

Interview of Dr. Kevin J. Harty

Interviewer: Meghan Skiles

Interviewee: Dr. Kevin J. Harty

Date: March 21, 2019 at 1:00 pm

Recording Location: Dr. Harty's Office, Olney Hall 169, La Salle University, Philadelphia, PA

Log Created by: Meghan Skiles

Recording Equipment: iPhone XR using Voice Memos Application

Abstract

Dr. Kevin J. Harty was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1948. He grew up in Brooklyn until his family moved to Chicago when he was about twelve years old. His father worked for the telephone company, which spurred the family's move to Chicago, and his mother stayed home and cared for the family. Dr. Harty attended high school in the suburbs of Chicago, graduating when he was fifteen and a half years old. Between high school and college, he worked for a year in a department store, and briefly considered going into the fashion industry. He attended Marquette University for his undergraduate degree, graduating in 1970 at the age of twenty-two, with a B.A. in English and German. He then attended the University of Pennsylvania, earning a master's degree in English in 1971 and a Ph.D. in English in 1974. After earning his Ph.D., Dr. Harty began his teaching career at Centenary College of Louisiana and taught for brief periods at Rhode Island College and Temple University before starting a position as an English professor at La Salle University in 1982. Dr. Harty won the 1992 Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching at La Salle University. He went on to become the chair of the English department, and served as chair from 2002 to 2018, winning the Faculty Distinguished Scholarship Award in 2015. He recently stepped down as chair and continues to teach a wide variety of English courses at La Salle. Dr. Harty is trained as a medievalist and is considered a specialist in Medieval Literature; Chaucer; Vikings; literary traditions of King Arthur, Joan of Arc, and Robin Hood; film representations of the Middle Ages; cinematic adaptations of literary texts, and pop culture as related to AIDS. He is a renowned scholar and has written several books and many articles on a variety of his specialties, many of which have become industry standards.

Interview Log

00:00 Dr. Harty was born July 20, 1948 in Manhattan, New York. He lived there with his family for about two years, after which they moved to Brooklyn. He lived in Brooklyn until high school, at which point his family moved to Chicago, Illinois. He used to speak in a Brooklyn accent, and joked that he could talk in a Brooklyn accent for the entire interview.

01:25 Dr. Harty's father and mother were both born in Brooklyn, and they grew up around the corner from each other. They did not know each other well growing up, but may

have crossed paths on occasion. His father enlisted in the Navy Air Force right after the attack on Pearl Harbor, before which he worked as a milkman. He served in the Air Force, which at that point was not a separate branch of the military, but a part of the Navy. After he came out of the Air Force, he went to Manhattan College under the GI bill. The day Dr. Harty was born, his father started work at the telephone company and worked there for the remainder of his life. His mother worked as a legal secretary, and stopped working once she got married.

03:03 He grew up as the oldest of five children, although there were other children interspersed between those five who did not survive childhood. Growing up, his parents taught him and his siblings to be responsible people, but his parents did not pressure them to pursue any specific careers. His father was the first in his family to attend college, and nobody in his mother's family attended college. It was assumed that he and his siblings would attend college. Dr. Harty considers his childhood unremarkable in many ways. He had a lot of extended family in New York, which caused some tension when his immediate family moved to Illinois, because the rest of the family remained on the east coast. Originally, his father's plan was to spend only two years in Illinois, and then to return to New York. They originally moved to Illinois because his father got a huge promotion, working with computers, or the forerunners to computers, in 1952.

06:10 He does not necessarily think his parents were very strict with him and his siblings when he was growing up. He recalls one occasion when his five-year-old brother wanted to run away, so his parents allowed him to pack a suitcase and to go sit on a bench in Prospect Park for five hours. He speculated that his parents probably thought it was very funny at the time.

07:46 Dr Harty was around his mother more growing up, because his father worked, but he feels that he was equally close to both of his parents. Among his siblings, he and his sister Kathleen are most like his mother's side, who are French-Canadian/Newfoundlander, and the rest are more like his father's side, who are Irish. His mother's side and his father's side of the family have different sensibilities, different senses of humor, and a different look. He and Kathleen used to joke that, due to their stark differences, either the two of them were adopted or the other three were. Now, Dr. Harty's siblings are spread out between Florida, Chicago, and Indianapolis. They do not have much contact with his brother who lives in Florida.

10:00 Growing up in Brooklyn, Dr. Harty attended mandatory weekly Sunday dinner at his grandparents' houses, alternating between his mother's side and his father's side of the family each week. Once he and his siblings and cousins were old enough, they would make the transition from the kids' table to the adult table, which often involved being pranked as a rite of passage. Only Dr. Harty, his parents, and his

siblings lived in his home growing up, but aunts, uncles, and grandparents would often come to stay with them for prolonged periods, especially once they moved to Chicago. He and his siblings did chores such as mowing the lawn and shoveling snow in order to receive their allowances. His father was very handy and could do everything from plumbing to electricity, but for some reason never taught Dr. Harty or any of his siblings those skills. Dr. Harty claims that this is one of the reasons he now lives in a condominium with staff, because whenever he needs any handiwork done he can just call downstairs and someone will come help him.

13:26 Dr. Harty grew up in a neighborhood of Brooklyn called Windsor Terrace, which he claims no one who grew up outside of Brooklyn knows where it is. It is in Park Slope, but was the working class part of Park Slope when he was growing up. It is not nearly as affordable now. His father paid about \$3,000 for the property when he bought it, but Dr. Harty recently looked the property up on Zillow and it last sold for \$1.8 million. While living there as a child, he played in the street, played stick ball, and walked home from school for lunch. Nobody bothered locking their doors when they left home, even when they were gone all day. The neighbors looked out for each other, but he claims there was not a lot to look out for in Brooklyn at the time. Once they moved to Chicago, his family lived in the suburbs, which Dr. Harty claims are his personal hell. The community there was fairly close-knit as well.

