

Interviewee: Brother Richard Kestler, FSC.

Interviewer: Alexandria M. Moraschi

Date: April 3, 2019

Location: Anselm Hall, La Salle University, Philadelphia, PA

Running Time: 0:51:42

Recording Equipment: iPhone XR using the app Voice Memos

## Log

- 0:00:02** Stated date, continuation of interview, asked permission and he agreed.
- 0:00:30** He began college about a year and a half after entering the Christian Brothers and was not sure what to major in. He had challenges, but had great mentors helping him succeed and named a few prominent ones. His experience at La Salle College was a positive one and he graduated with 196 credits because as he was working on his bachelors in math, as a brother he had to obtain a master's in theology. After graduating in 1965, he began his ministries. At his first assignment in Jersey City, he took classes over at Fordham University to get a master's in mathematics. After four years, he was appointed principal at West Catholic, therefore got a master's in education at Villanova. When asked for a contrast between La Salle and Villanova, he stated that La Salle was the more difficult of the two, however, there is a large difference between degrees in theology and education.
- 0:06:00** He answered why he was interested in learning about the American Circus with the fact that he used to attend the circus every year when he was a child. He learned about the background of the different acts and was intrigued by "freakism". Some other fond memories at La Salle included his work in the administrative offices for the SATs and learned about the grading and security of the tests. He also made a parallel to a current issue happening in America with SAT and admissions scandals. He weighed in saying that wealthy people buying their children's way into a prestigious school is no surprise, but back when he was in college, it was difficult to get another person to fill in for a student at the SAT. In the late sixties, women were beginning to be let into more colleges and it was a dream of theirs to pursue an education and career.
- 0:10:44** His first assignment out of college was at an orphanage for about thirty boys. Thereafter, he taught at Hudson Catholic in Jersey City where he taught typing and coached track. It was interesting that he taught typing without the use of typewriters. He outlined to typewriter and had his students learn which keys to put their fingers on and everyone left knowing how to type. He would say, "give me your A finger, give me your S finger, never give me your D finger (middle finger), give me your F finger" and so on.

**0:15:47** He did not have to choice in switching from teacher to administrator, but he would be assigned by the provincial. For eight years, he was head of Student Affairs and Activities at Hudson Catholic where he was in charge of putting on their first prom. He stated that the same venue that prom was held was also where the fiftieth high school reunion also took place. In that same time, he became Superior of the house. Afterwards, he was sent out to be principal at West Catholic High School, and although young and inexperienced, the Cardinal who appointed him was impressed and gave him three mentors to take him through the ropes. He also helped the racial changes happening in the school. A heavily Irish-Catholic school was becoming a predominantly African American school, and they were also welcoming in many Vietnamese children as well. He got them all to co-exist by having them relate to something like soccer which helped the process.

**0:23:30** Brother Richard experienced many different experience in the schools he attended. His mentality in every school was that if he could not succeed in what he wanted to get done in six years, it would never happen, therefore, he needed to fulfill his duties within a six year block. He was at his first major assignment at Hudson Catholic for eight years and after was elected Provincial of the community where he had to visit schools along the east coast known as the Baltimore District. He was able to acquire new experiences that had him travelling to Guatemala, the Philippines and Northern Africa where he experienced a civil war, brutality against the Christian Brothers, new cultures, and different ways of life. He visited the Holy Land and taught children from all walks of life. He worked with children in a juvenile detention hall in Philadelphia. He was sent back to La Salle College High six different times as a teacher and administrator until he was eventually given the task as President. He saved West Catholic from going under by creating a solid marketing pitch to get the school back on its feet.

**0:41:40** As a Christian Brother, Brother Richard was able to recognize different characteristics of individuals, represent the values and school that the Christian Brothers affiliated themselves with and also having a Lasallian presence in every school. Saying the words, "Let us remember, we are in God's holy presence" brought together the richest and poorest schools and students and pressed upon the guiding principles. He stated that brothers were approachable and engaging and wanted to see success in their students.

**0:44:07** Brother Richard's more difficult experience had more to do with the parents of children rather than the actual children. He noticed many conflicts between generations of parents and kids. He impacted many students being a prominent figure in schools. In one instance he realized how important the power of word is

when having a conversation with a priest at Hudson Catholic who was a student of his and explaining that it was something Brother Richard had said that made him want to become a priest. He went on to say that when dealing with young people, it is important to win their respect and understand that they listen to every word being said. He ended with a quote that he tries to follow that St. John de La Salle stated, "Before you can teach anything to a kid, you first have to win their heart".

**0:51:42**      **End of Session 2, Part 1**