

Part II: Interview with Mr. David Diehl

Date: March 13th

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BD: What was it like coming back to your alma mater to teach and eventually lead the school as principal?

DD: Coming back was a unique - most of all the teachers that I had in school were here still teaching when I came back; same principal, same assistant principal, same guidance counselor so it was really unique in a sense. It was like coming home, it was very comfortable and they were all very welcoming and very helpful to me.

BD: And it was the same when I came back here since it's like a family. When you started teaching what was your; still is, your teaching philosophy in the classroom?

DD: I always think to just try to keep the students engaged, to try to motivate them, get the best out of them, trying to keep them moving forward; every day try to make it interesting, challenging. Hopefully you'll learn something; learn something about a subject that, I think, they learn something about themselves a little bit when you're with them every day.

BD: How about your philosophy as principal, when you became principal. What year did you become principal?

DD: I believe it was 1968 – '86, 1986.

BD: What was your philosophy as principal?

DD: I assumed it was a tremendous responsibility, I saw it as a great responsibility. Try to move the school forward yet, at the same time, hold on to traditions of the past. At that time we just opened St. Michael Hall so that was a huge boost to the school and introduction of technology into the school with a computer lab and all of that that went with it and that was a big boost to the school. I think my overall philosophy was, certainly, to keep the overriding philosophy of the school that of St. John Baptist de La Salle, the Christian Brothers. Their philosophy has permeated this place and permeated all people who have gone here so in a continuation of that philosophy, touch hearts and students, and keep us going forward, keep progressing as an academic institution yet staying human as a community and there were things that I strove for 11-12 years that I was principal.

BD: As a teacher, as a principal what are the most important values in your estimation that students learn here at La Salle?

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DD: Hopefully I think they learn respect. I think a big part of our philosophy's always been the concept of mutual respect and I can reflect on myself when I was here, in all my time here, I think the idea of respecting each other, respecting different people. I think La Salle has always been about different people coming together, being able to work together, respect each other, grow together. I really think that is one of the cornerstones of what we try to do here.

BD: What exemplifies the typical La Salle student athlete? Is there an aura or any kind of thing that sets them apart? Do they stand out; I mean, when they come through these doors?

DD: I often think that the word 'student athlete' is probably overused, but I really think all of our students here are student athletes; the athletes are student athletes. I think all of our – we've been blessed with having so many of our coaches being teachers in the building and the concept of classroom is first, academics are first and what you're doing out there is an extension of what you do all day in school. The philosophy of what we do in school all day, the philosophy of St. La Salle, I think, is carried over on to the fields, practice fields, playing fields so that it's really a smooth transition, they're not separate entities, they're a continuation of one entity.

BD: Absolutely. What are some of your fondest memories as a teacher or principal or coach at La Salle High School?

DD: There's millions. I wouldn't even know where to begin to tell you the fondest memories –

BD: How about this, obviously with the passing of Coach Flannery this year it would be appropriate to - one or two stories or memories of that legend Tex Flannery.

DD: He was a man; it was larger than life. As I said, I saw him - came in contact with him when I was 16 years old and luckily I was able to live the rest of my life in contact with him. He was just larger than life that's all I could say to you; he was a character. His speech pattern was a little different. Funny story, if you will, a reporter came to see him early on, I was assistant coach, and a reporter came to see him and he was a young reporter and needed a story for his newspaper. He sat with Mr. Flannery for an hour

asking about the team, the upcoming season he left the room with Mr. Flannery and sought Mr. Marty Stanzack was the athletic

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director and myself; sought us out and said, “What did he just say to me?” He said, “I asked who the quarterback was and his response was, ‘You tell me.’” So he was desperate for a story, had spent an hour with the coach and had no idea as to what was being said to him. So we sat down with him and helped him write a story, to get his story in by the deadline. That was Mr. Flannery in all his glory. Brilliant – a great man, brilliant man, a great coach, a great family man, a good friend, a loyal son of La Salle; I can’t say enough good things about him.