15:42 Compared to the other people in his working class neighborhood growing up, Dr. Harty said that his family was no better or worse off than anyone else, but that everyone was in about the same situation financially. It was a white neighborhood, and after Dr. Harty grew up there was a “white flight,” where the neighborhood turned Puerto Rican and black, then gay. Dr. Harty commented on a pattern that occurs in many cities, where the gay community moves in and rescues the neighborhood, then the neighborhood becomes too expensive for them to live in and the “folks with the money” move in. Dr. Harty’s grandfather owned a few apartment buildings in the area at one time, and Dr. Harty wishes somebody had saved at least one of those buildings so he could afford to retire to New York. One of the properties was a three-flat building with a common driveway and twelve parking spaces which, in New York City, is worth its weight in gold. Back then, a parking spot cost about \$5 per month, which was a lot of money at the time because of how difficult it was to stay parked due to street cleaning. Today, a parking spot would probably cost eight or nine hundred dollars a month. His aunts sold the property for a low price after his grandfather died, because they were convinced that the neighborhood was going downhill. Dr. Harty had many close friends in his neighborhood growing up, but is no longer in touch with any of them. A few of his friends from Brooklyn became minor television stars, but none of the families who lived on his block live there now. Some of the families from his neighborhood in Chicago still live there today.

- 19:20 Growing up, part of his immediate family were Episcopalian and part of them were Catholic, which caused some tension. Dr. Harty himself was Episcopalian, but he had to go to Catholic schools and, in his words, “the nuns were less than kind.” In grade school in Brooklyn, the pastor of the church was an Auxiliary Bishop of the diocese, and when he visited the school, all of the children had to throw themselves on the floor because of the Bishop’s high status. One student was always prompted to ask for the bishop’s blessing, and the nuns would always say, “Not for Harty, ‘cause he’s not a Catholic.” His favorite memory of grade school was one classmate who kicked a nun back after she hit him. After the incident, the boy and his family disappeared from the school and the neighborhood. Dr. Harty commented that, in retrospect, the incident was “absolutely, hysterically funny, but not.” The church and school were a working class, Irish parish at that point. It is now much more mixed. When asked whether his Episcopalian religion was a big part of his life as a child, Dr. Harty responded, “No, I mean, you just went to church,” and clarified that he is Anglo-Episcopalian, which means that in some ways, when it comes to rituals and traditions, they are “more Catholic than the Catholics.”
- 23:16 Dr. Harty started school when he was four years old. In New York, you could start in January or in September, so he started in January when he was four and a half. He thought he was being taught by “large penguins that would eat [him] alive,” because the nuns did not have ears or feet, and they knew what you were thinking. In Brooklyn, he went to Holy Name Parish. He started high school at the age of eleven, because he skipped a few grades. Now, he thinks this may have been one of the worst things that ever happened to him, because he was way too young, and the age difference between him and the other children in his class was noticeable. He got through it by being the class clown.
- 25:40 Overall, he did well in school, although math was never his strong suit. He talked about one English teacher he had in high school who had been a chaplain in World War II and the Korean War, who suffered from severe PTSD. He was a bit of a curmudgeon, assigned fifty-page papers to high school freshmen, and taught all of Shakespeare Dr. Harty’s freshman year. Although he thought the teacher was a little crazy, Dr. Harty enjoyed the class immensely and had the same teacher all four years of high school. Partially because of him, Dr. Harty realized he wanted to be an English teacher.
- 27:14 Dr. Harty commented on how, when he was a kid, no one ever worried about getting a job, but that it was sort of a given. He talked about how his generation enjoyed going to school, and how when it came to choosing a career they did not have the same stressors that today’s college students have, such as student loan debt. They took classes they wanted to take, and chose careers they wanted to pursue, and they figured they would get a job. At Marquette University, where he received his undergraduate degree, they had flat-rate tuition and people could take eight classes

a semester if they wanted, simply for the fun of it. He believes that today's students at La Salle probably would not understand the idea of taking a class for the fun of it because of the pressures they are under to meet course requirements. In addition to English, he ended up majoring in German in college, having never taken a single German class before then, simply because he wanted to try something new, and because it provided him with the opportunity to study in Germany for a year. He graduated with around 180 credits, two majors, and three minors, because he took so many courses just for fun.

30:12 Although he did very well in English, Dr. Harty claimed that math and science and he do not get along well. At one point in high school, he was put on probation for flunking trigonometry. His father was not happy, because he was an engineer, and it was in a sense Dr. Harty's moment of infamy in high school. He was required to go to school every Saturday and scrub the foyer with a toothbrush as punishment. When asked if any of his high school teachers other than his English teacher left a lasting impact on him, Dr. Harty said he really liked the teacher who gave him an F. He actually liked all of his teachers, although in retrospect he thinks that many of them were "loony tunes." The high school he went to in Chicago was run by an all-male Catholic order, and there was an all-female high school run by nuns two towns over.

