

**Interview of Richard J. Grande**  
**By Frank Hopper**  
**Abington, Pennsylvania**  
**June 25, 2009**

Hopper: This is an oral history interview with Professor Richard Grande in the History of La Salle University series. The location is Abington, Pennsylvania. The date is June 25, 2009.

Hopper: What is your full name and current title at La Salle University, Professor?

Grande: My full name is Richard John Grande, and my title at La Salle would be Adjunct Professor of English.

Hopper: Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Grande: Yes.

Hopper: Starting first with your childhood, when and where were you born?

Grande: I was born in Philadelphia, October 2, 1942.

Hopper: And what was the name of your neighborhood or section in Philadelphia?

Grande: South Philadelphia. I was born in South Philadelphia near Eighth and Tasker. We moved when I was three or four to the neighborhood where I have been ever since which is also in South Philadelphia.

Hopper: I would like to ask you a few questions about parents. What were your parent's full names?

Grande: My Mother's name was Stella. Gossen was her maiden name. My father was Walter Grande.

Hopper: We'll start with your father, where and when was he born?

Grande: He was born in Philadelphia on February 9, 1915.

Hopper: And far did he go in school?

Grande: He graduated high school. He went to Central and graduated from Central High School in 1932.

1:49

Hopper: And what kind of work did he do?

Grande: He was a steamfitter/ plumber and worked at the Frankfort Arsenal until it folded essentially in the 1980s.

Hopper: Where and when your mother born?

Grande: She was born on June 24, 1917 in Philadelphia, also.

Hopper: What section?

Grande: South Philadelphia

Hopper: How far did your mother go in school?

Grande: She graduated Junior High at least. I don't think she graduated from senior high.

Hopper: Did she work outside the home?

Grande: Yes, off and on. She worked over the years in sales for department stores in central city.

Hopper: And how many children were there in the family?

Grande: I am the only one. There were no siblings.

Hopper: Did your parents bring you up to consider certain things were important in life?

Grande: Well, I suppose growing up religious values. Also, family values and the importance of ethnic background.

Hopper: Did they hold up any examples for you?

Grande: What you mean?

Hopper: People that could emulate?

Grande: I don't recall any specifically growing up that they pointed out to me.

Hopper: How would compare your mother and your father as influences on your life?

3:40

Grande: My mother was probably much greater influence since I saw much more of her growing up. My father was gone most of the day working. Mother and I had similar interests in growing up - listening to favorite radio shows and watching favorite TV shows. I definitely spent more time with her than my father. Later on, with my father, I went to ball games and movies and that sort of thing.

Hopper: What kind of shows did you listen to with your mother?

Grande: Well, whatever was on radio in those days: I guess soap operas, domestic comedies, westerns like the Lone Ranger. All those things.

Hopper: What was it like growing up in South Philadelphia?

Grande: Well, it was fun. I mean it was a different time and different era, late 1940s and 1950s post-war environment. It was a pretty quiet and safe time in many respects. There was a general ease. A thing is not necessarily around today for better or for worse.

Hopper: What sort of games did you play?

Grande: Well, in the house it was board games, like monopoly and things like that - whatever the popular board games of time were. And outside the usual kid games: touch football, baseball.

Hopper: Did you keep pets?

Grande: Actually, growing up, we only had a cat for brief period of time. That was to take care of the (laughter) mice in the basement. No, otherwise there were no pets.

Hopper: Did you go to church as a child?

Grande: Oh yes, of course, going to Catholic school, one did. Besides, weekly mass on Sunday wherever activities were planned at the grade school and also at the high school too. It was a Catholic high school so there were religious activities straight through, and at La Salle too for that matter when I was there as an undergraduate. So a thorough background there.

Hopper: Moving to your formal schooling, where did you go to elementary school?

6:09

Grande: St. Edmund's which no longer exists, unfortunately, but I went to kindergarten and eight years of grade school. It was located at 23rd and Muffin in those days.

Hopper: How did you feel about the teachers and instruction there?

