

Interview Log

**Narrator:** Brother Joseph Grabenstein

**Date:** February 27, 2013

**Location:** Christian Brothers' Chapel, La Salle University

**Interviewer:** Wesley Schwenk

**Recording Equipment:** Apple iPhone 4

0:00:00 Interview introductions and recording permission

0:00:30 Subject was born January 6, 1950 in Cumberland, Maryland. Which is a small city situated 120 miles west of Baltimore. He just turned 63 year of age. [clears throat]

0:01:30 His father was Herman J. Grabenstein Jr. and was born April 22, 1921 in Cumberland, Maryland. He recently passed away in 2006. He was an assistant manager at the S. T. Little Jewelry Store from the late 1940s or early 1950s until the mid-1980s. A veteran of World War 2 and was a flight engineer in the Pacific Theater. His mother was Irene Grabenstein, maiden name Ley, and she was born August 18, 1922 and just turned 90 years of age. She was a homemaker, then became Secretary of La Salle High School in 1964, and then after 1966 became Administrative assistant at Bishop Walsh High School. [De La Salle Chapel bells and honking traffic] She worked until she was in her late sixties. She became an Honorary Christian Brother because of her service and spiritualism. His parents married in August of 1945. Both individuals were extremely dedicated to their jobs and were great role models.

0:10:58 He was raised with specific values by his parents. One value was honesty, to never tell half-truths or consider it. Hard work was realized early on in life by maintaining a newspaper route while. He mentions the significance of the John F. Kennedy assassination and its affect on the re-printing of front pages during his time. Another aspect being faithful to one's beliefs and that homework and schoolwork comes first and foremost.

0:15:20 He mentioned that his father was a rather quiet individual and his mother was the more talkative. His parents relationship was a very good one, one would say healthy, but possibly not ones to showcase overt affection toward their children. It was a sense that his mother was a very critical individual and his father was not one to showcase clear or obvious fondness.

0:20:10 When speaking about his siblings, he begins with his oldest brother Larry who was born August 6, 1946. He was a teacher at a Catholic high school, 1968 graduate of La Salle College and is now an investment counselor. He has donated funds to La Salle Athletic Department in order to renovate the weight room in Hayman Center. Larry has homes in both Baltimore and Florida. He also financially assists the Brothers and supports his parents as well. Jane was born August 25, 1953 and was a nurse and now works in a law firm that handles lawsuits within hospitals based in Pittsburgh. John was born August 12, 1957, and is the Director of Scientific Operations at Merck in Greater

Philadelphia. He also is a retired Army Colonel. He jokes that the siblings cover the four topics of money, healthcare, defense, and religion within their careers.

0:25:24 In an overall sense Grabenstein enjoyed his childhood a great deal. He felt very proud. He felt very strongly about his values and his education. Experience with the Ursuline Sisters and the Christian Brothers, and the significance of growing up in the 1950s and 1960s. However, he believed he missed out on friendships.

0:28:10 He delves into detail on his hometown of Cumberland, Maryland. A place that was small in size comparable to major cities. He mentions that the population was around 33,000 while he was growing up and dwindling down today because of the loss of manufacturing businesses. He mentions the significance of geography on his hometown as a positive and a negative. Recreational activities such as museums, sporting events, and others only made available by travel. The area has deep historical roots as the terminus of the C & O Canal, B & O Railroad, and the beginning of the national highway. His first influences of history and his outlook toward the future, especially joining the Christian Brothers came from his hometown.

0:35:30 When he mentions the entertainment opportunities or lack thereof within his city. He and his friends went to dances, movies, and he looked forward to summer vacation trips. His siblings also had their own sets of friends but there was not really a sense of intermingling between them, most likely because of the age difference. As a hobbyist he also was a collector of newspaper clippings, stamps, and held an intrigue in almanacs.

0:39:00 Speaking in terms of his neighborhood, the first thing that comes to mind is the lack of children in his age range. His neighbor, Mike Kenney, was mentioned as possibly someone to be friendly with but not be close friends with. He also mentions the significance of neighbors talking about cousins in his community, when most of his relatives lived in other states. It was his way of thinking to behave himself, no need to go out drinking with friends. West Virginia, in proximity, five blocks from his home and Pennsylvania only being seven miles away.