32:35 His high school was brand-new when he attended, and his was the first class in the doors. When the school year started, the gym and the cafeteria were not complete, and they were still finishing work on the school when the students showed up. His elementary school in Brooklyn was co-ed, but there was a wall in the middle of the school to separate the boys and the girls. The boys had nuns as teachers for the first two years, a lay teacher for one year, and Xaverian brothers for the remainder. Nuns taught the girls for their entire eight years. In his all-male high school in Chicago, he had a mixture of lay people and religious people as teachers, all of whom were male except for one female typing teacher. She was very pretty, and all of the students took typing because she taught it. They often pranked her with practical jokes such as taking all the rollers out of the typewriters and putting them in her desk. In retrospect, he feels for her, because she was up against 400 teenage boys. He commented that she did not hit the students, whereas the priests did. They would take their collars off first, and the students were allowed to take the first swing, after which the priest would hit the student, often pretty hard. Dr. Harty does not know if they were hit any harder or less hard if they hit the priest or not, but he always took the opportunity. Other teachers would make them to eat soap in front of everybody if they said something dirty, or the coaches would make them do extra sprints or pushups, but the priests just hit them. They sometimes used their hands, sometimes a ruler, and sometimes a book. If the students said anything to their parents about it, their parents hit them for upsetting the priest. He does not know if this would be considered child abuse now, but said that he survived.

- 36:59 Dr. Harty swam and ran as extracurricular activities in high school. Illinois had mandated Physical Education, so if students were on a team they did not have to take the class. Illinois also required a Civics course, and students were required to learn the Illinois state song as well as a lot of information about the Illinois constitution. Dr. Harty told a funny story about a student he had in his honors class about six years ago from Illinois, who ended up in the hospital after a trip to the Penn Museum. Dr. Harty marched into his student's hospital room singing the Illinois state song, and the student looked at him like he was crazy for knowing it. Dr. Harty had jobs throughout high school, many of which were, in his words, "lousy jobs." His first job was at a local version of a Baskin Robbins, and he was fired because his ice cream scoops were too big. They were supposed to weigh the cone to make sure it was the right size, but they received a lot of business from the baseball fields across the street, so he never had the time to follow that rule. He made \$0.92 an hour, which sounded great at the time. He also mowed lawns, babysat, and worked in department stores throughout high school. One chain he worked for had a management training program where they would send you to become a buyer, and he briefly considered this but ultimately decided against it. He worked because it was expected that he and his siblings not sit around the house and do nothing, and because he needed money to put gas in the car and pay for car insurance.
- 40:30 He graduated high school when he was fifteen-and-a-half, and in Illinois the driving age was fifteen. Going into high school as an eleven-year-old, he knew he would be picked on, so he felt he had to be the class clown. If trouble was going to be started, his name was going to be associated with it. After graduating high school, he took a year off and worked for a men's clothing store, where realized he had a knack for sales and an eye for clothes. He then started college when he was sixteen.
- 42:55 Dr. Harty started college at Marquette University in the summer to get a head start, and he lived with two boys who were seniors and drunk all the time. It was eye opening for him. He started there in 1966 and graduated in 1970. Marquette was an urban campus, which appealed to him due to his disdain for the suburbs. He started as an English major, and ended up majoring in both English and German. By starting in the summer, he had more freedom to take the classes he wanted to take. He does not remember anyone complaining about taking any classes, regardless of what type of career they were pursuing. One of his roommates went on to become a very famous cancer doctor, another is a "big-time lawyer," and another runs a venture capital firm. They had a good time, had many parties, and played around a lot, but they also studied and did their work. There were often manic weekends where he had to read three novels and write three papers in one weekend.

- 45:08 Everybody had a job while Dr. Harty was in college. He also had summer jobs. Once he worked second shift in a torpedo factory, which he liked because he would go to school in the morning, work from 4-11, and then go out drinking. He made \$4 an hour, which was a lot of money at the time. At that time, tuition was \$900 per year. The year that the cumulative total of his books for the year rose above \$50, he was outraged. He had a big circle of friends and they often took classes together. Some of his classes were 500-600 people. These courses were usually taught by the big names in their fields. He liked the location of Marquette because he could easily hop a bus to Chicago or Madison, and enough people lived close enough that they could go party at their houses. It was the time of the Vietnam War, and there were often protests and marches on campus. He does not know what would have to happen today to get La Salle students marching, but he and his fellow students marched at the drop of a hat. Everyone he went to school with seemed to genuinely enjoy school. Students did not have advisors the way they do today – they were given the catalog and told what they needed to do, and they just did it.
- 48:33 While in college, he spent junior year studying in Germany, which he thoroughly enjoyed and claims he has never been the same since. The town where they had a campus no longer has a campus, but he has been back to the area since then. There is now a kindergarten there. In his program, they studied a subject and then they went to see it. For example, they studied Charlemagne and then went to see his grave and castle. They went to Dachau after studying the Holocaust, and to Salzburg. His favorite memory of Germany was seeing the Berlin Wall, which was still up at the time. When they went into Berlin, they went by bus and travelled through East Germany. Teachers who were born in the east were not allowed to travel by bus and had to fly in, and the buses that the others took could be stopped at any moment to be searched. He thought it was cool to see how different it was. The staff of his program had been bribed to never speak English, but the students would occasionally bribe the staff to speak English in certain situations. There were about 60 students in the program, and they all became good friends.
- 51:40 Dr. Harty initially wanted to go to Fordham University in New York City, and he no longer remembers why he did not end up going there. At one point, he planned on transferring from Marquette to Fordham, but he would have lost so many credits that he would have needed to do an extra year. Marquette was close enough to his family in Chicago that if he needed money from “the folks,” they could send money and it could be there in three days. If he needed to bounce a check, it would take five days for it to bounce, at which point the money would have arrived from his parents. Marquette was not too far away from home, and it was affordable, which were factors in his choosing to attend. It seemed like a fine option, and he ended up finding his niche there. He was the student worker for the English department for a period, and the English and German departments both seemed to like him. He felt like people at Marquette invested in him. His parents did not play much of a role in

his college decision, although he stated that if he had wanted to go to Berkeley his father would likely have said no because he was already enough of a hippie.

