

Interview with Mr. David Diehl (Part I)
Date March 13, 2008

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- BD:* This is Bill Donohoe in Wydmoor, Pennsylvania with Mr. David Diehl. Mr. Diehl do I have permission to record?
- DD:* Absolutely.
- BD:* Thank you. Mr. Diehl, in what year and where were you born?
- DD:* I was born in 1937 in the city of Philadelphia.
- BD:* What were your parent's names?
- DD:* Daniel Edward Diehl and Ellen R. Diehl.
- BD:* Any brothers or sisters?
- DD:* I have five brothers and sisters; I'm the youngest of six.
- BD:* What are their names and you're the youngest?
- DD:* I'm the youngest of six. Daniel, Dorthea, John, Frances, Ann and David.
- BD:* What occupations did your parents hold and the neighborhood you guys were in?
- DD:* My father was a wallpaper engraver probably one of the last of a trade in the country. The very complicated hands-on process where he made the dyes to make wallpaper. It became completely automated but he actually was - he did it by hand.
- BD:* What are some of the other occupations in the neighborhood you lived that people held?
- DD:* Very blue collar. In the neighborhood where I lived and grew up I don't think there were any - very few professionals at all - factory workers, union workers. Yes.
- BD:* Okay. What were the houses like in your community? What did the houses look like? What was the streets and the whole landscape?
- DD:* I grew up right in Germantown right behind Germantown High School. It was a row house. It was rented, my parents never
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owned a house until I was in 8th grade, believe it or not, and they had gone through the depression, having six children. They never

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owned a car in their lives, my parents. It was a typical city landscape, it was nice, it was livable, but it was inner city.

BD: What grade school did you go to?

DD: St. Vincent de Paul, Germantown.

BD: What was grade school like in your - your childhood infused with grade school?

DD: It was fine. I grew up - I guess we were considered poor but never thought of us that way, I mean, we just had happy childhood. School was fine and always did fairly well - my grades were - I always did well and was able to play sports and it was enjoyable time.

BD: What were some of the neighborhood activities - neighborhood kids; what would you guys kinda get involved with?

DD: It was stick ball, wire ball, it was certainly football, baseball. We had the fields of - when I say fields, the yard of Germantown High School was across the street so we could play ball in there. The bad part of it was it was a cinder field so I think there's still cinder in my knees from playing over there.

BD: Out at St. Vincent's, how did you hear about La Salle High School?

DD: My cousins had gone to La Salle by the name of McGrath and all their sons, maybe four or five sons that went here, so we knew it through them. Both my brothers went to North Catholic High School and my two older sisters went to Little Flower and I was expecting to go to North Catholic. That's where I thought I was headed and my parents said, "No. We want you to go take this test at La Salle." And so I did and then, not my choice at the time, but they said, "Well you're going to go there." So really it was my parents that sent me here. *(Laughter)*

BD: What was your first day of school like here? Obviously coming in not wanting to come here.

DD: Yeah, it wasn't like I didn't want to come here, I just expected to go somewhere else. I expected to follow where my brothers went

and it was just different. I didn't know a soul, there was no one from my parish here except me and I did not know anybody but surprisingly in a day or two it seemed, everything seemed to go

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well. I fit right in; never had a problem. I was never that I didn't enjoy it or I never felt strange being here.

BD: What was the ethnic makeup of your neighborhood in Germantown?

DD: It was a very mixed neighborhood, a lot of - there were Irish and Germans and African Americans in the surrounding areas; it was a fairly mixed neighborhood.

BD: You said all fairly blue collar workers.

DD: Yes.

BD: When you got to La Salle was it - what was the makeup here? What was the typical freshman at La Salle? From where was it - ?

DD: It was very mixed bag. We were - I went to 20th and Olney, naturally, so you had a great number of people coming up from south Philly on the subway. From the subway, was along Broad Street subway, was in walking distance of La Salle and you had the 26th trolley and you had the J bus so there were three or four public transportation systems that fed La Salle and that's where - how I came to school every day. You did have people driving to school it was a mixed bag, there were some Doctors' sons and lawyers' sons but a lot of working class families and students as well.

BD: If you can remember, do you remember what the population of the school was? The number?

DD: I believe maybe 600. Maybe 150 in a class. 600.

BD: What was tuition if you remember?

DD: I do remember. \$240 a year.

BD: Wow.

DD: Which was a lot of money.

BD: Very sure, absolutely. So what year did you begin to -

DD: 1951.

BD: It was in '58 when they moved to here, was it?

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DD: '59 – '60.

BD: '59-'60. Did you play sports at La Salle, an instrument or any activities?

DD: No, I just played football for four years. I really didn't - I was trying out, I thought I was trying out, for the basketball team two years; I never went through with it, but I did play football for four years.

BD: So was Tex coaching?

DD: Mr. Flannery came when I was between my sophomore and junior year. We used to have a couple of days of spring practice when I was a sophomore; it was the first day, I guess, I met Mr. Flannery out on the football field.

BD: Did he come back as the head coach right away?

DD: No, he was assistant coach. Jim Gallagher was head coach.