0:41:35 His family was one to sit at the dinner table and enjoy a meal together. It was not necessarily a place to converse about the day but to eat and then it would be to move to schoolwork. It was a sense of structure within his life. It may have been a feeling that the siblings already knew what the others were involved in. He had mentioned a “been there, done that” sort of attitude, living in the shadow of the other sibling. His family was not one to go out on the town either.

0:45:26 Grabenstein always enjoyed vacations and traveling. He takes some time when he goes to other institutions and is involved in other Brothers’ projects to enjoy the history. When he has gone to Buffalo, New York or Toronto, Ontario, Canada he makes his stops but it never impedes his archival work.

0:47:30 His early childhood education was at St. Peter and Paul Parish School in

Cumberland, Maryland. The Sisters of St. Ursula were his teachers and as he recalls, both knowledgeable but strict. They showcased the significance of memorization and used sarcasm as their weapon. He went there from first grade until eighth grade. He also comments on a story about Brother Eugene Grabowski who was at La Salle High School, and slapped classmate Mark Natale for being a troublemaker.

0:50:40 He moved on to attend La Salle High School in Cumberland, Maryland. He received a scholarship to attend the institution and was there for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade from 1964 to 1966. His school was closed along with two girls schools and merged into Bishop Walsh High School. [coughs] It became co-institutional, a separation of the sexes, Brothers taught the boys on one floor and the Ursuline sisters taught the girls on another floor. In 1968, they began co-education experimentation and stuck with the process. He was involved with the school newspaper that had oversight from Brother Gerry Molyneaux, who forty years later is in the Communications Department at La Salle University. Grabenstein sidesteps and reflects on the captions he did in Dr. John Rossi's book, *Living the Promise*, as his school newspaper work aided him. Also a member of student council, student chorus, or even class vice president, he was not positive. His student chorus activity caught up with him, as he became moderator of the La Salle Singers a total of seven years ago.

0:56:23 Grabenstein was employed at the Cumberland Evening Times, at the newspaper plant, doing Classifieds every weekend. He utilized a typewriter to work with advertisements and put in four hours each Saturday and Sunday at the newspaper. He estimated he made around \$1.50 for one hour of work.

0:57:12 He did plan on attending college after high school graduation, but he digresses to explain his transition into the Christian Brothers at the age of fifteen. It was not necessarily a career outlook but a lifestyle choice for the future. He did not tell his friends, and when he did tell his parents, they recommended not telling his peers or his siblings. He did finally tell his classmates in the spring of his senior year, even though they knew he would be attending La Salle College. They recommended not telling his peers to avoid categorization or exclusion. His commencement ceremony was held during a time of mourning because of the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy. A total of seven days later he joined the Christian Brothers. He did date in high school as well at semi-formal dances and junior and senior prom; he counts a total of seven dates in that manner.

1:01:53 This turns over to religion and its affect on his childhood. [puts hands together to imitate praying]. He was an altar boy in grade school, and did not consider the priesthood because of Latin. The Brothers that taught at his high school were approachable and others not so much. The most influential individual was a family friend who was also a Brother, which was Jeremy McNamara. He saw the dedication of his teachers and noticed the impact. His parents supported his decision to join the brotherhood, and he relates the ideas of individuals who did not have such encouragement. His parents and grandparents saw the influence of the Christian Brothers. His two siblings were too young but his older brother Larry, came up and put

his hand on Grabenstein's shoulder [imitates the motion] and states "Boy you'll make a good one."

1:06:07 He felt that he was aware and conscious of his decision to join the Christian Brothers at such a young age. He felt that he would uphold this commitment. During that time period, it was simpler to take decisive action, to know what you wanted. He mentioned examples of not changing majors while in college or always keeping the same steady job. It was a true cultural shift as time passed and comments that he is on his second career. [Shifts in his chair].

1:07:16 The impact of the novitiate was felt after he graduated high school. Training is necessary because they are considered novices. This process lasts one year and takes place in Ammendale, Maryland. Brother Jeremy McNamara accompanied him and drove there. He mentioned that he was scared, homesick, and was ready for college. By February of 1969 he was ready to move onward and upward.