54:40 Marquette is in downtown Milwaukee, and Dr. Harty appreciated the urban setting. The drinking age was eighteen, and there was an incredible number of bars either on the campus, or within two blocks of the campus. There was one street that was just all bars. He and his friends had specific bars in which they hung out, where the bartenders knew them and they were regulars. On his eighteenth birthday, there was a big party, and the bartenders were confused because he had been going there for some time ahead. Fake I.D.s were very easy to come by, and his fake I.D. said he was nineteen.

56:18 Throughout college, he got very good grades. He did not take any science courses, and he took easy math courses, which helped him keep his grades up. He reiterated that he took classes because he wanted to and because he would enjoy them, and he mentioned his German degree again. He officially decided to major in German once he was in Germany, because he had all of the credits he needed and thought, “why not?” He considered going to graduate school in Germany, but his generation had to register for the draft during the Vietnam War, and the draft board usually did not allow people to leave the country for school. He had also wanted to go to University of Toronto for graduate school, and they did not allow him to leave the country for that either. Eventually the draft board instituted a lottery to decide who was required to serve, but before that, they issued deferments for individuals who were in school, as well as individuals who got married and had a child. Once the lottery was instated, those with high numbers were required to go serve. The draft board issued deferments for undergraduate studies, but rarely for graduate studies. Dr. Harty has friends who are PhDs in medieval studies who were drafted as typists, among other jobs, in Vietnam. Dr. Joseph Volpe, from La Salle’s Philosophy department, served as a foot soldier, and John Baky, former Director of the Connelly Library, was an M.P. Many people from his high school and college died in the war. The possibility of being drafted was something that loomed large as Dr. Harty and his generation got ready to graduate, and some people delayed graduation or joined the National Guard to get around that.

1:01:19 While at Marquette, Dr. Harty was involved in student government and the newspaper. He was the editor of the newspaper, and head of student government. He also was named the Outstanding Graduate of the College of Arts and Sciences, which meant that the president of Marquette, Fr. John Raynor, whom Dr. Harty had locked out of his office as a freshman during a student protest, ended up giving him an award. Dr. Harty stated that the president remembered the lockout for many years. More recently, Marquette asked for donations from alumni to build a new Union building, and Dr. Harty sent them \$1000 along with a note to Fr. Reynor, who was still serving as president. The note said that he was happy to donate

because he had locked Fr. Raynor out of his office when he was a freshman, after which the Fr. Raynor gave him an award as a senior, and Dr. Harty did not know if he remembered. In the note, he jokingly said that he was amazed by how much the president had grown in those four years. Fr. Raynor did remember, and ended up calling Dr. Harty, who then donated another \$1000. His name is now on the wall in the Alumni Union at Marquette.

1:03:09 Dr. Harty decided he wanted to focus on Medieval Studies for his graduate degree, in part because his favorite English professor at Marquette specialized in Chaucer. He wanted to go to Toronto because they had the best Medieval Studies program on this side of the Atlantic, but as he mentioned before, the draft board would not allow it. He applied to Yale, Harvard, Penn, and possibly a few other places that he no longer remembers. Yale did not accept him because the last two people from Marquette's English department who went there flunked out, so Marquette English students were essentially blackballed from Yale. Because of his GRE scores, Dr. Harty got offers from places to which he did not apply. He was offered free rides to Chicago, Michigan, Illinois, Notre Dame, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. He thought Chicago would have been good, but he wanted to get back east, so he focused more on Penn and Harvard. Harvard accepted him, but they start a month later than everyone else, which complicated things. They claimed they wanted him as a student and they might have money for him, but by the time they decided whether they had the money he would have missed deadlines for everywhere else.

1:05:09 Penn had one of the best Medieval Studies programs, in some ways better than Harvard's program, and he received a four-year, free ride offer. The first year, students were research assistants to two people in the department, then they taught for two years, then they were paid for their fourth year to complete their dissertation. They were required to finish in four years, and then Penn would help them get a job. Dr. Harty had the opportunity to study with many big-name people in the field, including the head of the department who ended up directing his dissertation. He told a funny story about how one night the head of the department was having a party and needed a bartender, which happened to be one of Dr. Harty's side jobs. He called Dr. Harty and asked him if he could do it, and when Dr. Harty arrived, he tested him on how to make a scotch. Dr. Harty passed the test, and his professor said, "I like you. You know Latin, you know how to make a drink, and I'd be happy to direct your dissertation." Dr. Harty took him up on his offer, and he proved to be an excellent dissertation director. He helped Dr. Harty get his first job and his second job after graduate school. Dr. Harty's graduate fellowship paid him \$2000 per year, tax free, and he lived very well. He usually paid about \$60 per month for a room somewhere. Once a month, they went out to a place on Penn's campus called La Terrasse, and splurged \$10 on a meal consisting of a French Onion soup and a glass of wine.

1:09:15 The first year of Dr. Harty's graduate program was technically the Master's portion of the program, which entailed a reading list and some comprehensive exams. The following three years, he did more focused work for the Doctoral portion of his program. One of his professors was Norman Mailer's college roommate, so Norman Mailer would show up in class every now and then. Dr. Harty feels that his education at Marquette adequately prepared him for his experience at Penn. For graduate studies in Medieval Studies in those days, they required four languages. Dr. Harty's languages were French, German, Latin, and Icelandic. Choosing Icelandic as his fourth language was a decision he made partially because it allowed him to go to Iceland for a summer. He once again reiterated that he chose classes because they sounded fun, and that he genuinely enjoyed graduate school just as much as undergraduate school. He did not have to stress about getting a job the way today's graduate students do.

