

**Interview of Michael R. Smith  
By Bradford J. Morith  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
February 8, 2015**

Audio File:

Morith: Okay, My name is Brad Morith, and I am the interviewer. I am here with Michael R. Smith, La Salle University Class of 1982, and he is the narrator, interviewee. Today is Sunday, February 8th, 2015, and we are in the La Salle Student Union to do this interview. Do I have your permission to record?

Smith: Yes, you do, Brad.

Morith: Thank you. To begin, could you tell me when and where you were born?

Smith: I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1960, in Nazareth Hospital in the Greater Northeast [Philadelphia].

Morith: Hmm. Did you grow up here in Philadelphia?

Smith: Yes, I did. I lived in Philadelphia until directly in Northeast Philadelphia, same house, 'till I was 25 and then lived in Ambler 'till I was 28 and then moved up to the Connecticut New York area so—

Morith: Huh

Smith: --A lot of time in Philadelphia

Morith: What part of Northeast Philadelphia? What neighborhood?

Smith: I grew up in Holmes Circle and went to Saint Jerome's Grade School and Father Judge High School. So it was Holmes Circle near the [Roosevelt] Boulevard. It was a big area for me all those landmarks—Welsh and the [Roosevelt] Boulevard. But I grew up on Winchester Avenue—so that's the point of reference

Morith: And where did you go to high school again?

Smith: I went to Father Judge High School, which is, still is, an all-boys high school—small Catholic boys, young men's high school. They call it now in Northeast Philadelphia—had about maybe at the time about 500 boys in my graduating class. So, that was a great experience.

1:48

Morith: And what year did you graduate?

Smith: I graduated from [Father] Judge in 1978. So, I started here at La Salle in September 1978.

Morith: And, you chose La Salle. I was just wondering, what other colleges did you consider attending?

Smith: Funny you should mention that. I was talking with my dad who was also a La Salle graduate last night about that. And he asked me, "How many other colleges did you visit and apply to?" And I visited none, except for La Salle, and I applied to Villanova, and might have applied to Temple. I can't remember back that far. Because we were watching the Villanova basketball game, and he said something like, "It's a shame you couldn't get into Villanova," and I said, "I was accepted."

Morith: Uh-huh

And I just visited La Salle. I'd like to say it was because I was just so enthralled by La Salle. I have to temper that with I think I was basically lazy and thought okay this is a good place to go. I knew people who that guy from high school who were coming here.

Morith: Uh-huh

Smith: And, legacy wise, I can go through the legacy. My dad went to La Salle. My mom's brother John went to La Salle. My dad's brother-in-law Jack went to La Salle. My sister Nancy \_\_\_\_\_ (??) Anne Marie went to La Salle. My only brother, he's younger, Richard went to La Salle. My cousin Michael went to La Salle same year as me. Another cousin Ricky went to La Salle. He's probably 7 years older than me. And it was always just La Salle. And, you know, one thing I knew was that La Salle had a really good accounting program. And that was my reason for coming here. Or at least that's what I said. And, you know, [I] visited here in probably February of '78, I think. And, my sister took me through the campus, and she is—she taught here for about four years. She got her undergraduate here. She got her M.B.A. here. So did my brother—got his undergraduate and M.B.A. here, too. My sister was like the La Salle—just everything great about La Salle. I was kind of like, okay. I'm ready. Where do I go? And, I just—it was off my checklist: Apply to college, move on, and I had taken accounting in my junior and senior year of high school, and I liked it. And, I remember my mom convinced me to take the accounting, and then she said, you know, "La Salle has a really good accounting program." I said, "Okay, I'll go." And I was probably the easiest recruit they've ever had here—not that anybody was breaking down the door to recruit me.

4:49

And I was also a swimmer in high school. And I had this notion that I could swim at La Salle, that I knew a couple of guys that were coming here to swim. They were much better than me. I never swam here, but I used the pool a lot.