1:08:38 He then moved on to La Salle College, and was considered a Scholastic. The term means that he was a student Brother. He did commute because the Brothers' residence was then located in Elkins Park in Philadelphia. He lived at St. Joseph's Hall from 1969 to 1970 on Ashbourne Road. After 1970, they moved to Anselm Hall on Spring Avenue on the same piece of property. His classes began at 8:30 AM and would continue to be held every hour that way.

1:09:27 The process during the novitiate included early morning rising, prayer, conferences that were presentations. He mentions that because of the changing times, he was able to take two college courses each semester. These 12 theology credits would transfer to La Salle College and he thought they were very difficult. He took 6 credits at De La Salle College in Washington, D. C. and 6 more at Xaverian Junior College in Silver Spring, Maryland.

1:11:00 He returns back to his experience at La Salle. He explained that nearly one-third of his classmates finished in three years. He decided to take summer courses too, but stayed on his fourth year. He graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in History in the class of 1973. [coughs] He had Dr. John Rossi as a professor for some of his history classes. Both Dr. William Binkowsky and Dr. Theopolis Fair were there but he did not have classes with them. He mentions the wake that would be happening that evening for the recent passing of Brother Patrick Ellis, the Former President of La Salle.

1:12:12 Coming back to his time during the novitiate, he just said it was as easy as just going to Philadelphia. You could leave if you desired because you had not taken your final vows. There were thirteen individuals in his year and it seemed to be the beginning of the decline. A total of seven came to La Salle College. At Ammendale he was tasked with taking care of an older Brother, named Denis Edward Wilkowski, who was stricken with polio. Grabenstein believed that they recognized both patience and willingness to assist others, as well as, a friendly disposition around older generations. At Elkins Park his chores included vacuuming the television room and other community

assignments. His current duties are that he is in charge of the twelve community cars for a total of twenty drivers.

1:15:59        The Christian Brothers looked differently upon history as a major, maybe some would say negatively. Still upholding his temporary vows, he did see many nice and sincere individuals leave; he still may have been distraught because he was still not seeing friendly faces. He continued to have faith that it's going to get better. Grabenstein states that he is a reserved more quiet individual.

1:19:04        He did not really get to know the older Brothers at La Salle, they were figures away from the other younger Scholastics. He did join the History Club at the College and also became an officer in the group. He also mentioned that he did not have to wear black when he attended college in the early 1970s. His roommates at Elkins Park chose majors of English, History, Math, and some selection of Sciences. He mentioned that campus was only 20 acres of land and was very different than today. Only one Master's Degree was offered at that time and it was in Religion. Overall he enjoyed his time at La Salle but because of his living arrangements and other instances, he was ready to continue with his future plans.

1:23:42        His goal was to teach history in high school. Most Brothers are kind of assigned to a certain institution but Grabenstein was allowed during this time to kind of pick the school he would like to teach at. It was a transitional phase within the Christian Brothers and the leadership was changing. They had a foothold on the organization but some leaders did not see the rotation of Brothers like chess pieces. He would go visit schools with other Brothers and get a feel for the environments. He then mentioned he went to sample places for a week at a time beginning during his freshman year. [coughs] He ventured to Hudson Catholic High School in Jersey City, Calvert Hall in Baltimore, Central Catholic in Pittsburgh, and went back to Calvert Hall another time as a senior.

1:26:25        He asked to be placed at Calvert Hall. It is located in suburban Baltimore, but considered in Towson, Maryland. It is the oldest Christian Brothers School in the country and moved out of Baltimore to its current location in 1960. He began teaching freshman World Cultures that became a lecture hall class for history twice a week and then smaller size seminars the other two days. He prepared vigorously for his first class and began with the Big Bang Theory and pre-History.

1:29:12        End of Audio

Interview Log

**Subject:** Brother Joseph Grabenstein

**Date:** March 12, 2013

**Recorded At:** Christian Brothers' Residence, La Salle University

**Interviewer:** Wesley Schwenk

**Recording Equipment:** Apple iPhone 4

0:00:00 Interview introductions and recording permission

0:00:35 Grabenstein began his teaching career at Calvert Hall in Towson, Maryland in 1973 just after he graduated from La Salle College only a mere three months prior. He spent a total of six years teaching there from 1973 to 1979. This was an all boys' Catholic institution. He also taught religion besides history. He was also a moderator of sports that included lacrosse, freshman football, and freshman basketball. He speaks of team teaching where he and two other teachers would give forty-minute lectures and divide them up but he volunteered for more than his share.