1:13:15 The title of Dr. Harty's dissertation was "The Apocalyptic Unity of the Chester Mystery Plays." In the High Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance, different towns put on cycles of 18 to 32 plays based on Bible stories. There is controversy about how many of these plays there actually were, and a lot more towns did them than we have the texts for today. The collection of plays from the city of Chester, which is in Northwest England on the Welsh border, survives intact in a number of manuscripts. Dr. Harty's idea for his dissertation was that what held that group of 24 plays together was an over-concern with the end of the world, hence the "Apocalyptic Unity." He argued this in part because there was a big Benedictine monastery in the town and Benedictines worry about the end of the world. He no longer believes in the ideas and arguments he presented in his dissertation. Scholars now believe that the plays may have come a little later, after the monastery was there, which calls into question his argument regarding the Benedictines. His dissertation did make it into a book and a bunch of articles, and Dr. Harty is on a video tape about Medieval drama in which he talks about it. He has not done much with Medieval drama in the years since his dissertation, and has focused on Chaucer, Joan of Arc, King Arthur, and Robin Hood, as well as film. At Penn, unlike many other doctoral programs, Dr. Harty did not have to defend his dissertation. Instead, they were required to submit a minimum of 220 pages, their director had to sign off on it, a second reader had to sign off on it, and a third reader who was supposed to be a bit of an outlier had to sign off on it. Throughout the process of writing his dissertation, Dr. Harty's director was so thorough with his suggestions and critiques during the process that when it came time to submit it to the readers, it was basically smooth sailing. The most difficult thing that Dr. Harty remembers about his dissertation was not the process, but the requirements for typing it up and maintaining margin sizes. In addition to his dissertation, Dr. Harty and the students at Penn took exams in three fields at the end of their third year, which he admitted were a bit of a bear, but he passed all three.

- 1:20:20 The first year of grad school, Dr. Harty worked as a research assistant to two professors – a Chaucer scholar and an Anglo-Norman Studies scholar. He then worked for two years as a teaching assistant. He taught a freshman literature course called *The Novel* in which the students read an entire novel and wrote a paper about it each week. The teaching assistants received no training before teaching their first class. Dr. Harty decided to start his first class with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, by James Joyce, and his entire class ended up being Jewish. This made teaching Joyce difficult, because his writing is heavily steeped in the Catholic Church. His next semester he chose to start with *Portnoy's Complaint*, by Philip Roth, to cater to the Jewish student population, and there was not a single Jewish student in his class. Dr. Harty commented on how they covered more material in a week than he would ever consider teaching now. As a teaching assistant, he taught one course per term. He taught *The Novel* for his first four semesters as a teaching assistant, after which he taught in the evening. There were no freshman composition courses like there are today, because the freshmen were expected to already know how to write before they got to college. There was no director of freshman writing, although there was a director of freshman English. This position, however, served mostly to oversee the first-year masters students who had just been thrown into teaching. Dr. Harty had a fellow classmate who, in his words, was “very green,” and did not always understand the cultures of the students they were teaching, such as the custom of practicing Jewish students to not name God. This led him to mark papers incorrect when the students typed “G—” in their papers in place of the word God, and Dr. Harty had to take him aside and explain the custom to him so he did not get in trouble with the Dean’s office.
- 1:24:20 Dr. Harty has kept friends from graduate school, although many of them are no longer living. He also stayed friends with many of his professors. He maintained a professional relationship with his dissertation director and became very good friends with the Anglo-Norman professor for whom he was a research assistant. She finished typing her last book at age 100 on a manual typewriter, and Dr. Harty used to scour the boroughs of Brooklyn to find her typewriter rolls. Her book is a study of each of the approximately 400 manuscripts that have any of the French of England in them. She spent her whole life travelling around Europe looking at and working with these manuscripts, some of which were destroyed in World War II.
- 1:26:10 After completing his PhD at Penn, Dr. Harty took his first job as a professor at Centenary College of Louisiana in Shreveport. He got the job because of a recommendation he received from his dissertation director. Moving to Shreveport from Philadelphia was interesting for him. The city consisted of about 100,000 people and is a buckle in the Bible belt, and the school itself is Methodist. Dr. Harty had long hair at the time, and he was the first “Yankee” the school had ever hired. He was 25 at the time, and the person closest in age to him on the faculty was 53. Dr. Harty hung out with the students more often than he did with the faculty,

because they were closer in age to him. Looking back on his experience there, Dr. Harty reflected that he may have been “a bit of a jerk,” saying and doing some things that stirred the pot. Overall though, the faculty was generally upset when he left. Shreveport was a city in which it was liberal to be a Methodist in the 1970s, and the college had crosses burned on its lawn and the town was still fairly segregated. The nearest big city was Dallas, Texas, which was four and a half hours away. They only got two television stations in Shreveport, and they had no theaters or art in the city except for what they had at the college. There was one movie theater, but it was highly censored and if a film had any questionable material in it, it would not be shown.

1:29:00

While employed at Centenary College, Dr. Harty taught composition, as well as courses that focused on pre-Shakespeare and post-1900 literature. He taught five courses per term, two of which were composition classes that had 25 students per class. In these composition classes, students were required to turn in drafts of every paper, which professors had to grade and give back, then the students would write out their papers. Dr. Harty felt like he was forever grading papers. Over the summers, Dr. Harty was provided with money to go study at other libraries, and he took that opportunity every time it was offered. Last year, he had a student in one of his honors classes at La Salle who grew up across the street from Centenary College, and he called this student “Billie Joe Bob” because he was from Shreveport. Dr. Harty admitted that Shreveport had a famous bakery that made the best strawberry pie. He stayed at Centenary College for two years and had a slightly awkward experience leaving because his new employer, Rhode Island College, called Centenary College to verify a few things before Dr. Harty told Centenary that he was leaving. The chair of the English department was sad to see him go, and he and Dr. Harty remained friends long after Dr. Harty left. Centenary College is struggling now, although it has a bigger endowment than La Salle. There is money in the town from oil and gas, but the salaries and opportunities provided at the college are fairly limited.