Grande: I don't remember all that much about the instruction. It was a strict Catholic grade school environment. The Nuns were very strict, and the discipline was probably good. I was introduced to subjects that I would take more of interest in later on, things like literature and the arts in general. It was solid Catholic grade school grounding.

Hopper: You mentioned they were strict then. Specifically, what were they strict about?

Grande: Well, conduct in class, following rules, not misbehaving, anything like that. It was a different era entirely, and they certainly used physical discipline as well, which they wouldn't be able to do today, I gather.

Hopper: Where did you go to high school?

Grande: I went to what was then Bishop Neumann High School, the old Southeast Catholic, which no longer exists at the building where I went, at 26th and Moore. It has been incorporated with St. Maria Goretti at 10th and Moore. But I went to Bishop Neumann High School graduating from there in 1960 prior to La Salle.

Hopper: Was that an all-boys school?

Grande: In those days it was until it was combined with Maria Goretti.

Hopper: Did you have a choice of which high school to go?

Grande: No. Based on the grade school I graduated from, it was Bishop Neumann, unless I wanted to go to private school which wasn't even considered basically.

Hopper: At the high school level were class rules strict also?

Grande: Oh, yes.

Hopper: Did they also use physical violence?

8:30

Grande: Some teachers put their hands on students, but certainly not the way the nuns did in grade school. The paddle was popular with some teachers. I didn't see too much lying on of hands or, you know, slapping, or whatever. There was a definite sense of having graduated from grade school by that time.

Hopper: Was any a teacher in high school that was a particularly important influence on you?

Grande: Yes, at least two. One was a history teacher, my junior year. The other was a Latin teacher, my freshman year. They were both excellent teachers. They are the two that I most remember.

Hopper: When did you decide that you wanted to go to college?

Grande: Probably not until senior year. I mean, it was kind of automatic in the academic group that I was with that everyone would go to college. So in those days if you went to Catholic high school in the city, there really were only three colleges that you were expected to choose from: La Salle, Villanova and St. Joe's. If one went to college, almost everybody went to one of those three schools. If you were interest in science and engineering, you went to Villanova. If you were interested in liberal arts and pre-med, you went to LaSalle, and St. Joe's for everything else.

Hopper: At that time, in your senior year, did you have a particular vocational aspiration? In future life?

Grande: Well, in high school, the vocation actually I was considering was the seminary, the priesthood, and to teach as well. And then teaching took over after that.

Hopper: While you were in school, did you have any part-time jobs?

Grande: In high school?

Hopper: Yes.

Grande: No, not in high school.

Hopper: Okay. What colleges did apply to for admission?

Grande: Only La Salle actually.

Hopper: When were you enrolled at La Salle College?

Grande: The fall of 1960.

11:06

Hopper: Since 1960, of course, there have so many changes on campus. What was the campus like in those days?

Grande: Pretty much totally different from the way it is now. I mean some of buildings of course were there then. College Hall was there. The Brothers' residence. The Union building. Wister Hall. And the Science Center actually opened, the Holroyd Building, opened the fall of my freshman year. Benilde Hall was a class room, the whole thing in those days. McCarthy Hall and McShain Hall were also classroom buildings, and one of those doesn't exist now. The library was in what is the administration building now so there have been lots of changes physically. And the fact that the campus, of course, is coed, which it wasn't in 1960.

Hopper: In 1960, what was the student body like in sex, ethnicity?

Grande: All male, it was not coed yet. It was almost entirely Catholic. The ethnicity would be mostly Irish, Italian, Polish, and very few African Americans. I am trying to remember if there were any in my freshman year. It was almost one hundred percent Caucasian.

Hopper: What standards of behavior and dress were expected on campus?

Grande: Well, for dress, we were expected to wear a jacket and tie and that was in force through the four years. And standards of behavior did you say?

Hopper: Yes.

Grande: There were no discipline problems in the class as I recall. La Salle was a wonderful place to go to school. There were no disruptions or disturbances.