0:02:20 He moves on to explain what are the duties of a sports moderator. A moderator is the in between individual, a better term would be the scheduler and/or liaison. He sits on the bench during games but makes sure all the athletes are waiting for the bus, holds personal valuables for the team, and be on time. Also, if there were conflicts between the coaching staff and an athlete the athlete could bring them to his attention.

0:03:28 The subject then mentions his wanting to shift schools. He had it in his mind that they were going to move him but he also wanted to teach a younger audience. He was given this luxury and took a position at St. John's College High School in Washington, D.C. A middle school was attached to their high school, the latter being a military school. However, there was a present military atmosphere in the middle school classroom. He spent seven years teaching there approximately from 1979 to 1986. In terms of location, it was in the Northwest region in close proximity to Rock Creek Park. He taught history, geography, and religion at that institution.

0:05:37 He also volunteered to moderate basketball while there and Grabenstein was asked to run the intramural program as well. He was also offered the job of moderator for the middle school Student Council, coordinating lots of events and activities.

0:06:06 His change in school led to a change in students as well. This change developed because he shifted from teaching freshman to eighth graders. To him, the eighth graders seemed rather moody, they had known each other for a longer period of time. His first year was full of adjustment as he was prepping every night for class the next day, while at Calvert Hall preparations were every other day. He mentioned that the military influence was relevant because of the dress code at St. John's, as well as, inspections in the classroom, the atmosphere was really enjoyable.

0:08:42 In terms of size differences, Calvert Hall was composed of 1100 or 1200 boys and St. John's was close to 800 or 900. The size of the middle school at the latter was shrinking and enrollment was decline, and it is evident that it may have affected the decision to become co-educational. St. John's eventually dropped the middle school in the 1990s but Grabenstein saw the institution during its peak years.

0:10:37 Again, Grabenstein decided that it was time to move on because he felt the administrative structure would move him around. He kept considering that priests get moved around why wouldn't teachers? He believed that his superiors would do that to him at some point. Those superiors are known as provincials. He wanted to make it clear that if they were considering moving him he would love to go to another middle school and there was only one left. That was in his hometown of Cumberland, Maryland that had a sixth, seventh, and eighth grade section adjoined to the high school. He would go to teach at Bishop Walsh Middle/High School.

0:12:25 In 1986, he started at Bishop Walsh which was then co-educational. He mentions that the teaching of girls is different and the teaching of boys around girls. It was his first experience tackling this. He taught there for a total of four and a half years until mid-January 1991. He was teaching mostly eighth graders but it was a different dynamic than St. John's. These individuals had been learning together since first grade but developed relationships and personalities. Personalities could be split into three groups: those who were efficient, those who were right in the middle, and those who were unreliable and disrespectful. He began to doubt his profession because of the students and it was if they only came to class to be entertained.

0:16:48 He then wrote a letter to the President of La Salle University, who at the time was Brother Patrick Ellis, said that he should strive for a doctorate degree. Grabenstein felt he was not capable of Ph.D. work and did not want to keep teaching. Then, he began to inquire about volunteering in the archives and then the Christian Brothers permitted him to return for a third master's degree.

0:17:55 The interview switches gears, in order to backtrack about his higher education and his attainment of other Master's Degrees. In 1979, after taking over five summers for classes he received his Master's Degree in History from Villanova University. In 1987, after summers as well, he received his Master's Degree in Education focusing on Elementary Education from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Then in 1991, he began full-time yearlong study at the University of Maryland-College Park. He took 36 credits over the course of eleven and a half months. He received support from the Brothers through the entire process.

0:23:07 Interview shifts focus to how he adjusted to moving from school to school and residences as well. Calvert Hall to St. John's offered strong traditions, Brotherhood support, and parents were similar. The move to Bishop Walsh he just thought that he had undeserved backlash and behavior that he was not ready for.