1:35:00

Dr. Harty taught at Rhode Island College, located in Providence, after leaving Centenary College of Louisiana. Rhode Island College, although it is not technically a Catholic school, is very Catholic. It is called Rhode Island College, but is essentially Rhode Island State University, and since Rhode Island is the most Catholic state the school was heavily influenced by Catholicism. There were big departments at Rhode Island College. Dr. Harty taught Business writing, Linguistics, and College Writing. While he taught there, there were about eight people in the department under the age of thirty. In comparison, today it is rare for individuals to complete their PhD by the age of thirty. The department was often unpleasant, because there was a lot of fighting within the department. It was a union school, and people often showed up to meetings with lawyers and sued each other over everything. There were, however, some people Dr. Harty liked and kept in

touch with over the years. The college was close to Boston and Cape Cod, and Dr. Harty lived in Boston for part of his time there, commuting to work. He liked Rhode Island College better than Centenary College. He made more money in Rhode Island and enjoyed being in the north. His coworkers liked him, and there was some talk of the possibility of him making a good assistant chair or chair someday. He stayed there for two years.

1:37:38 He got a job at Temple University in Philadelphia after working at Rhode Island College. It was a much bigger school in a bigger city. Temple then had a freeze on tenure, which spurred his move to La Salle. In most schools, after six years professors either receive tenure or must leave. They have the option to bring credit with them from other jobs, and Dr. Harty now believes that if he had not brought credit with him things might have gone differently, because the tenure freeze came off. As it happened, Dr. Harty took a job at La Salle and has stayed at La Salle since then. He commented that in his heart of hearts he thinks he always wanted to take another job, but that never ended up happening.

1:38:47 Dr. Harty started teaching at La Salle in 1982. During his time at La Salle, he has been an assistant professor, an associate professor, a professor, director of writing, assistant chair, and chair. He was chair of the English department for sixteen years, which is a very long time to serve as chair, in part because no one else wanted the job. One of the best parts of being chair for so long, is that he was able to hire who he wanted and build his own department. Some of the people he hired over the years left, but all of the professors he hired who still work at La Salle have received tenure. When he started as chair, it was much easier than it is now, partially because there was more money than there is now.

1:40:32 When asked what initially brought him to La Salle, Dr. Harty responded that, in addition to not being able to get tenure at Temple, he wanted to stay on the east coast. There was a possible job in Boston, but he did not like the school. He considered a job in Delaware, but he did not like the way they handled the hiring process and it made him nervous. When he started at La Salle, Br. Emery Mollenhauer was the provost, and he made a point of making Dr. Harty feel welcome. Dr. John Keenan was the chair of the English department, and Dr. Jim Butler was the assistant chair. Over the years, Dr. Harty became good friends with some of the people in the department, as well as in other departments. One of the things Dr. Harty learned at chair camp, or as he liked to call it, “sleepaway camp for chairs,” was that being the chair of the department would mean he would not be friends with the people he used to teach with. For Dr. Harty, it did not turn out that way, and he has many close friends in the department. He has also built a huge network of friends at other schools, in part because of sleepaway camp for chairs and in part because of the work he does and the conferences he goes to. He considers himself blessed to have “an inordinate number of friends” in the United

States, Canada, and Europe. His group of friends also includes several younger scholars whom he has helped over the years. He has had two books dedicated to him.

1:42:55 Dr. Harty enjoys the teaching profession as a whole, although he thinks the profession is in a lot of trouble. He also thinks La Salle is in a lot of trouble. He always wanted to see how he did in a dean's position, and was offered a job at another college, but it did not feel right to him. Most of the time when he applied for dean positions, he came in second and they ended up hiring people who, in his words, "turned out to be an idiot, quite frankly." He commented, "I could turn out to be an idiot, give me a chance! Can I be your idiot?" He has since concluded that it was not meant to be.

1:43:48 Some of the first courses he taught at La Salle included Business Writing, Composition, and thematic courses such as Literature and the Sexes, Literature and the Hero, and Literature and the American Dream. The core curriculum was very different then, and La Salle has had about five or six cores since Dr. Harty started teaching here. The core La Salle currently uses is one that he helped design as core director. Dr. Harty considers La Salle a place that takes teaching seriously, and believes that there are some genuinely inspiring teachers at La Salle. He gets the impression that people either love or hate him as a professor. He often runs into people who had him as a professor, and they often tell him how they remember the things he taught them.

1:45:45 Dr. Harty described his teaching style as crazy. One time when Dr. Butler was the chair of the English department, he came into Dr. Harty's Business Writing class, in which Dr. Harty was especially crazy. In this class, Dr. Harty used to take memos from the president's office and tear them apart because of how poorly written they were. Dr. Butler's review said that two people in the room were completely terrified of Dr. Harty, but that the rest of them were eating out of the palm of his hand. The review also said that Dr. Harty was crazy and all over the place, but that there was a method to the madness. He does not teach from notes, but basically just goes in and talks about the material. His classes are not entirely lecture-based, but often involve more of a give and take between him and the students. Occasionally his language may offend someone, but Dr. Harty does not really worry about that. He clarified that this is not to say that he is insensitive to students by any means. He likes to think that over the years he has taught material written by a diverse range of authors, and often likes to incorporate brand new material into his courses. There are many marginalized students at La Salle, and Dr. Harty likes to think that people from a variety of backgrounds can feel comfortable and find their voices in his course.