Hopper: When you were speaking to a professor, did you commonly use sir, professor? Was this expected?

Grande: Most of the teachers I had in those days were Christian brothers who were priests. There were lay teachers, of course, they were addressed as Mister or Doctor if they had a Ph. D.

Hopper: Do you have any stories about freshman orientation and registration which in some schools can be a horror?

Grande: I remember in freshman orientation having to wear what they called beanies or dinks or whatever for a week. It wasn't a particularly severe initiation. It was fairly pleasant and having to wear a name badge for that first week. But that was about it.

14:07

Hopper: How did you spend your time between classes?

Grande: Probably not much different than many students spent it today: in the cafeteria, going to the library, which was as you know right there in the center of campus across 20th Street. Those were the main ways. But, since it was basically a commuter campus, I mean, if one were finished class one left fairly quickly. I worked on campus from my freshman year on in the library for four years. That was my job for the four years I was there.

Hopper: What did you have to do in the library?

Grande: Stacking books, shelving them. It was an easy job. It didn't pay very well: seventy five cents an hour, as I recall, to start. It went up to a whopping dollar fifty an hour by the time I graduated. But I worked there in the summers, as well, after freshman year, sophomore year, and junior year even after senior year.

Hopper: Did you participate in any clubs or organizations on campus?

Grande: Let's see. I was a member of, I guess, Chess club, things like that. I'm trying to remember the school newspaper - I know it was in high school, but I am not sure it was in college at La Salle.

Hopper: There were some events during your years that are noted in history of La Salle book that we been reading. I was wondering if you had any remembrances about them. One thing they mentioned were some of students who supported the troops in Vietnam? As far as demonstrations of support?

Grande: I graduated about '65 so it was just as the Vietman buildup began. I am trying to remember the President's speech announcing that buildup. It was just, I think, as I was graduating college so Vietnam wasn't an issue while I was in school there. But it became one obviously that summer and fall.

Hopper: Did you attend any of the La Salle sports teams' games during your undergraduate years?

Grande: Basketball, as I remember, that was always a big sport at La Salle, but that was about it.

Hopper: Do you have any vivid memories of the games?

Grande: Actually, none. I remember more of high school than anything. In high school, we went to the finals, the All-City finals a couple of times.

17:16

Hopper: Since La Salle was an all-boys school during your undergraduate years, were there ever any incidences where girls were invited to the campus for social dances?

Grande: There were mixers. There were not that many of them. They weren't for some reason very popular or well attended. It was a different sort of era. The social atmosphere was much different than what it would be today.

Hopper: Do you recall any administration or student activity in celebration of La Salle's One Hundred Year Anniversary in 1963.

Grande: No. I don't remember hardly anything about that at all. And I certainly was there in '63. I would have been finishing my sophomore year, but I really don't remember anything.

Hopper: Do you recall where you were and what you were doing when you heard President Kennedy was assassinated?

Grande: Yes, quite vividly. It was a Friday afternoon. It was after lunch, and I was on quad. I had philosophy class at one o' clock I think it was. Then the word came to go the chapel that the President had been shot. We went into the chapel where the news was finally announced while we were there by Bro. Daniel Burke actually that the President had died. Then we went immediately home from there.

Hopper: Were there special memorial services on campus for President?

Grande: If there were they were in the following week, the assignation was Friday. There were no classes on Monday because of the funeral. I guess it was Tuesday when we came back. I don't remember any specific memorials. I remember some teachers devoting time in class to talk about it.

Hopper: In 1964, you were a member of the team of four scholars who brought national recognition to La Salle College through an appearance on the nationally televised quiz program, The G E College Bowl. How was the team selected?

Grande: It was selected mostly by Charles Kelly, then the Chair of the English Department, who held a series general knowledge sort of tests first and selected a group of people who did well. Then [he] set up teams to compete against each other, and he would ask the questions. Gradually there was a process of elimination, and it came down to four people being chosen and two alternates, as I remember. I was lucky enough to be one of those four.