0:24:40 This is a section to relationships as he speaks to the advantages of living

with Christian Brothers. He thought the fraternity support, friendships, watching out for each other was integral. A downside is that some of the personalities clash and some were not willing to open up to more friends as others had been.

0:26:14 Grabenstein returns to his degree in archival science at the University of Maryland. His first courses in the fall and summer were rather difficult and he also comments that the faculty assumed that the student knew some things ahead of time. There was a cohesive nature with his classmates, whether it is a study group or other venture. During his final semester there, the Dean of the College of Library and Information Sciences called him to his office in order to ask if he would deliver the commencement address. He said he would think about it, then replied with a no, and then drafted his first piece of text. He returned to tell the Dean, Dr. Frank Burke, that he had changed his mind. He read the two pages and commented that it was perfect. Grabenstein delivered his address and spoke about bonding together, being a “people profession.” During his time studying at Maryland, he was living with the Brothers in what was considered their retirement home a mere five miles away.

0:32:05 He was not placed at La Salle but rather bonded with the Archivist, Brother Thomas Warner. He felt things fell into place for him as he was also well acquainted with the President Brother Patrick Ellis. The narrator also comments that he was not quite sure who else wanted the job and just presented himself as the best candidate.

0:33:10 Grabenstein began his “second career” as an archivist at La Salle University on August 12, 1992. After graduating from Maryland, he spent his summer nervously waiting to hear about his future. He first was the assistant to the archivist Brother Thomas Warner. He maintained that position until December 31, 1993 and when the New Year began he became the head archivist.

0:34:42 As an archivist he follows specific guidelines on what to collect. He mentions they don’t collect everything but look for certain things. He feels that it is a challenging profession and one in which he enjoys helping people, a trait that is believed to have come from his parents and their upbringing (see Part 1). He recollects on September of 2007 in which he goes to collect four yearbooks, a practice he does every year. The advisor and students were there and mentioned to open the book, and then specifically page 5. It was dedicated to him, a written note of two pages; he remains “speechless” and “eternally grateful.” This was one instance where he was fueled to assist people even more.

0:39:30 The archives have changed dramatically since his arrival because of computer technology. He comments that a contemporary of his in Memphis and the University encouraged getting a computer. He enjoys typing and word processing but the ever-changing software among other things is his weak point. During the winter of 2011, the automation/digitization process of the archives began when the narrator got a new supervisor.

0:41:40 Rebecca Goldman arrived at the University and became the Director of Computer Services. During this time he has seen a great deal change and only a small portion of the archives is digital. Grabenstein remarks that he lets things go and possibly because he may not know what to do in order to work in the digital catalog. He took a computer course during the summer and in January and February of 2013 took another in Washington, D.C. He mentions that there is a long journey ahead and that Ms. Goldman remains patient with the process.

0:43:11 The role of the archives and the archivist has changed more recently because Rebecca Goldman has progressed this process because of digitizing certain things. To save things on websites that are “born digital” keeps Grabenstein amazed and it seems that there is always supposed to be a quick response. He still magnifies the personalized service quality and the proactivity as well.

0:44:52 The placement of the archives within the administrative structure has changed as well. Brother Thomas Warner was archivist from 1984 until 1991 and the narrator mentions not knowing whom he was reporting to. By 1994, Brother Grabenstein was to report to the Provost and specifically to the Director of the Library. It is a pyramid type administrative structure

0:46:01 Grabenstein estimates he spends almost eleven hours doing his archival job. He usually is there at 7:45 AM until nearly 5:30 PM. He also affirms that he manages to archival collections, those of La Salle University and those of the entire Christian Brothers order in the mid-Atlantic region. They are two separate entities. He mentions that he began not just preserving the history but spreading it, by giving nearly forty to fifty presentations to freshman. In order to free up more archival time, he and a student made a video history of La Salle University. He mentions cutting back the presentations by maybe just to Brother Edward Sheehy’s seminar or Brother Michael McGinniss honor’s course in Education.

0:49:30 In terms of handling two institutions, the process is very similar but there are differences too. There are similarities between histories of education departments, department chair’s of specific years, history’s of Brothers’ school closings. He comments that instead of offering first-hand research, Grabenstein can tell researchers to visit online versions of La Salle Alumni Magazine and Yearbooks to do research. There have been modern modifications.