So, La Salle for me goes back probably when I was seven or eight. My dad and my family—big basketball fans—so, we would watch La Salle play on, the Saturday night. They would have it on either Channel 6 or Channel 17, and we would watch all the Big 5 [men's basketball] games. That was a big weekend for us in there. And La Salle, I didn't know at the time, but that's where my dad that, he was a local sports fan, not obnoxious, but he puts himself into the game. La Salle, he was *in[to]* the games. So, I knew it was kind of special, and we went to see his family out in Drexel Hill. They were La Salle people, and that's all they talked about. And, I went to my first La Salle game. Actually my first basketball game was the night before Easter. And it was probably '68 or, I think it was '69. And it was Saint Joe [Saint Joseph's University] and La Salle for the Middle-Atlantic Conference championship. And I didn't know the significance of it. I was just happy to go. And it was nuts. It was nuts. Ken Durrett was La Salle's big star. He was hurt previous to that. And, I could do a whole series on the Ken Durrett injury. But it was nuts. I was in the Palestra for the first time. I sat behind one of the baskets—I guess in the La Salle section. I still don't know. It was hot. It was packed. It was sold out. And the game went into triple overtime. And, it was nuts. La Salle ended up losing. I think they did. I was drained, exhausted. I remember I was sweating profusely when I came out of there. And that was it. That was La Salle from there forward. I still don't like St. Joe's. And Villanova, I don't like at all. And, it became a basketball—I think I came here for the basketball. And, you know, that's where it was. We would go see La Salle play 2 or 3 times a year—me and my dad and my sister, and that was it.

Morith:           Going back, you mentioned quite a bit about basketball, and I wanted to talk to you a little bit more about that later. When you started college as a freshman, how did you feel about La Salle?

Smith:            What little I knew about college—it was safe for me. It was almost like an extension of high school and Northeast Philadelphia. I took the bus. There [were] three buses to get here. And, there [were] three of us that morning who got on the bus, and we came down here. And we each went our separate ways. Well, first we all ended up meeting in the student union with like eight other guys from Father Judge. Some were here already and others were freshmen, like us. It was like being back at high school, except you didn't have all the discipline of a Catholic boys high school in there. And I remember going through the whole day, classes—whatever else—and then meeting up with those same three guys, getting back on the bus and going home. And, I had to take three buses to get here, and I think I got home that afternoon about 4:30 [p.m.]. And I'm like wow, that's, you know, that's a long ride. And from that day forward, we started working on trying to find a car ride (laughs) into La Salle. And, I guess, my first experience was 'this is kind of like high school.' I knew of other people from other high schools from swimming and just hanging out that you'd see here. And being a

commuter, I didn't realize there was such a difference because I never considered living on campus—never, never even considered it. And, mostly commuters [were] who I came across through here.

9:57

Morith: So, you lived off-campus.

Smith: Yes, [I] lived at home, you know. People ask me who did I live with when I was in college. I said, "I lived with my parents while I was in college." You know, I was a commuter person. Get in, and go to class. I worked at various jobs after school so I was typically going out. And one day, it was a big day. We realized that Hayman Hall was free.<sup>1</sup> We didn't go to any of the orientations or any of that. We said, "Wow!" We can go over and play basketball. But, I'll back up a little bit. I thought I was going to swim here. I was planning to go onto the swim team. I think it was my 2<sup>nd</sup> day here. I swam at the pool at the high school for the Catholic league championships and some other meets a couple of times. This was the first time I went in, and I saw some guys working out. And, I kind of thought, wow. They're good. And then one of the pool attendants, what was his name?—Greg—because I got to know him after that. He remembered me, and he said, "Are you going to swim?" I said, "I'm thinking about it." He told me their workouts. And that was when I realized, you're not swimming. There's no way. This was a serious team. I wasn't totally serious. And then, factoring in the commuting and the fact that I needed to find a job, that was the end of my swimming career right there. But it was great. We used to use the Hayman Hall. We would play basketball there two or three times a week as a group. And, I think some classes were foregone for basketball as we got further into it. My experience was Hayman Hall, College Hall, student union, occasionally the library, and a couple of other classes because I was a business major. That's where most of my classes were—was College Hall, I think.

Morith: So, you mentioned basketball. Were you in any other extra-curriculars or club sports?