- 1:51:17 He wishes his students had more joy in learning, and more specifically that they had the luxury of joy in learning. He thinks that almost all La Salle students are fraught. The honors students are fraught in a certain way and the non-honors students are fraught in a slightly different way, but it all comes down to needing a job, needing to be successful, and needing to rack up points. He thinks the recent scandal involving college tuition and admissions should not come as a surprise to anybody, because today's society programs students to measure success in all the wrong ways. He thinks his teaching style is his style and that nobody else should teach the way he teaches, but that he could not do it any other way.
- 1:52:59 In 1985, Dr. Harty received tenure. The process for receiving tenure was slightly different then, although some aspects have remained the same. The department votes, then it goes to the dean, the provost, and the department chair, who also vote. After that, it goes to the promotional tenure committee, who have the final vote. After their vote, the president has to sign off on it, but Dr. Harty does not think the president has ever overturned a positive recommendation. Technically, the trustees have to approve the tenure as well, but that is usually more of a formality. Not everybody gets tenure, but he only remembers two or three people in the English department not getting it in his time at La Salle. The tenure system was originally put in place to protect freedom of speech, and it means professors cannot be fired. Originally, professors were being fired for their political ideas, and tenure was instated to protect their jobs.
- 1:56:14 In 1992, Dr. Harty received the Christian R. and Mary F. Lindback for Distinguished teaching. He joked that they must have stuffed the ballot. Students, faculty, and alumni nominate professors, and professors are usually nominated several years in a row before eventually receiving the award. It includes a monetary award, which is now a lot of money. In 1992 however, it was significantly less money. In order to receive the award, the recipient has to show up to graduation, and Dr. Harty did not always have the best track record with attending graduation. That particular year, he had gone out of town around the time of graduation. When he checked his answering machine, he had multiple messages on his home phone from the provost telling Dr. Harty to call him. His first response was, "I know I've done something wrong, but what did I get caught at?" He had not been aware that he was nominated, because the University does not inform professors of their nominations. When he finally called the provost back, he was informed of his award and told that he had to show up for graduation or he would not get the money. They did not announce the winner of the award until they presented it, and Dr. Harty was therefore sworn to secrecy until then.
- 1:59:42 When asked to put into words what it means to be a distinguished teacher, Dr. Harty said that the line that stuck out to him from the citation was, "He sets very high

standards for his students, but higher standards for himself,” and he thought that was fair.

2:05:19 Dr. Harty became the assistant chair of the English department in 2000. The chair at the time was Dr. Butler. There is no assistant chair anymore, but essentially the role of the assistant chair was to do what the chair did not want or have the time to do. Specifically, Dr. Butler had Dr. Harty run the searches for new hires. They often received hundreds of applications for a single job, and Dr. Harty kept track of the applicants and ran the interviews. Around the time that Dr. Harty became chair, Dr. Tom Keagy became the new dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, and he decided that the chair of each department should do all of the hiring. Because of this, Dr. Harty had to shift some of his responsibilities around to make room for the hiring process. Now, one of the biggest responsibilities of the chair is assessments, which Dr. Harty often had his assistant chair, Dr. Bryan Narendorf do because Dr. Harty does not consider assessments one of his strong suits. He commented that nobody should be chair for sixteen years because it was far too long.

2:07:10 While Dr. Harty was assistant chair, Dr. Butler decided he no longer wanted the position because of many stressors such as the constant turnover in part-time staff. When Dr. Harty started at La Salle in 1982, there were 2 part-time faculty members and about 32 full-time faculty. Now there are about 28 part-time faculty members and 11 full-time faculty. He commented that the part-time faculty are incredible professors, but that La Salle should hire more full-time faculty. Dr. Harty had excellent assistant chairs during his time as chair, including Dr. Stephen Smith, Dr. Judith Musser, and Dr. Narendorf. At different times, Dr. Kevin Grauke, Dr. Claire Busse, and even former chair Dr. Butler each served as acting assistant chair when he needed people in a pinch. Dr. Harty continued serving terms as chair for sixteen years, and eventually Dr. Narendorf thought he might like to try for chair in the next election. Although Dr. Harty also ran that year, he admitted that he was not disappointed that he did not get re-elected.

2:10:18 After serving as chair, Dr. Harty was selected by the provost, Dr. Joseph Marbach, to direct the core. He now serves on a committee for leaves and grants. One of the biggest obstacles that came with the hiring process when Dr. Harty was chair was how difficult it is for academic couples to find jobs near each other. As a city with many institutes of higher learning, Philadelphia tends to be a good place for these couples to find jobs. Many faculty and administrators have spousal units who work at other schools in the area.

2:13:30 When faculty members take on the role of chair or assistant chair, they decrease their teaching workload. In general, in the School of Arts and Sciences, all professors are supposed to teach four courses per term. When professors become chair, the requirement is reduced to one course per term, and for the assistant chair,

it is two per term. Now, professors have the opportunity to apply to teach only three courses per semester as opposed to the standard four. When he became chair, Dr. Harty taught two classes per semester. This year, which is his first year not serving as chair, he was assigned three classes per semester.

2:15:20 Since Dr. Harty started working in La Salle's English department in 1982, the size of the department has changed and the number of majors has changed. Dr. Harty thinks that in all of the years he has been at La Salle, the academic part of the operation has carried its weight. The school is in the mess it is in because other parts of the school do not carry their own weight. The people who raise money do not raise money, the people who are in charge of Public Relations do not do it well, and a lot of the administration does not know what they are doing. The teachers, however, have remained excellent. There are many teachers such as Joseph Volpe, Stephen Smith, Richard Mshomba, and George Stow, among others, who are inspired teachers. Students get a good education at La Salle, but there is no money to do anything. The graduate English program at La Salle was recently discontinued, because it was not making money. Dr. Harty believes that this was mainly because the program did not receive advertisement or funding. In his opinion, the school needs to focus more on advertisement and getting the name out there.

