a bus boy, on a loading dock, and in the mailroom at the Veteran's Administration. There were no loan programs as there are today. There were no grants available either.
- 46:18 [A friend drops by to pick up Phillie's tickets from Mr. Monastra. I stopped the tape and we took a short break]

Audio File 2

- 00:10 Here we begin Mr. Monastra's discussion on how he ended up at LaSalle. Two of his closest friends had applied to LaSalle so he applied as well. He originally wanted to go to West Chester but the head of Neumann refused to send his transcript to West Chester because it wasn't Catholic. However, he ended up going to LaSalle. He majored in history. He knew immediately that he wanted to major in history. He believes it is best to major in your subject area instead of education.
- 2:36 Mr. Monastra discussed his freshman year of college wherein he admits he did not do very well. He had a difficult time adjusting. For many kids of his generation, they were the first ones to graduate high school, let alone go to college. Even though he graduated in the top 10% of his class in high school, he soon found out that college learning is a lot different. He was also working while in college as well as having a "crazy ass" girlfriend. He was on academic probation his first semester. The Dean at the time reminded him that if he failed out of college, he

could end up in Vietnam. He sought out advice from a former boss who told him to focus more on school and get rid of the girlfriend. He was off probation by his sophomore year.

- 7:05 Mr. Monastra and his friends were “day hoppers”, meaning they lived at home and not in the dorms. They rode the subways to school. The majority of the students were “day hoppers”. He lived with his parents during college. He went to class during the day and worked at night.
- 8:00 I asked Mr. Monastra which professors at LaSalle made an impression on him. His two favorites were Ralph Thorton his English teacher. He says that Prof. Thorton taught the students how to write. He carries with him [figuratively] all these years later, a quote by Dr. Thorton; “The mark of an educated person is the ability to communicate verbally and graphically”. He said that Thorton cleaned up their essays and really taught them how to write. He also taught them how to articulate by having them putting candy in their mouth when they spoke. It was among his favorite classes.
- 11:34 His other favorite teacher was Brother Anthony Robert who died very young from cancer. He had Br. Robert for two courses in Philosophy. He was very good. Br. Robert also said something that sticks with Mr. Monastra until this day; “The purpose of education is to raise more questions and not to provide answers. My job here as a teacher is to force you to question”. He [Monastra] said he loved that quote and would always put it on the board of the classrooms in which he taught. He says Br. Robert was a good man and a good teacher
- 12:54 Here he discusses how the Christian Brothers opened up the students’ minds to other non-Catholic writers. This forced them to question their own faith to the point where some of them fell away from the ritualistic aspects of the church.
- 13:35 At this point, I asked him if he knew he wanted to teach immediately upon entering college, which he responded with “yes”. He knew since childhood that he wanted to teach. He always loved schools, being around schools, being around books. He loved to go to the library. In fact in 6th grade, he had the idea that he would read the entire encyclopedia. He has always loved reading biographies. His mother gave him his very first book, *Robin Hood*, which unfortunately, he lost. He said he must have read it 50 times. He said his mother knew he enjoyed learning. She gave him a book when he graduated grade school called *A Day of Infamy*, about the attack on Pearl Harbor by Walter Lord. He has read all of

Lord's books about world history. The book cost \$4.95 which was a lot of money for his mother. He says she must have saved "a few pennies a day" to buy the book.

16:20 I questioned him regarding his participation in athletics at LaSalle. He said when he was not in the library studying, he was working. He wasn't into clubs much either. He was, however, involved in some of the anti-war rallies. On Wednesday and Friday afternoons, he went to the anti-war programs. He was able to hear people from many genres of society: blacks, Republicans, Democrats, Socialists, and even a member of the American Communist Party. All the t.v. stations were there filming the speaker from the ACP. People were there protesting his presence on campus. He also did not like "the whole fraternity scene". He thought it was snobbish and exclusive which he believes "cut across the grain of which the Christian Brothers were trying to put forth, this idea of egalitarianism".

19:15 In light of the fact that Mr. Monastra attended college during the 1960's, a very tumultuous time in our nation's history, I asked him what effects could be felt on campus. He said there were two, possibly three professors that acted as catalysts to this. One was Art Hennessey, a history professor. He opened his eyes to what Asia was really like, as far as the history and colonization. He started to think about Vietnam War in a different way. The other professor was Dr. Bernard Frank, a rabbi from a local synagogue who was brought in to teach comparative religions. He showed the students that there were other religions in the world besides Catholicism. I commented on how progressive that was for the time. His response was, "that is the Christian Brothers".