Smith: I played for two years. They had the intramural swimming. I was recruited early on in intramural swimming. That made me feel good. I also played intramural water polo. Most of the time, it was pickup basketball in Hayman Hall. And the other activity for four years, really three, at La Salle I learned was the game of pinochle. I think I played more pinochle in the student union than I did in classroom time. A bunch of guys were playing it. They play between classes. There were some days when I went just to play pinochle. Sad to say that now—I haven't played pinochle since the day I left La Salle probably. I can give you a little—what the morning would be. We would get off the bus there at 20<sup>th</sup> [Street] and Olney [Avenue]. And, they had the newspaper boxes right out in front of there. I'd buy a Daily News and Inquirer.<sup>2</sup> This was 1978, '79. We knew we were going to head to the student union and find our friends. We were highly educated so all we read were the sports pages in there. And, everybody would read their newspapers and play pinochle back and forth between classes. Typically, you had two to three classes a day. So, you didn't have a dorm to go back to. So, the

14:00

student union became our meeting place. And I got acquainted very easily with commuter school life. That was because I knew people there. Like I said, it was like an extension of high school. I had my oldest friend, whom I have known since 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. He went with me. He lived right around the corner from me. So, we would commute together, and during the day, we'd look for somebody who had a car, who was going home. It is amazing without cell phones and all that other stuff, him and I were able to communicate. I guess telepathically that one of us had a ride home for the other one. And, we'd stall. If he got a ride with somebody else, he'd stall until I found him. And he would say, "Aw, can you take my friend home?" Or, I'd stall. It was amazing how that all happened to not have to take those three buses. I grew to hate those buses after awhile. I did homework on the buses. I used to hate those buses. I look back now. It was fun. We hung out on the bus. In the day, my dad said that I could start taking my mom's car—was a great day in my life—and my friend's life, too. (laughs) I was remembering my first day at La Salle. It was sunny. I think my mom asked me, "How was it?" And I said, "It's a lot like high school." And, that was it. My first class was a philosophy class. And, coming from an all-boys high school, of course, La Salle was co-ed by then. And we had women in the class. That was interesting. That was like, wow. In Northeast Philadelphia, Father Judge [High School]—completely Caucasian—so, you had diversity here at the time, too. That was an interesting getting used to—where you were with different people. I forget the philosophy professor's name. He had some nerve condition and talked in a really high-pitched voice. What I remember him saying was [that] there's no wrong answer or right answer in philosophy. I was in there with a friend of mine. And I said, "Well, I guess we're all getting A's because there is no wrong answer—no right answer." (chuckles) We laughed. We were very funny then. The last class I had that first semester was calculus. I ended up getting the 3:30 pm calculus class. And, I never really liked calculus. I disliked it even more, because I knew if I missed that bus, I was not getting home 'till like 5:30. I remember her name. Bev Bacon was the professor.<sup>3</sup> We would sit there. There were two of us who commuted up to there. We would say to each other, "Come on, Bev. Skip this." "Would anyone like to—" "No, no. We are ready to go." Everybody else wanted to learn. (laughs) There were like three of us who had to catch the bus in there. So, that was my freshman—first semester at La Salle. I can't remember my professors. Wow.

Morith: You talked about calculus and philosophy. In your four years here, did you have a favorite professor?

Smith: My favorite professor here was an accounting professor my sophomore year—Pete Sweeney.<sup>4</sup> He taught principles of accounting—201 and 202. It was a three-day-a-week class. One of them was an hour-and-a-half lecture. Everybody I heard coming in said that I didn't want to get Sweeney. Well, that summer I started working for the Philadelphia Department of Recreation. I was a lifeguard at a swimming pool at B [Street] and Wyoming [Avenue]—at a rec center. It turns out in the small world that the gentleman who was like the area manager for the department of recreation was one Pete Sweeney. And, the guy who ran the rec center said, "That's your new accounting professor." He would talk to me. "Aw, you're

19:09

going to go for accounting?” I used to talk to him. Then, I took his class, and I kind of felt like he knows me, so I have to show up. You can give me a reason—but, I went to every accounting class. I might have foregone other classes for pinochle, or basketball, or something like that. I went to accounting classes. He was a very focused professor—serious about it, intimidating. He used to pull me aside. In the class, he was harder on me than he was on the others because he needed a whipping person, I guess. He was not mean or anything. I worked really hard. And to this day, I’m not an accountant. I’m not a C.P.A.<sup>5</sup> But his principles—When he used to talk about the principles of accounting—conservative accounting—naturally comes out when I talk to people. I worked a couple of other summers after that. I saw him a couple of times after I left. We never had mentoring talks or any of that because I was not that kind of person at that time who would talk to professors. I got in and got out. Pete Sweeney—somebody told me he passed away awhile back.<sup>6</sup> I think. He was a really good—as was every other accounting professor or teacher that I had at La Salle—were awesome. I knew it then, too, but they were really good.