BD: How about teaching, coaching with Joe Colistra? The winningest coach in La Salle history; surpassed his mentor Tex.

DD: A lifetime of friendship with Joe. I coached Joe when he was a student here at La Salle. Was here when he came back after a time at Villanova; was his teaching colleague, was his department chair for awhile, coached with him, certainly, for years and we just shared a lifetime of good times at La Salle. Sharing just most of our lives, had coaching, teaching and we’ve been together for a long time.

BD: In your tenure here, are there are any specifics or one or two events that stand out that were particularly difficult or stressful on the La Salle community? Any difficult times?

DD: We’ve really been - there few difficult times, I really - it’s hard for me to comment on them. I think, by and large, things have been pretty good.

BD: I mean like coach - when I spoke with Mr. Colistra he mentioned the death of Miles Miller –

DD: Certainly living in the school community for all these years the deaths of - tragic deaths of some students, some in school, some right after they graduated, some in young years, parents, boosters of La Salle. I remember Dr. Gene Gallagher who was the team physician for so many years and gave so much of his time to La Salle. His death was tragic, and of course, Mr. Flannery and Miles Miller sure. It’s a community and we go through those things; there’s always been a - certainly a bonding or coming together when those things occur.

BD: I mean when I first came on staff we lost Fran Johnson –

DD: Fran Johnson sure –

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BD: We had the field day come up you know maybe quickly –

DD: Typical of La Salle, a beloved faculty member, Fran Johnson, and tragic death and people coming together, aid and support his family; which in some ways they still do at Christmastime and naming an event after him. Right now, somebody is doing a video on Fran, the life of Fran Johnson to help people remember who he was and what he's done. I think a typical La Salle response to a tragedy like that is to come together, look for positive things, move forward, help as best we can.

BD: Over your tenure can you maybe identify two or three people that really had a positive impact that changed or revolutionized something here. For example I wanted to mention later on about the bell story with getting rid of bells, but any, besides yourself, other people that really made a change or something for the future of La Salle?

DD: I think that it goes back a way but Brother Edward Gallagher who was the athletic director when I first came; he came to La Salle the same year I did. He then became the schools principal and he was principal at a time when we go back all the way through an evaluation in 1966; Middle States Evaluation. The school was very, very strict and rigid as far as scheduling was concerned. I think people were in class almost every period of the day and after that evaluation the people were here had nothing but good things to say about the school but it was in the '60's and they're saying education was changing – possibly some free time, some flexible scheduling and that was a very difficult thing to do, it's a very difficult thing to pull off and he was at the forefront of that. After that evaluation in years planning after that, the following year, we went to a schedule very much like we have now and much more flexible, many more options, some free time and a lot of trying to teach students the proper use of free time as they're going to prepare – prepare them for college not only academically but socially. Brother Edward was a larger than life figure for me and I think for the school. He was principal - two terms as principal; he was away and he came back again for another term.

I think of all the people I can think of, with him, at the time, as his assistant academic affairs principal, was Brother Carl Clayton who was another a young Brother at the time, and an innovator and a

great motivator of the faculty, a great communicator. So those two - those people had a tremendous impact.

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Not so much a person, I mentioned this to you before, but in all my time here the building of St. Michael Hall was a milestone. I was fortunate to be principal the year after I was principal it opened and for those 10 or 11 or 12 years it had a major impact and really changed the school as much as I think this building will now. I - singly the building of that building it just seemed, to me, to change the whole face of the school not physically, certainly, but more than that, in so many ways, attracting different students, initiation in the art, the fine arts program, the computer age coming upon us but just enthusiasm and the number of people it attracted as far as students and families that had a tremendous positive impact on the school.