21:37 I questioned Mr. Monastra regarding the general consensus at the time on campus regarding the Civil Rights movement and Vietnam. He believes that the consensus was there was something wrong, and they [his generation] had to do something about it. They didn't know how to go about it. He found the business majors to be pro-war. He thinks this was because these majors had the inside track to a lot of the jobs. They were being recruited on campus by large companies [Military Industrial Complex] to work for them. He believes, however, that most were against the war. There were three groups: those who were very much against the war, they were pro-civil rights, pro-women; a moderate group who could go one way or the other; and then a small portion that were pro-war. He said he had a "foot" in first two camps. He said some issues he waffled on but he was very much against the war. He did participate in a trip to D.C. where he picketed the White House, throwing food on the White House lawn. Interestingly, all students were required to take R.O.T.C. for two years. During the protests, he would wear his R.O.T.C. jacket with peace medals. However, he only wore this outside of campus.

- 24:16 Mr. Monastra was finishing up his senior year when Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968. LaSalle had a memorial service for him at one of the chapels. He said he doesn't think there wasn't anyone on the campus that wasn't touched positively by that experience. There were black leaders from the area that came to the campus to speak. He said he feels the campus was mostly pro-civil rights. Generally, the men on campus were in a progressive spirit. Once in a while you would see an interracial couple which he believes was being done more out of fashion than spirit. He said there were few African-American students at LaSalle. LaSalle did not get their first black professor until 1968. He remembers only two women professors, in the foreign language department. He said there *may* have been a woman in the science department.
- 26:40 1968 is considered the most tumultuous year of the decade. Here I discuss with Mr. Monastra what life at LaSalle was like during that year. He said Philly was nuts. There were marches and protests in the city. There were rallies held. He discusses a particular rally at Dilworth Plaza where thousands of people showed up. He describes LaSalle as the "calm in the urban storm". There were a few campus rallies. There were some radical elements. There was an attempted sit-in but did not work out so well. He said it affected his senior year in a limited way. Most of the seniors were focused on graduating and getting a job. They were still motivated by "the American dream".
- 28:40 Here we discuss the day Martin Luther King was assassinated. Mr. Monastra was student teaching at Southern Philadelphia High School. He was taking on his 3rd or 4th class the next day. It was a racially and ethnically mixed school. It was a good example of urban education. The school erupted in riots that day. Windows were being smash. Furniture was being thrown out the window. Fights were breaking out. The principal hit the fire alarm to get everyone out of the building. Mr. Monastra and the department head tried to make it down to the first floor. As they are descending the steps, two students were heading up the steps, one with a broken glass bottle. The department head braced himself on the wall, and kicked the kid right in the head. The next day the city closed all the schools. Many of the other students who were doing their student teaching at the time had similar experiences.
- 35:36 I ask Mr. Monastra about his involvement with LaSalle as an alumni. He is still donates money every year. He goes to the basketball games, especially against Villanova. He went to one reunion.
- 36:36 Mr. Monastra's overall experience at LaSalle was an extremely positive one. "I would not have traded it for the world" he says, adding "they took this kid, who was a very scared, insecure kid from South Philly, very parochial in the literal

sense of that word, and the Christian brothers and all the teachers, lay teachers, ran us through these courses, and they were wonderful. It was a wonderful eye – opening, socially opening experience for me”. He met people from all walks of life. It was a very broadening experience, a very well-rounded education, socially, politically, academically. He believes out of all the Christian orders, the Christian brothers do the best job of providing this well-rounded education.

40:48 At this point, we move on to Mr. Monastra’s teaching career. His first full-time teaching job was at Collingdale High School in Pennsylvania, from September, 1968 through June of 1970. He taught 11th and 12th grade US History and American Government. He was also the assistant wrestling coach. He was then hired at Glassboro Middle School in Glassboro, NJ from September of 1970 through June of 1972. Ironically, it is here that he met Kenneth Soboloski, future principal of Buena Regional High School, who will eventually hire Mr. Monastra. From September of ‘72 through June of ‘83, he worked at Interboro high School in PA. He taught 11th and 12th grade Sociology, Psychology, Honors U.S. history. He was also the coordinator for the Gifted and Talented Students’ Program and a student council advisor. He was laid off along with 30 others in ‘83. He was recalled back to Interboro in ‘84 until he was laid off again in ‘85. He was hired by Haddonfield High School in N.J. where he worked until 1987. In January of 1989, he was hired by Ken Soboloski, his former co-worker from Glassboro, as a U.S. History and Psychology teacher at Buena Regional High School. He worked at Buena until his retirement in June of 2009. This is where I met Mr. Monastra.