Morith: Do you feel like they prepared you well?

Smith: Very much so—

Morith: For career—

Smith: Very much so. They were good, as were all the business professors I had here. If I don’t have regrets, but I look back now and I could have applied myself a lot more. If I ever had a do-over—of course I would want more than one do-over—however, I’d say—to go back and experience La Salle in a different way—would be a do-over I would take. I’d take it in a second. I have a daughter who is nineteen now, and she goes to Bloomsburg University.<sup>7</sup> I tried to get her to go to La Salle, but she had her mind set on Bloomsburg. And, [I] go up there quite often, and I live somewhat vicariously through her. She lives there. She is involved in a lot of activities—knows her professors really well. I can talk to her from the experience of—“Listen. I really didn’t do this. However, I wish I had. Can you go and do this?” And just walking through the campus here, it’s 2015. Probably, the last time I was on campus was maybe ’83—I came back—probably to pick up a transcript. And it still looks the same in a good way. I get like that, wow. In full disclosure, my first reaction on this campus was I wonder if I’m late for class—or, if there are any assignments that I haven’t prepared for today. (laughs) That was my typical way here.

Morith: Did you intern or study abroad while you were at La Salle—

Smith: No, I did not. I worked. Interns—there wasn’t a big. Studying abroad was never in my wheelhouse. Interns—I got a job through—I have to give full props here. I was looking for an after-school job. It was 1979, I guess. I went to the career placement office on campus, and it was very high-tech at the time. There was a beat-up binder—(giggling)—that had jobs in

23:23

it. And, I found a job with—a posting for an automotive parts company in Northeast Philadelphia that was looking for an accounting student. And, I applied, and I got the job. So, I owe La Salle. Going back, I never realized where I got that job. I started out—That would have been '80 because the Phillies won the World Series.<sup>8</sup> It was the beginning of my junior year. So junior and senior year, I was working after school and on the weekends probably like thirty to forty hours a week for this company. That was my internship. If they had interns, opportunities, I didn't know about them. And that was either ignorance. And, I was working. That was what I did. I came in, went to class. By that point, my junior year, I had a car—my dad and mom's car. I was coming in for class and going and working—coming into class, going and working. I got that job through La Salle. It was a great accounting experience in there. Yeah, La Salle—Wow!—Thanks for this interview because I now remember walking into that place and finding that little book.

Morith: So, what did you do at this job?

Smith: I did everything in the accounting group—bookkeeping, preparing financial statements. That ended up being my first full-time job out of college because back in '82, I think unemployment might have been—it was bad—fifteen plus percent.<sup>9</sup> I was probably—My grade point average was like 3.2? So then, you had the Big Eight accounting firms<sup>10</sup>—and then, maybe like the next eight. And, they were recruiting here on campus. And, I was rejected. I got interviews with all of them, and you needed to be in like the 3.6 grade average. And then, it was tough finding a job back then. I didn't know how to network. I remember seeing Pete Sweeney one afternoon come across the campus. And, he asked me how I was looking for a job. I remember him shaking his head and saying, "That's not the way it works." And, he asked me if I was still working at this place. And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "That's probably your best bet." So, I stayed there for a year, but I learned a heck of a lot. It was this privately owned company, and I saw all the inner workings of a crazy, privately-owned family company, which was pretty cool at that age to experience it. Now, I'm going back to the campus recruiting, and I'm thinking of the suit that I wore and my button-down shirt and realizing—I did not present well at that time. (laughs) And then, there were a lot of my fellow students who were active and involved—and ended up getting really good jobs because they knew how to network. I can use that now—that experience—because it benefits my daughter. I tell her what I did in 1981 and 1982 and say, "Do the exact opposite of it. You're going to be okay." However, I came out of it with a great education. As I got better jobs and would travel a little bit, people would say, "Oh, where did you go to college?" "La Salle." I started out sometimes—I was like in Texas or somewhere else. It's the small world. "Oh, we know about La Salle." My shoulders would perk up, and—"Oh, really!" Sometimes, they knew for basketball, and other times, they knew it for the accounting and business side.