2:22:08 Dr. Smith is one of Dr. Harty's closest friends at La Salle. In his words, they "go way back." Mr. Baky the librarian, Dr. Butler, and Dr. Keanan are some other individuals with whom Dr. Harty developed friendships. He enjoys the junior faculty members very much and has seen many of their children grow up. He is genuinely fond of the former dean, Tom Keagy as well.

2:26:06 Dr. Harty was one of the premier scholars on the subject of the Middle Ages on film. He fell into this specialty around the mid-1980s. At the time, the computer search was a new concept, and each search cost money. The dean of Arts and Sciences at the time, Br. James Muldoon, offered to pay for volunteers to conduct internet searches. Dr. Harty was teaching King Arthur at the time, so he decided to do a search on that. The search produced a very preliminary list, which sparked his interest in the field. He did a short publication of additional films on King Arthur, and edited a collection of essays called *Cinema Arthuriana*, which was a term he invented which everybody uses now. He took a sabbatical for a year and went to England, where he basically lived at the British Film Institute. One of the film librarians from the British Film Institute has since become one of his best friends. He was there so often that he was given a stack pass so the librarians no longer had to continuously haul books up and down for him – instead he could search the stacks himself. He wrote a book called *The Reel Middle Ages*, which covered material nobody had ever covered before. The book ended up defining the field, because he

was one of the first to start taking film seriously. He hopes to one day write a big book about television, another field that people do not always take seriously.

2:31:09 There is an annual Medieval film festival in Kalamazoo, and Dr. Harty is a prominent figure at these festivals. He continues to write and publish papers in the field and is currently working on a book focusing on women in Medieval film. He continues his scholarly work because he enjoys doing it, not because he has to. He could have stopped publishing years ago, but he has fun doing it. He has made some very good friends through the scholarly community. He does not always take his scholarly work too seriously, and finds it amusing when people at conferences fawn over him and his work. He does not think that he parts the waters or walks on water, and claimed that humility is not one of his virtues. He also commented that there are a number of faculty at La Salle who have had similarly successful scholarly careers in other fields.

2:35:18 Dr. Harty talked about some of the things he does not consider himself good at, including poetry and novel writing. He once wrote a novel called *Catch 44*, which has never and will never see the light of day. There are also things he is not good at teaching, such as 18th century literature, the romantics other than Byron and *Frankenstein*, and Victorian literature. The enjoyment he gets out of teaching relates to the enjoyment he gets out of scholarship, and they often intersect. At a certain point, being an administrator was enjoyable for him, and at a certain point, it stopped being enjoyable, which is why he was relieved to no longer be chair.

2:37:23 He has worked a lot with the *Arthuriana* Journal, and was president of the International Arthurian Society from 2008 to 2011. He claimed that he was president because nobody else wanted the job. As president, he had to run some hectic meetings, and he was very good at keeping the meetings brief and to the point. He had responsibilities such as attending international meetings and helping people get funding. He thought it was fun and considered it something of a civic duty on an academic level. He thinks the journal, which comes out of Purdue University, is important because it is the only journal in English devoted entirely to King Arthur studies. He has been a member of the editorial board and a book review editor since 1996, when the journal was started. He is invested in encouraging young people in the field. He commented that people in the scholarly community were very good to him when he was younger, and he considers it important to pay it forward.

2:41:23 Dr. Harty thinks that academia is either the best or worst profession in the world, depending on how one does it, and there are some very nasty people in academics who only look out for themselves. He considers teaching the easiest job in the world to do badly. He would like to retire before he starts to “go loopy.” It is increasingly

difficult to get a PhD and to get a job as a PhD, and Dr. Harty wondered aloud whether it is moral to allow people to do this knowing the challenges they will face.

2:43:14 One of the major developments in the field since Dr. Harty got involved is that scholars have started to decide that popular culture is not a bad thing and is worth studying. He occasionally teaches a graphic novel or a comic book in his courses, but thinks it is important to mix popular culture with traditional literature rather than focus solely on popular culture. Dr. Harty is unsure whether the English major will survive in the coming years, both at La Salle and in the broader college community. He thinks that there will continue to be more adjuncts in the English department at La Salle, and doubts whether the three English professors who are retiring soon will be replaced with full-time faculty.

2:47:08 When asked how his career has affected his personal life, Dr. Harty said that it has given him lots of friends and allowed him to travel a lot. Because of the nature of his work, the professional and personal boundaries often blur. He has friends who like the things he do, friends who he knows through academia, and friends who do not do the same type of work he does, and they all sort of blur into one big collection of friends. He thinks that his profession makes his personal life more interesting. He does not know how much longer he will continue to teach, but wants to retire before his teaching starts to go downhill.

2:51:53 Dr. Harty considers his greatest achievement thus far to be that he is blessed with many good friends. He commented that it is nice to have written an influential book and done a lot of work in the field, but he does not think it makes him “better than.” He admitted that it is rewarding to run into students who tell him that he influenced them as a professor.

2:56:11 When asked about his biggest regrets, Dr. Harty said that he thinks he would have liked to have another job. He thinks he would have done well in a Dean’s position, and would have liked the opportunity to try that. He does not have any big plans for retirement, because he will probably never fully retire, but will continue writing and doing scholarly work. He would like to continue to travel and has always wanted to go to Australia via boat. He would also love to travel the entire way around the world on a boat, but knows that it is very expensive and does not know whether he would be able to afford it. He may look into teaching in a program called Semester at Sea. When asked whether there was anything else he would like to add to the interview, Dr. Harty said there was not.

2:58:51 Interview Ends