Hopper: How did the team do in the contest against its opponent, Arizona State?

20:25

Grande: We lost on the show. But it was very close. I mean it was tied, as I recall with about one minute to go. We missed the last few questions. We had won almost all the practice sessions. We probably were overly confident, but we were over-weighted as far as majors in the humanities were concerned. We had a weakness in Science so the powers that be on show kind of realized it. The last practice had a number science questions which we missed. Arizona State won the last practice session, and then they won on the show, but as I said it was very close.

Hopper: Did the team receive any special recognition on campus after the television program?

Grande: There was a dinner for us, as I remember, and we were also given a metal, which I had forgotten about, but coincidentally I found it last night rummaging through in my desk. There it was it nice gold metal commemorating of the fact that we were on the GE College Bowl.

Hopper: Moving to the academics. How do feel about your La Salle teachers' classroom methods and styles of instruction, in retrospect?

Grande: Of course they varied greatly. Some were no more than elevated high school teachers. Others were very, very good, particularly in History and English. Those were the best teachers I had at La Salle.

Hopper: Were they strict at La Salle also?

Grande: Yes, actually in history, two teachers I had, John Rossi and Joe O'Grady, were very strict. They were also excellent teachers.

Hopper: How about the amount of homework and reading that you would be assigned?

Grande: There was a fair amount of reading in those courses and in particularly as an English major in the literature course.

Hopper: Did you feel you were prepared for the academic challenge of college from your high school experience?

Grande: Yes, actually I was.

[Interruption about two minutes]

Hopper: Were there outstanding teachers that kindled your passion for literature or other subjects?

23:55

Grande: Yes.

Hopper: Any particular ones?

Grande: Well, in history, the aforementioned John Rossi and Joe O'Grady. In English, it would have been: he's now deceased, James Devlin and Charles Kelly, also deceased, the head of the English Department by my senior year. Those four in particular.

Hopper: At what point did you decide to major in English?

Grande: At the end of freshman year. I had considered majoring in history, but I decided to major in English, a move I've never regretted.

Hopper: Did your English major have capstone seminar course?

Grande: Senior year. Yes, we were expected to specialize in one writer or author for an entire year, and I guess it was two papers each semester.

Hopper: At what point did you decide you wanted to go graduate school in order to teach on the college level?

Grande: Senior year in college, actually, fairly late.

Hopper: Did you have a mentor at La Salle who encouraged and guided you regarding graduate education?

Grande: Yes, I did.

Hopper: Who was that?

Grande: The aforementioned James Devlin. He was my instructor in four different courses. I guess three of them were in the senior year.

Hopper: What you graduate schools did you apply to?

Grande: Actually, just two, I suppose, Temple where I was accepted and University of Dayton because they had a teaching assistantship program.

Hopper: Which one did you go to?

Grande: The University of Dayton.

26:22

Hopper: Why other than assistantship did you chose that school or was that the main reason?

Grande: That was the main reason. They were offering tuition of course with that of course as well as a chance to teach on the college level and money for that and the chance to get away too after having commuted for years to school.

Hopper: As part of your program, did you, have to teach undergraduate courses?

Grande: Yes, every semester I was there. Composition.

Hopper: In retrospect, what courses that you took at La Salle helped you acquire the knowledge and skills to succeed at the graduate level.

Grande: A survey course in English literature which was required for English major for two semesters and courses in drama. One required course for English majors, a course in literary criticism, I guess as well.

Hopper: Was there a professor at the graduate school that was particularly influential on your development as a literary scholar and a college instructor?

Grande: Yes, at least two, one instructor in American Lit, another in Milton and Renaissance Lit.

Hopper: What was your area of specialization at Dayton? Did you specialize?

Grande: No, not at the Masters' level, it was just a generalist thing. I took x number of credits, and I took a comprehensive exam to get the degree.

Hopper: After earning your graduate degree in English, did you seek employment? Currently, you're teaching full time at Penn State?