53:49 Since Buena was his last place of unemployment, and where Mr. Monastra worked the longest, I focused on his teaching experience at Buena. The student body was somewhat larger than it is today but similarly diverse. He was surprised by the number of Hispanic students.² He found these parents to be extremely grateful and appreciative for giving their children an education. One father brought in a bushel of tomatoes to thank Mr. Monastra.

56:00 I asked Mr. Monastra how much Buena has changed from the time he began working there until he retired. He said the school was pretty much the way it was when he first began there. He says the kids are decent. They are still motivated and many went onto college. He said he used to try to challenge the kids. He remembers one particular student. She played field hockey. He describes her as

² Buena is still a large farming community, employing many Hispanic immigrants to work on the farms. It was originally settled by the Spanish and remained largely Hispanic until Italian immigrants began moving in at the turn of the century.

“one hell of an athlete, but one hell of a student as well”. She was eyed by Notre Dame. He and one of the counselors, and perhaps another teacher, worked with the family to get her into Notre Dame. She received an academic as well an athletic scholarship. Unfortunately, she was so homesick, she came home after one term.

57:48 As a teacher myself, I was curious to know what changes Mr. Monastra saw in the students over the years. He feels they are less motivated, they want to be entertained. He feels there is a disconnect between the adults and the teenagers today. It is hard to bridge the gap. They are very tech savvy. He thinks they are much more into their “secret life”. School is an afterthought. Their jobs, their cars, and their social life is their focus. He thinks that is the biggest change.

59:33 As a follow-up question to his comments about students, I asked if he thought it wasn't so much the kids that have changed, but the parents. He said absolutely. Parents have attempted to give their kids what they didn't have and as a consequence, ended up spoiling them.

60:00 At this point I ask him what he thinks about the role the federal government has taken in education. He thinks they could do more. He believes there should be more federal aid to education to get the states “off the hook and in turn get tax payers off the hook”. He likes some of the grant programs.

61:11 I clarify and ask about the micro-managing the government is doing in education. He feels they need to back off. He believes it is an attempt to compete on an international basis. He says the mandates from the state are “counterintuitive” to what goes on in the classroom. Teachers have become frontline social workers. They deal with pregnancies, drug abuse. There are programs focusing on drug and alcohol use, teen pregnancy. He doesn't think that this should be the role of the school. The school should focus on educating people on preparing them for college, the work force, the service. He would like to see kids do a year of national service upon graduation like they do in Europe. He pointed to Sweden as an example. He believes though that because they are a smaller country, and more homogenous, is why it is a successful program. He continues to say that he doesn't know if American kids would do something like that.

1:04 He continues with his opinion about the micro-managing of education on behalf of the government. The government needs to back off, just set some broad standards but leave it up to the individual school districts or maybe even the states to figure it out. He feels that No Child Left Behind is “bogus”. He says it is the “easiest kind of teaching, you teach to the test”. We need to get back to Bloom's Taxonomy.

1:06: We take another break.