Morith: What was one of these jobs—the better jobs that you had that you were mentioning?

27:43

Smith: I lucked into a really good job—accounting job with—what was then—Warner cable T.V. They were moving their headquarters to Blue Bell, PA. The place where I was working at after I left the automotive place, their C.F.O. was telling me about the headhunter who was hiring for that.<sup>11</sup> So, I went in and interviewed—a cattle-call kind of interview in Center City, Philadelphia in '85. I ended up getting hired by Warner-Amex cable.<sup>12</sup> Cable was in its infancy. And, I always had a fascination with T.V.—not just watching it, but how it worked. It was accounting that got me that job and that career. Accounting has always been my go-to. It was a differentiator throughout the rest of my career in that I could speak. People would say, “Oh, he’s an accountant.” I never was a C.P.A. because I didn’t go down the public accounting route. In there, however, from La Salle, I knew accounting really well. And, that helped me differentiate myself in moving ahead. And, that got me my job at Warner-Amex. I worked cable T.V. from 1985 until 2005 and went from accounting into—because I never wanted to be an accountant. I got to be a financial analyst which is probably a different title—a little more pay, but you didn’t have to be called an accountant. And then into general management and operations, and business development, however, the differentiator always came back was I was the one who knew how to do like pro forma financial statements. I could analyze financial statements, and I could—where some of the other people came from different avenues of life. And, to me that was the thumb; accounting was my thumb—differentiating me from other people. And, it goes back to La Salle. That was really good. You had excellent professors here.

Morith: Going back, you talked quite a bit about your career in accounting and the impact of La Salle and accounting and financial planning and such. I sense from talking to you and also from going to the men’s basketball game versus George Washington that you really love La Salle basketball—<sup>13</sup>

Smith: Yes, I do.

Morith: I was wondering if you could describe the men’s basketball team while you were a student here.

Smith: We were average. Was Lefty Ervin the coach here?<sup>14</sup> Yeah, I remember Stanley Williams.<sup>15</sup> That was when I was a senior. When I was a freshman or sophomore, we had a player here named Michael Brooks.<sup>16</sup> He was one of the best. He was the college basketball player of the year in 1980. So, I did go here with Michael Brooks. I just did the math in my head. And La Salle played Notre Dame<sup>17</sup> on a weeknight at the Palestra.<sup>18</sup> Notre Dame was number two in the country. Yeah, Michael Brooks—you had Mo Connolly,<sup>19</sup> who I went to high school with—Kurt Kanaskie.<sup>20</sup> My mom went. It was me and my mom and my sister Nancy, who was Miss La Salle. We went, and La Salle upset Notre Dame that night. I remember the students flooded the court. Of course, mom wouldn’t let us do that. Here I am an eighteen-year-old guy, and I can’t run on the court. She was driving that night, too. And then, they all graduated. In my junior and senior year, we really weren’t that good. I remember my first two years we were good. I knew a lot of the guys on the team. I remember Stanley Williams.<sup>21</sup> He