BD: I remember I was sophomore when it was being built I think it was done – no, I was in there as a sophomore because I had Dr. D’Angelo that’s right; it was a great, spectacular building. What are some of the greatest lessons you’ve learned at La Salle whether it be as a student or a coach or a teacher or whatever?

DD: I think you learn humility being here, I think you’re surrounded here by really talented people, talented students, talented coworkers and I really think that you learn humility. I think you learn a lot from the people around you. You look around and see so many good people, so many talented, talented bright people that I think one thing is that to say every day to yourself, “You’re lucky to be here.” I think, at least for me, I often been humbled by the fact that I’ve been here and have stayed here so long. Just look around at all the people that I’ve been surrounded with and humility.

BD: You mentioned it earlier and when Rose was in here as your tenure as principal, some of the major things that you facilitated one being the bells and I wanted to get that story real quick.

DD: That’s a silly thing but for how many years we began and ended the day and every class with a long, loud bell ringing and it became part of your day. These bells went off and everybody was timed to the bell and one day the bells broke; they just didn’t - we had a short circuit and so we just said, “Look we’re going to just - everybody look at their watches, everybody knows the schedule if there’s any change in the schedule we’ll announce it, look its just for a day.” By next day they came and said, “The bells are fixed.”

And I said, "You know what, let's just not turn them on and see what happens." We could just tell people that they are broken for another day or two and let's wait until the end of the

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week and see what happens and there were some people that it was a security blanket that was taken away from them; after two or three days no one even knew it and to this day it's a very quiet, orderly change –

BD It really is –

DD: You know when the periods up everybody gets up and walks out, everybody knows when they have to be at their next period; so it's a silly thing but it certainly adds, I think, to the general well-being of the school.

BD: I couldn't agree more. And people come here and I've - just by teaching today and people, "There's no bell that comes off?" "No, we just go." People are just like, "Wow!" It is I think it's a real neat thing. You were inducted into La Salle Hall of Fame what was it three years – three or four years ago?

DD: No, it was more than that.

BD: It was eight.

DD: I think it's - it goes back at least –

BD: I just passed it on the walk, forgot to look what year; I thought it was –

DD: It doesn't say there. I think it's at least ten years.

BD: Yeah I forgot to look, but how was that being a lifelong La Salle student, teacher, principal; how was that?

DD: That was special and it truly was. I have to say I was the first person in my class to be inducted into the Hall of Fame, which is great pride for me when I look around at all the very talented people that were there, and it was fortunate. I was here, I was at La Salle. I've spent my life here but to do that that was really one of the highlights of my life. I've been - served as a student here, I've been a parent, both my sons have gone here, my grandson graduated from here, so I've been a parent, a father of students at La Salle; every connection there is to La Salle. But going into that whole thing was very, very, very special to me.

BD: What positions did you hold when your sons were here?

DD: I was assistant principal.

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BD: How was daily life with your sons going here?

DD: It was fine, it was fine. We did - as there have been a great many of our faculty have had sons go here and its people are very accepting I found, the students are very accepting. I can't really think of - we never had a problem, they never had a problem, they didn't - they were free to be who they were at La Salle. They made their friends; they still have lifelong friends from La Salle. I'm sure at times they weren't happy that their father was here and that could pass, however, it never was a problem for us. I don't think it was ever a problem for them. Faculty and students, all, they were just other people as, I think, it happens for a lot of our faculty.

BD: My brothers are my sons but kinda similarity. I talked to Joe about the same thing with Paul and Joe. So to wrap things up how do you want to be seen in the eyes of future La Sallians; students and faculty? I guess what do you see your legacy being here? That's a tough one.

DD: Someone who spent his life here, someone who was dedicated to the school and to its students; came every day, showed up every day, and tried to do my best for the school, for the students in the school. Fortunate person; to be able to live a life like that.

BD: I feel the same way being a colleague of yours. You were my principal, so on and so forth, Mr. Diehl thank you, again, for taking the time to sit down and talk with me about La Salle it's greatly appreciated.

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