BD: Jim Gallagher was head coach then. What were your favorite subjects at La Salle? Some of your favorite teachers when you were here; if there's any?

DD: Sure. There's - I had Brother Thomas for history and he was really a good teacher and Brother Jeremy; legendary Brother who taught me, tried to teach me, Spanish for four years. We had Brother Joe Wolfinger taught me algebra. A lot of these men were characters; they were great teachers, good people. I was fortunate enough to get to know them as friends, as well, when I came back here to teach.

BD: What were some of your highlights of your high school years here at La Salle? Did you win any championships? All Catholic?

DD: No. We did not - I was second team All Catholic, I was captain of my football team as a senior. Actually, a big event for us was we beat, when I was a senior, West Catholic and North Catholic in the same year and I think it was the first time in the history of the school we had done that. We were - when I was a freshman here, the football team did not win a game. When I was a sophomore, we won three games. When I was a junior we won five and when I

was a senior we won eight and almost went to the championship; we just missed that.

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BD: Pretty impressive. Is there a - I imagine there are - but was there any one or two people here at La Salle that really had a major impact on your life and what you were going to do for the rest of your life?

DD: I think Brother Jeremy is one person. I think more than anything else his calm, quiet demeanor. He would - he was a moderator of the football team for awhile so we were around him. Brother Edward Cannon was a moderator for the football team for awhile and can remember just sitting talking to him, riding the bus to and from somewhere.

BD: He was my neighbor for a year when I was a volunteer, Brother Ed; great guy. Do you remember any funny stories or pranks that were pulled here during your four years? Anything that stands out?

DD: Not really. I can't - I don't remember too much of anything like that. I think we were - wasn't a school for a lot of pranks in those days, I don't think. The ship was run pretty tightly.

BD: What will you remember most from your four years here? If there's one moment that just - whether it's graduation or - what will you remember most?

DD: I think what I remember most is the people; I still have friends from my high school days. I think they associate - the people, I think, is what La Salle's always been about. The Brothers, my classmates and I think the - not events but, faces and people are the things that are important that I do remember; take away from those four years.

BD: In your junior/senior year at La Salle High School, obviously, you go through the college process. Where did you go to college? What road led you to college?

DD: I was interested in continuing to play football. Coach Gallagher, at the time, he recommended me to a few schools and I ended up at Temple. I was fortunate enough to get a scholarship to Temple, so I could afford it and travel to Temple my first couple of years were minimal and then on the subway again or on the trolley car. But I would, again, I didn't know what my parents could afford, at that point, but I was fortunate enough to get that scholarship.

BD: So you played four years of football at college?

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DD: One interesting thing - I tell people this, a neighbor of mine was a big Penn graduate and he wanted me to try to go to Penn and I said, "Sure, I'll give it a try." And he said, "Well you have to go take a test." I had applied to Villanova and St. Joe's and La Salle and all the local schools and I said, "Test? Well I didn't have to take a test at anywhere else." They said, "Well, there's this new test that the Ivy Leagues are giving, it's called the SAT test." I said, "Well, I'll go take it." I got the scholarship to Temple so that's where I ended up but it was funny that I didn't have to take the SAT's. -

BD: I guess that might possibly have been like a trial run maybe?

DD: Well I think it was just starting. That was 1955, '54-'55.

BD: That's interesting. What were some highlights of your college career at Temple? Academically and athletically.

DD: I played football for four years and I enjoyed that we really weren't that good but got to travel. Traveled up and down the east coast, mainly, and I enjoyed the four years there. I was an average student; I did fairly well in college nothing spectacular. It was a commuter college, I lived at home the whole time; I never lived on campus or in a dorm or anything like that. It was back and forth.

BD: What did your major in?

DD: I majored in business and really towards my junior, middle of my junior year, I started to take some education courses and took some extra history courses and I had a faint idea start - idea of maybe teaching.

BD: After your four years of college, do you think, looking back, La Salle High School prepared you well for your career?

DD: Absolutely, absolutely, yeah, really, I think it really did very much so in all ways.

BD: You mentioned that junior year, senior year in college you started thinking about becoming an educator and then playing football; naturally, a coach. Do you know that - did you feel that in high school or just come on - what sparked your - just like a calling?

DD: I can't say that. I kind of grew into it. There was no defining moment even when I started, I think in my mind, I was going

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to do it for a year or two and then maybe go out and do something else. I just - it wasn't that I knew this was going to be my lifelong profession.

BD: When you graduate. What year did you graduate from Temple?

DD: '59.

BD: Was La Salle your first - teaching at La Salle your first job?

DD: No. I - when I was in Temple there was still a draft going on, not for the NFL. *(Laughter)*

BD: Right. Pre-Vietnam, post Korea. Sure.

DD: So I - you could take a deferment if you were in college and if you took that deferment you were eligible to the draft until you were 30 or something like that and I certainly didn't want to do that. I never took a deferment so I was 1-A all the way through college and took a chance that I wasn't going to be drafted and I didn't get drafted. I thought certainly soon after I get out of college I would be drafted. So I went - I worked at the Department of Recreation. I graduated on June 13th on a Saturday and I got married on June 20th. I got married the week after I graduated.