32:09

got drafted by the Celtics a couple of years after that.<sup>22</sup> I can't say how I knew some of the other La Salle basketball players. But, we knew a lot of the guys that played. We'd be over at Hayman Hall playing basketball. And it was kind of the one-off thing. I knew somebody who went to high school with somebody. That was my four years here—still going to the Palestra a couple of times a year to see La Salle play. I don't think we were playing any games in Hayman Hall then. It was just a workout place. It has somehow always been a part of me. When I moved up to Connecticut, La Salle was playing in the MAAC then.<sup>23</sup> It was the Lionel Simmons era.<sup>24</sup> It was the glory days. I went from Ken Durrett when I was eight years old.<sup>25</sup> Also, I have to throw in the plug for Larry Cannon.<sup>26</sup> He was probably the 2<sup>nd</sup> best—He was a greatly underappreciated player. I remember Larry Cannon. He was from Saint Gerome's Parish where I went to.<sup>27</sup> And his brother Greg was also a player on the team. I ended up meeting them one night when I was at a Saint Gerome's sports banquet when I was like a nine year old. So you went from them to Michael Brooks—and then to Lionel Simmons—and Doug Overton,<sup>28</sup> Randy Woods.<sup>29</sup> I was living up in the New York area, and La Salle probably played on the road up there five times a year. And, I would get to like four of those games. Then, I would of course come down here and watch them play in the Palestra. We were on T.V. back then fairly frequently—the early days of ESPN.<sup>30</sup> So, I got to see that team a lot. Then, when I moved to Florida, I wasn't as in touch with La Salle. The Internet wasn't around then, either. If there is a La Salle—we could be bad, and I'll still watch that game. I'm going to complain. It's La Salle basketball. The day we went to that game—The first time I went to a La Salle game in a long time<sup>31</sup>—it was good being home—really good being home.

Morith: Switching tracks, graduation day—Can you describe your graduation day in 1982?

Smith: One of the guys I hung with here—I won't use a name. He stopped going to class. This is what graduation day was to me. So, he was not eligible to graduate. However, he didn't tell his parents. And he ended up—His parents were going to meet him at the civic center. I forget because they had to go somewhere. So, he came down with me and my dad and my mother and sisters. And I guess grandmothers were going in a different car. And my dad says to him, you know, "I didn't think you were graduating." And he's like, "No, I'm not." And he said, "You're going to the graduation?" And he says, "Yeah, I can't tell my parents I'm not graduating." He says, "They're going to know when your name's not in the program." And we are laughing. I can tell you where we were on the [Roosevelt] Boulevard laughing at this. (Morith giggling) I remember after graduation him standing there with his parents—and, them reading the program and just searching it furiously because their son's name isn't in it. (Morith giggling) I don't think he ever ended up graduating. If he did, we kind of went our own ways. That was like my memory of graduation was just laughing at him the whole time. Of course, everybody then by that point—it's that viral groundswell where everybody knows. And, in this day and age, we would have had a camera on his parents recording the whole thing. And, you know—understood it. And he dreaded—this is somebody—we were getting our diplomas, and he dreaded the end of graduation (laughter) because he had to face his parents. (single hand

clap) So, that was my highlight of—I knew I was going to work for Kay Automotive when I left. And, it was at the civic center. I don't know the commencement speaker. I'd like to say it was an author. It might have been James Michener.<sup>32</sup> And, it was hot. We just wanted to get the diplomas and get out of there. And then about a week later, me and two other friends drove cross country for six weeks. And then I came back and went to work. And that was probably the last time I came on the campus of La Salle because I was working and didn't have any connection to it.

37:18

Morith: Have you been active in advocacy—donating to the college? How would you describe your role as an alumnus?

Smith: Early on, I donated. And then when I moved to Florida, I think I still donated. You know, don't check the records. It wasn't much. In there, I was always the kind because I moved to New York. You know, I wasn't really connected to La Salle because of being the commuter side of it. So, it was kind of like a—got my diploma. I paid for what I got. You know, and that's the way I was back then. And however, you know, if a friend's brother or sister or even later their children—I mean, I'm like, "Are you going for business? Then, you got to go to La Salle. You got to go to La Salle. You got to go to La Salle." And they would say, you know, "What did you do there? I would, like go "It's important for you to go. And, it's just a really good school." I remember I would always say, "It's just a really good school. You're going for accounting? Why are you going *here*?"<sup>33</sup> So I didn't get involved to the degree that I, you know—others did or whatever. However, I support the basketball team quite often in there. And now I look back and, you know, it's like I said if I had a do-over, I would have embraced the La Salle life a lot more.

Morith: Do you think you would have lived on campus?

Smith: I don't know if I was mature enough to live on campus at the time. It would have been a short tenure, probably. I didn't know how to do laundry back then in there. I would have acclimated I think in there. I would have lived on campus, but the dorm life here was not much when I was here. You know, athletes lived on campus, out-of-town people. But there was a ton of us that commuted because those buses used to be mobbed. And there wasn't much, you know, 'nightlife' around here then. And it wasn't the safest of neighborhoods back then. I worked so I still would have needed to work because I had student loans and paid, you know, a lot of it. I knew, you know, I had to work for that upcoming September tuition bill.