0:52:06 The narrator states the he does not travel to other institutions as much as he would like in order to do archiving. In a perfect world there would be more time to reach all these places. When he does travel he enjoys making contacts, photocopying yearbooks, and enjoys being the keeping of records.

0:54:43 His greatest challenge as an archivist is not having enough time and computers/technology. When he first came to La Salle University the archives was utilizing typewriters and now maintain three computers. The complexity with button pushing is something he never would have imagined and collates his own manual. It is

his recipe style.

0:56:40 He remarks about publishing on La Salle's history. There are unpublished documents on the History of the St. Gabriel system. Grabenstein does receive credit in the foreword of Dr. John Rossi's *Living the Promise* book, and that the photographs were his domain, a behind-the-scenes with captions. He did assist with the research and also creates short write-ups and biographical sketches. He is perfectly fine with letting others have the spotlight not only in terms of his job but in other matters as well.

0:58:59 Overall, he has seen La Salle change since becoming archivist with one word, growth. When he was a student it was a street corner college and when Brother Patrick Ellis became President it started expansion. Brother Michael McGinniss was integral in getting the Germantown hospital and refers to it as the University's "Louisiana Purchase." It is the acquisition of space and the archives will move to the west campus. He also comments on the renovations to Hayman Center, new Master's Degree programs, and Doctorate degrees. La Salle is poised for the future. The students are involved, the campus has developed, and the academic offerings

1:01:57 He is the moderator of the La Salle Singers and joined in 1996 or 1997. It falls under community service and he jokes that it is therapeutic for him. He has deadlines and pressures but it's good to take a break [tapping on the glass lamp on the nearby end table]. He is also a member of the Chapel Singers and they sing at the 6:00 PM Sunday night mass every week.

1:03:33 The La Salle Archives definitely has a direct link or for individuals connected with the University. In terms of a relationship with the community or city, he states that they have one but it is "every now and then." He pulls out an example of correspondence with someone writing a book on Philadelphia during the First World War and he wants to dedicate a chapter to Colleges and Universities. He mentioned that sources that he could locate for this author.

1:06:35 The community has changed a great deal since he was a student here at La Salle. He mentioned the changing demographics when he was a student and the decline of the neighborhood that continued in the 1990s. In the past ten years he has seen the graffiti and abandoned cars dissipate.

1:07:54 His hope for the future of the archives is that he jovially states that a wand will make him a technology genius. He really would like to continue to follow Rebecca Goldman's leadership, digitize as much as possible, and to continue to be available and helpful to everyone. Grabenstein plans on retirement around 74 or 75 and would love to help someone take over at that time. The Brothers would enjoy that he keeps a foot in the door and volunteering with his previous post and accomplish sidebar projects.

1:10:43 In terms of the future of the university he comments that the numbers of the Brothers are dwindling. The university is dependent on enrollment, which is a crucial aspect. He does not really think about the future because he spends most of his time collecting and organizing the past history of the institution. With the numbers of

Brothers dwindling, Grabenstein sees it as an opportunity to preserve the mutual legacy of the Christian Brothers and the University as well. Grabenstein also manages the archives of the Brothers of the Christian Schools District of Eastern North America, more commonly referred to as the Baltimore District. He is a multi-tasker and an individual who always says that he can help in any way necessary. [Tapping on the nearby lamp and voice in the background.]

1:14:35        He remarks on what he would like to do after he retires. He would not be a cruise person because he would probably find it boring. He would like to visit more Civil War battlefields and when he visits Christian Brothers' schools he always takes a sidebar excursion. [De La Salle Chapel bells and tapping on lamp]. He does not take outright vacations.

1:16:15        The final question asked pertains to concluding statements by the narrator. He offers up his own chance to say something for history. He shares his words of wisdom or his important eleven words that he begins and ends every presentation with, "You are an important part of something much bigger than yourselves." La Salle University has been around for 150 years and hopefully it will remain for 150 more. He cannot always learn or relate all the history or legacy of the institution to everyone. He hopes that new students or other individuals will do their own part to share and cherish La Salle's legacy. He remembers a moment after President Ronald Reagan passed away when a commentator stated, "There is no future without memory." It is something extremely powerful and will always stay with him.

1:19:23        End of Audio