BD: Wow.

DD: So, wife - both of us were working and I worked for the Department of Recreation and I was waiting to be drafted, actually, and someone suggested to me that there was openings in the archdiocese, maybe part-time or substitutes and things like that. So I went down and said - I applied and said, "I'll be honest with you, I could get drafted at any moment." Somebody there said, "You know what? We need you and we would like you to come teach. What we'll do is, we're going to give you a couple - can you teach algebra?" I said, "Sure I can teach algebra." And they said, "Well we're going to give you this job teaching a couple of courses in algebra and algebra is a necessary science and you get an automatic exemption from the draft if you're teaching science or math." So I said - they said, "We want you to stay so we want you to teach algebra." And I said, "Fine. I'll teach algebra." I taught at St. Thomas More High School for two years in '59-'60 and '60-'61.

BD: You said you got married right after college?

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DD: Yes. I coached there, I coached football.

BD: What's your wife's name?

DD: Carol.

BD: Carol. How many children do you have?

DD: We have four children.

BD: What are their names?

DD: David is the oldest; Connie is next, Daniel and Kathleen.

BD: Grandkids?

DD: Eight; going to be nine in July.

BD: Congratulations. So what circumstances led you back to your alma mater La Salle from St. Thomas?

DD: I was teaching and coaching there and Mr. Flannery called me and said, "How would you like to come --" Actually, I think, when my second year when I was at Thomas More he called me and asked me to scout a team for him and then to go look at this other team for him. So I was in touch with him and I talked to him and he called me and said, "How would you like to come back to La Salle? I think there is an opening here." I said, "Oh great." So I was over here in five minutes.

BD: Excellent that's great. What year was that?

DD: September '61 is when I started.

BD: What was your first position you held here?

DD: I taught algebra and I taught five classes of algebra.

BD: Over your tenure here at La Salle, what positions have you held? Teaching and coaching; administration, of course.

DD: I taught algebra and, which I was fine at, but I really wasn't a math major and they knew that. I'd ask, as soon as there's an opening in social studies that's really where I had more strength. After maybe

two years I did that, and then I moved into social studies. I taught that, I taught social studies, and I taught freshman, I taught seniors.

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We had different courses, some electives that I taught but mostly social studies. Psychology, we had an American diplomatic history that I taught, as well as, American history, as well as, world history. One year they were short of religion teachers so I taught religion for one course of religion. One year the driver training instructor was sick and they asked me if I could do that and I fit that in after school and I said yes. So then there were really - I can't say every year but there were more often than not years when I taught six subjects instead of five, because just helping out. So that's the kind of place it was.

So then I went to Villanova in the evenings and I got a masters degree in administration counseling; took four or five years and once I got that I became a junior counselor. I've always taught, I was never out of the classroom, so always taught a couple of classes but I was a junior counselor. When I was a junior counselor it was Easter time, it was this time of the year, we went on Easter break and one of the Brothers, who was the disciplinarian at the time assistant principal, had some kind of a problem and didn't come back from Easter break; I don't know if he was sick or ill. When we came back to school there was no assistant principal in charge of discipline and Brother Eunich Nickel who was principal at the time walked into my office, I remember the counseling office, and said, "How would you like to do this?" and I said, "Sure." So, 16 years later I was still doing the same thing but that's how I became the assistant principal in charge of discipline. I did that for 16 years and then was fortunate enough to become the first lay principal of La Salle High School and did that for 12 years I believe, 11-12 years.

BD: What year did you become principal?

DD: I think it was 1988, '87 possibly, '88.

BD: And your last year was –

DD: 2000.

BD: Yeah.

DD: Possibly 2000.

BD: Because I came in September 2000, I think you took that year off and came back the following year.

DD: Right, that's right.

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BD: At the beginning of your career did you see yourself, once you got to La Salle after St. Tom, did you see yourself spending your whole life at La Salle High School?

DD: Once I got here I have to say yes. It was home - back home, it felt so comfortable, it was so enjoyable. Not without sacrifices, both for my wife and my family especially, we're always very supportive and sharing me with La Salle. Just one thing to say, when I talk about sacrifices, my first year at La Salle my salary was \$3,200.00 a year. I often tell the story that I went through the whole year and no one ever came into my class, no one ever said, "You're doing fine, you're doing poor" and I was nervous. I loved the place so much and felt so much a part of it and I went all year and I never heard anything from anybody. I was walking out of school like the last day of school, we start exams ago, walked past the office and the principal was there and he had been my principal, Brother Francis, when I was in school and he used to call everybody 'Butch' and it was his name for everybody so he said, "Hey Butch." I said, "Yeah Brother, how are you?" And he said, "You had a good year, do you want to come back next year?" And I said, "Sure, I want to come back." (*Laughter*) And he said, "You know what? We're going to give you another \$100.00." So I went home I said, "You know I got a job again next year and I'm getting another \$100.00." That was great. No contract, no you know.

BD: Wow. How times have changed. Wow.

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