Morith: Were you in a fraternity here?

Smith: I was not. I was asked to pledge. I knew a couple of people in fraternities. And, my analytical mind said, you know, "First of all you don't live here. Secondly, you know, you are looking for that bus to get out of here, and you got to go to work." I mean I had some crappy jobs. None of them were around here. They were all up in the Northeast [Philadelphia]. So,

didn't have—[I] was asked to pledge a couple because I knew people and never took advantage of it. (pause) I was your typical commuter student, I think, at that time.

40:35

Morith: Kind of bringing this together—

Smith: Yeah

Morith: What is the greatest influence La Salle has had on your life over the past 33 years, would you say?

Smith: Accounting principles—basic, you know, accounting, business principles—that were taught. They were talking about ethics way before, you know, it became a big deal. I didn't know it at the time. It took a lot of like, you know, years to realize wow, you know, that was it.

Morith: Did that emphasis on ethics help you in your business career?

Smith: After I realized that's what they were talking about, yeah it did. It did. And I remember the Enron scandals and all of that. And thinking, you know, that's what La Salle preached against. That's what we were taught, you know, conservative accounting—just fundamental accounting. I used to laugh—I didn't realize all those people didn't go to La Salle. They didn't go to La Salle. They didn't have Pete Sweeney, or they didn't have Joe Reardon, or you know, [Professor] Zook or any of those other professors that I had here.<sup>34</sup> No, they would've been, you know, told differently and—probably like every other school. But when I meet accounting people at La Salle, from La Salle, it's (laughs)—It is a fraternity, especially as we get older, too, you know. [We are] cut from the same grain probably.

Morith: Do you consider it a good, a strong, network for career—

Smith: Yes. Yeah.

Morith: --this La Salle network in terms of finding career opportunities?

Smith: That beat-up white binder in 1979 was my entrée into it, and, you know, that was—I come across La Salle people. And like any other school, probably, but La Salle accounting. "What did you go to La Salle for?" And you just smile, "Accounting—           (??) and, you know, the professors."

Morith: One last thing, now you mentioned a professor named Zook?

Smith: Yes.

43:02

Morith: Could you give his full name please for the--

Smith: I think it was Joe Zook.<sup>35</sup> Now, I remember a professor I had for two economics classes—

Morith: Okay.

Smith: --who my dad had—I always—Joe Flubacher.

Morith: Okay.

Smith: He was old at the time—Professor Flubacher. And I'll close with this story. I had cut his class. It was a beautiful day. And we are sitting out in front of the student union. And we never did this a lot, but we were playing cards out there. And it's crowded. It was one of my first ever times relaxing out there. And he walks by, and he always wore like a black, kind of, not a cape I remember. And he just kind of glides by, and there were like three of us that had cut his class that day. And he looks down, and he says to me, "Mr. Smith, I hope pinochle will help you in your career, and I look forward to seeing you next week." And my dad had had him here, and he said, "And tell your father I said hello, too." My dad was like me. He didn't network. That scared the crap out of me. I never missed a Joe Flubacher class. And economics here at La Salle was awesome, too—that was another grounding principle. I took four economics classes here, and I had tremendous professors here. I just remember Joe Flubacher was that, and that's what sticks with me from, you know, '78, '79 up to now—is that.

Morith: Michael, is there anything else you'd like to share before we close?

Smith: It's been great reliving this period of time in a short amount of time. As I said this morning, I remember driving up. We drove up today, right there at the corner of 20<sup>th</sup> & Olney. That little house there was the admissions building. Tom Coyne was the admissions guy because he was a teacher for us in high school. And today has been 1978 all over again. It's really great being back here because this school is not—it's grown, but it looks the same as it did back then. And I think that's what it's all about.

Morith: Michael, great interview—Thank you so much.

Smith: Thank you, Brad.

Morith: And, we'll go ahead and close.

Smith: Thank you.