Grande: Abington.

Hopper: How have you been here?

Grande: Since 1985.

Hopper: And what courses do you teach?

29:03

Grande: The whole pantheon actually, freshman writing, sophomore writing courses, literature courses, courses that English majors take like the Survey of English Literature. I've taught quite a few courses here, and also at La Salle part time.

Hopper: Did you have particular areas of research interest?

Grande: Yes, Shakespeare, these days, particularly [cough] excuse me and twentieth century British literature.

Hopper: Have you pursued professional activities like associations, like interest in different writers or things of that nature?

Grande: Well, the general memberships that those college English teachers are usually involved: the MLA, Modern Language Association and the NCT, Teachers of English, National Council for Teachers of English.

Hopper: Did you have any difficulty with the transition from student to teacher after you got out school?

Grande: No, because I was teaching in graduate school at the University of Dayton and four years at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. By the time of my first instructorship, I had already had several years of college teaching.

Hopper: What changes have you seen in the classroom over the years, techniques?

Grande: You mean teaching techniques?

Hopper: Yes.

Grande: Less dependence on just straight lecture. More methods of general pedagogy, discussion, conferencing, group projects, and things like that, which I didn't experience when I was in school myself.

Hopper: Do you prefer teaching over research or writing?

Grande: Oh yes, by far.

Hopper: What satisfactions do you get from teaching that you value?

Grande: Well, the classroom interaction and challenge. One student, and all that, is much more satisfying than doing research in the libraries.

31:55

Hopper: You mentioned Shakespeare as an area of interest and twentieth century British literature. Have you published anything that you are particular proud of that you can tell us about?

Grande: I haven't really done any professional publishing in terms of articles or journal stuff or books. For one thing there hasn't been really the time with so many classes to teach through the years. It's never been a pressing interest of mine to do that. I have never had a position where I had to publish to keep the job. Either at La Salle or Penn State, these are very much teaching positions.

Hopper: Do you have any specific goals as a professor for the future?

Grande: At this stage, I am not sure of any long-term goals, but the usual things of teaching courses that appeal to me and passing on things to students and seeing tangible results wherever I can see them.

Hopper: Are you anticipating retiring in the near future?

Grande: No. Not right now. Especially now with the economy the way it is. I mean I could actually retire tomorrow if I wanted to, but I'm not going to.

Hopper: How do you think students have changed over the course of your time at La Salle and Penn State as a student and professor?

Grande: Students at Penn State are generally better than when I started here in the 1980s. I think the standards are a bit higher. At La Salle, if there be anything, it's been a slight decline on the undergraduate level. It seems to me that for the freshman standards have gone down there a little bit at La Salle from what I've heard. What I see of the results in class confirms that.

Hopper: La Salle has been a significant part of you life, I guess it's safe to say. What has La Salle given you skills, values?

Grande: All of those. It's been almost half a century actually from 1960 to now. It's certainly cultivated my interest in literature and formulated all those areas of interest for me. I am very grateful to La Salle. I am glad I went La Salle as an undergraduate, and I am glad to back there making some contribution teaching part time.

Hopper: Teaching one class a semester?

Grande: Two a semester, four during the course of a year. Since 1989, that's been pretty consistent. So that's a twenty year period, and I'll be there in fall as well.

35:12

Hopper: It's quite a busy schedule teaching full time here.

Grande: It is. I don't really need to do it. I don't really need to do it, teaching at La Salle, but I enjoy doing it. Not to be greedy, the money is another contribution. I have four classes at Penn State so that quite enough to keep me busy.

Hopper: Is there any topic that you would like to comment on regarding your long association with La Salle that we haven't touched upon in our little interview?

Grande: I don't think so except to say that I am grateful to La Salle. Grateful for the people that I have known at La Salle: the students, the colleagues, the administrators that I have come in contact with.

Hopper: Thank you, Professor for participating in our oral history interview on the history of La Salle, it will be deposited and preserved in the La Salle archives.

Grande: Thank you, Frank