Audio File 3

- 00:01 We rounded out the interview discussing his personal life: marriage, divorce, daughter, & grandchildren. I asked Rich when and where he met his wife. He said she was the “pain in the ass girlfriend he met in college”. They took a break his senior year of college, but she was putting a lot of pressure on Rich to get engaged and have children. They were married in September of 1968 and divorced in 1980. When they first got married they lived on South Broad Street. They lived there for two years. They then moved to an apartment on 17th & Morris Streets. He said the neighborhood started going downhill for about 10-12 years. They had their first child, a girl, in December of 1969. His wife had two miscarriages prior to the birth of their daughter and a subsequent one after.
- 3:15 We begin discussing his daughter who is currently 43. I asked about the role he played in his daughter’s life as she grew up. He said he had a more active role once he and wife separated. He said he became like “uncle-dad”. He had her every other weekend and one day during the week. He admits to not being the best father in the beginning. At the time of his daughter’s birth, he was still in graduate school and working full-time. He was also working a second job. His wife worked part time.
- 4:33 Their apartment was small and crowded so they had to buy a house. They bought a house on 9th & Mifflin Street, south of the Italian Market. The neighborhood was a “disaster”. They moved to Wallingford, PA in ’77 and it is at this point the relationship between he and his wife began to deteriorate. He said they should have never have gotten married. “It was a bad marriage from the beginning”. He said the divorce was very bitter and angry. He claims that his ex-wife was filling their daughter’s head with lies about him which put a wedge between him and his daughter. However, the relationship has improved over the years and he sees her often. He has two grandchildren, a grandson and a granddaughter. He is very proud of them.
- 8:21 I asked him what role he plays in his grandchildren’s lives. He sees them often and they are very close. He used to watch them in the summer while his daughter worked. They helped their grandfather around the house, they played in the back yard, rode bikes, and went to the local swimming pool. They went to Phillies

games as well. His grandson once wrote an essay in college about who he admired, and he wrote it about his grandfather. Rich said he was “in tears for three days”.

- 10:08 At this point I question him about his retirement from teaching. He retired in June of 2009. He has been teaching at the Wallingford-Swarthmore Community School. This is a school for adults. He taught a course on Presidential Elections, Economics Light, and American History through Film. He has been teaching there for about three years and he has also been taking courses at the Bryn Mawr Film Institute. Mr. Monastra always had an affinity for movies. In fact, he mentioned that films and the Phillies were the one common ground between him and his dad. He tutors and proctors the SAT’s at Buena Regional High School. He also attends Phillies games frequently.
- 14:21 I asked him about how he meant his significant-other, Karen, of 30 years. He met her on November 10, 1984. They were never married. He told her that if she wanted to get married “I ain’t the guy”. Karen has never been married and has no children. She was taking courses at Delaware County College where he was teaching part-time. He was also in the process of getting a divorce. He mentions that at this point in his life he had sworn off women. Karen registered for a course Mr. Monastra was teaching. During a class break they struck up a conversation. Nothing came up of it at that point. But a week or so before the end of the semester he asked her to go to dinner. They immediately hit it off. He says “she rang his chimes”. They bought their current home in Wallingford together in 1990.
- 20:52 Towards the end of our interview, I asked him what the best and the worst experiences of his life have been. He, without hesitation, said the divorce was the worst experience. He says it was a disaster. He advises people not to get married before the age of 30. Have some life experience, get an education, travel. As far as the best experience, he said he has had many good experiences. One of the best was when his daughter stopped hating him.
- 22:14 Here Rich becomes more reflective on life. He says when you reach his age, you realize you are not going to live forever. In the past few years he has lost several friends, some younger than he. When he and his friends go out to dinner they have this ritual they follow. They take a bottle of cognac, and at the end of each meal, they take a shot and toast each other. The idea is you keep that same bottle of cognac until you empty it, and then go onto the next one. At some point there will be fewer of you to drink. Obviously, the last one holding the bottle “wins”.

You learn to value your friendships, good friends. You find out who your good friends are.

- 23:54 He continues discussing the positives in his life: his friends, his daughter, his teaching experiences. He mentions he still keeps in touch with many of his former students.
- 25:53 In conclusion, I asked Mr. Monastra what he thinks about the world in which his grandchildren are being raised. He feels it is very challenging but he is optimistic. He mentions how older generations complain about how things have changed, but he cannot imagine raising a child during the rise of Fascism, Nazism, or the Depression. He thinks today's kids will do ok. He is a bit fearful. The United States needs to get our priorities straight and "get off of this war machine". He believes the politicians today are ripping the country apart "with their own egos".
- 27:37 I asked him if he thought each side of the political spectrum was becoming too extreme, in which he agreed. He said our country is based on moderation. That's our history. Some of the arguments about the new health care plan being "socialism" were the same arguments made about Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. He believes national healthcare is the best way to keep our citizens healthy. People just need to get used to the idea. He says he has voted for Republicans but they were "good men" they were "statesmen". He feels today it is all about getting reelected. He was asked by his local township to run for city council. He has declined.
- 29: 45 I thanked Rich for his time and complimented him on his remarkable memory of dates, names, and places.