45:16 ***End of Interview***

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Hayman Hall is the gymnasium and natatorium building of La Salle University.
- <sup>2</sup> Philadelphia Daily News and Philadelphia Inquirer newspapers
- <sup>3</sup> Beverly A. Bacon was a mathematics professor at La Salle University (digitalcommons.lasalle.edu, 2015).
- <sup>4</sup> Pete Sweeney was a longtime accounting professor at La Salle University. He passed away in 2011 (philly.com, 2015).
- <sup>5</sup> C.P.A. stands for certified public accountant.
- <sup>6</sup> Pete Sweeney passed away in 2011 (philly.com, 2015).
- <sup>7</sup> Bloomsburg University is located in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania.
- <sup>8</sup> The Philadelphia Phillies are a professional baseball team.
- <sup>9</sup> Michael is referring here to the early 1980s recession in the United States. Unemployment hit as high as 14.5% in Michigan (Wikipedia, 2015).
- <sup>10</sup> The Big Eight is now called the Big Four, and they are in reference to the world's biggest accounting-related firms (Wikipedia, 2015).
- <sup>11</sup> C.F.O. stands for chief financial officer.
- <sup>12</sup> Warner-Amex Satellite Entertainment was headquartered in New York City and lasted from 1979 to 1987 (Wikipedia, 2015).
- <sup>13</sup> George Washington here refers to George Washington University in Washington, D.C. George Washington University is an Atlantic-Ten Conference rival of La Salle University in collegiate athletics.
- <sup>14</sup> Lefty Ervin coached the men's basketball team at La Salle University from 1979 to 1986 (philly.com, 2015).
- <sup>15</sup> Stanley Williams played forward for the La Salle men's basketball team. He was drafted in 1981 to play for the professional Boston Celtics team (basketball.realgm.com, 2015).
- <sup>16</sup> Michael Brooks achieved 2,628 points and 1,372 rebounds as a La Salle Explorer basketball player. He was drafted in the 1<sup>st</sup> round in 1980, going to the San Diego Clippers basketball team (Wikipedia, 2015).
- <sup>17</sup> Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana
- <sup>18</sup> The Palestra is a historic arena, opening in 1927, in the University City section of Philadelphia (Wikipedia, 2015).
- <sup>19</sup> James Bernard "Mo" Connolly played forward on the 1979-80 La Salle men's basketball team (digitalcommons.lasalle.edu, 2015).
- <sup>20</sup> Kurt Michael Kanaskie played guard on the 1979-80 La Salle men's basketball team (digitalcommons.lasalle.edu, 2015).
- <sup>21</sup> See note fifteen for Stanley Williams.
- <sup>22</sup> Boston Celtics professional basketball team
- <sup>23</sup> MAAC stands for Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference. La Salle University is now in the Atlantic-10 Conference (Wikipedia, 2015).
- <sup>24</sup> Lionel Simmons was a forward for the La Salle men's basketball team in the 1980s. He played in the National Basketball Association (NBA) from 1990 to 1997 (Wikipedia, 2015).
- <sup>25</sup> Ken Durrett was a La Salle Explorer basketball forward from 1968-1971 (Wikipedia, 2015).
- <sup>26</sup> Larry Cannon played guard for the La Salle Explorers in the late 1960s (Wikipedia, 2015).
- <sup>27</sup> Saint Gerome's Parish is located in Greater Northeast Philadelphia.
- <sup>28</sup> Doug Overton played guard for La Salle men's basketball from 1987-1991 (Wikipedia, 2015).
- <sup>29</sup> Randy Woods played guard for La Salle men's basketball from 1988-1992 (Wikipedia, 2015).
- <sup>30</sup> ESPN stands for Entertainment and Sports Programming Network. It was founded in 1979 (Wikipedia, 2015).
- <sup>31</sup> Michael is referring to the men's basketball game versus George Washington University that he and the interviewer attended. This game took place on January 10, 2015 (Wikipedia, 2015).
- <sup>32</sup> After researching this La Salle commencement booklet on the La Salle Digital Commons, I was unable to determine if there was an outside speaker at this commencement ([http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/commencement\\_programs/51/](http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/commencement_programs/51/)).
- <sup>33</sup> Michael Smith was referring here to a college other than La Salle University.
- <sup>34</sup> The professor referred to as Joe Reardon was actually John Reardon.
- <sup>35</sup> The professor referred to as Joe Zook was actually Jack Zook.