

Interview of Brother Edward Sheehy, F.S.C.
By Lauren De Angelis
La Salle University
March 8, 2012

0:00:00

De Angelis: Today is Wednesday—Thursday, March 8, 2012. This is a continuation of yesterday's interview with Brother Edward Sheehy.¹ Can I interview you again Brother Ed?

Sheehy: Yes, you may.

De Angelis: Okay. We're going to start today with your higher education. What high schools did you attend?

Sheehy: I spent one year at Gonzaga College High School in Washington D.C. It took me eighty minutes to get to school one way. I spent my time studying my Latin vocabulary most of the time. And then when my dad gets out of the navy, we moved to Cumberland, Maryland. So I spent three years at La Salle High School in Cumberland, Maryland.

De Angelis: And who would drive you the eighty minutes?

Sheehy: My dad was going to work and they carpooled. They left me off at the front of the development where we lived. Then I took a school bus eighty minutes each way.

De Angelis: Out of both high schools that you attended, which one did you like the best?

Sheehy: They were both very different. Gonzaga was about eight hundred young men, very high powered academically. But the fact it was eighty minutes by bus away limited the amount of involvement I could have. So except for the intramurals and attending games, I really wasn't involved as much. La Salle was much different and I guess I would say for me it was better because it was a smaller school. There were only about three hundred, four hundred boys in it and so I could get involved in everything there and it only took me ten minutes to get me to school as opposed to eighty minutes.

De Angelis: Why did your parents choose Gonzaga if it was so far?

¹ This was the second time Brother Edward was interviewed. It was not mentioned by the interviewer in the introduction

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Sheehy: Well, it was considered at that time, and still is, one of the best if not the best high schools in Washington.

De Angelis: And did you enjoy high school?

Sheehy: Very much, very much. I enjoyed the academics and I enjoyed the interaction at Gonzaga. But obviously La Salle it gets more enjoyable cause of the number of activities I was able to be involved in.

De Angelis: And you went from coeducational grammar schools, correct?

Sheehy: That is correct.

De Angelis: To a single gender high school.

Sheehy: Two single gender high schools. Yes.

De Angelis: Was that a shock?

Sheehy: No. Because at that time there were many more single gender high schools than there are now.

De Angelis: What do you think the biggest difference was between coeducation and single gender?

Sheehy: That's a good question cause it's still being discussed today. And there's obviously a decrease in single gender schools particularly on the male side. The difference is certainly your social adaptability, your social interaction skills are not honed as much in a single gender school. However, I think it had many advantages in terms of spirit. And I think—I find it interesting when the schools merged in Cumberland, the small high schools all merged, the boys were the ones who resisted it the most.² There's a certain esprit de corps like when I work in all male schools they moaned and groaned about the fact there weren't any women there. But the point in fact of the matter is that they would have killed you if you've tried to go coed. [cough]

De Angelis: Do you think you missed out on anything by having single gender? **[Brother Edward coughs during question]**

² According to Brother Edward, the schools merged in 1966.

3:37

Sheehy: Yes. Yes. For a lot of reasons, one of them was being a year younger than anybody else. My social skills and social interactions, especially in dealing with young women, was not as easy as it would have been I think in co educational school.

De Angelis: And why were you a year younger than everyone else?

Sheehy: I skipped fourth grade.

De Angelis: And why did you skip fourth grade?

Sheehy: The school that I was in Portsmouth, Rhode Island was relatively small and they put third and fourth grade together. And the nun said, "He's already heard everything the fourth graders know so let him go into fifth."

De Angelis: In high school, was history still your favorite subject?

Sheehy: Absolutely, by far.

De Angelis: And was math still your worst?

Sheehy: Absolutely, by far.

De Angelis: As you were going through high school did you always know you wanted to go to college.

Sheehy: I think it was expected. I think it was expected. Again my dad had gone. [cough] The number of people who attend college is much smaller I think than people realize even now. Even then it was small. But I think it was expected that I would attend college, yes, and I was looking forward to it.

De Angelis: And as you went through high school, what did you do activities wise? You mentioned Gonzaga you didn't do as much.

Sheehy: No, I was just involved in intramurals and going to games and things like that. But at La Salle I got involved in a lot of things. I wrote for the newspaper. I was in forensics.³ I was in the plays, both class plays and school plays. I was manager for the football team. I was in the national honor society. I was head

³ Forensics is the art and study of debate; argumentation.

of the Catholic Student Mission's Crusade.⁴ I was involved in a great deal of activities at La Salle.

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De Angelis: What exactly did the forensics club do?

Sheehy: It was speech. We give speeches, oratory, so I did that.

De Angelis: Did you win any awards?

Sheehy: I was fairly successful. Yes.

De Angelis: Were there any other major awards you won in high school?

Sheehy: Well I was valedictorian of the senior class. I won the award for the highest average as a sophomore. And I guess I finished second in the class my senior year. I also won the award for oratory in my junior and senior year.

De Angelis: Were you parents proud that you were valedictorian?

Sheehy: Yes. Yes, they were. Then it was a great honor and in many ways it is too. Although now they call them student speakers as opposed to valedictorian and salutatorian and things like that.

De Angelis: And why did you speak as Valedictorian if you graduated second in your class?

Sheehy: Because we had oratorical contest, a speaking contest. And the person who won that was the individual who gave the valedictory address and the person who came in second gave the salutatorian address. The person who finished first academically wasn't even involved oratory, so he didn't give any of the addresses.

De Angelis: And you seemed really busy in high school, so did you ever have a job outside of high school?

Sheehy: No. Part of that reason was I was so young. I was sixteen almost my whole senior year and with all the activities and things, it kept me busy enough.

⁴ This is a mission education organization that was founded by Clifford J. King and Robert B. Clark. These two men were seminarians in the Society of the Divine Word. The first meeting was held in 1918.

7:34

De Angelis: And so how would you fund extracurricular activities then, such as going to a movies with friends—

Sheehy: My parents I guess would give me an allowance I guess as far as I can recall. I didn't—of course, don't forget things were relatively inexpensive at that point. I mean I would go to movies. I mean we'd go out and get something to eat after games. I still remember the place we used to go after football games. You can get a bowl of stew with crackers for ¢25. So I mean it was a whole different world. I husband my money. I got an allowance. I didn't spend it all at once. So I never really have—I mean I didn't have a lot, but it was never a problem.

De Angelis: How did dances work at a single gender institution?

Sheehy: For the most part they were held at the girl's high schools usually on Sunday nights. There was one every Sunday night at the girls—Ursuline High School in Cumberland. Occasionally we would have dances. Generally, I didn't attend. Again being relatively young and actually fairly quiet and fairly shy outside of activities; I tended not to go. I wasn't a particularly good dancer to begin with. I mean I took lessons but I wasn't particularly good.

De Angelis: What kind of dancing lessons did you take?

Sheehy: Regular dancing. Regular dances of the time, slow dances, the twist, things like that.⁵

De Angelis: Do you think that being shy, being at a single gender school, being young, do you think that hurt your chances getting girls in high school?

Sheehy: Absolutely. I mean on some level I was so involved that I didn't really have time. And on the other hand—it's kind of funny cause the night we graduated from high school I remember somebody, one of my classmates saying to me, "You know so and so? I said, "Oh yeah, I remember her." "She had a terrific crush on you when you were a sophomore."

⁵ The twist was a dance where two individuals danced without touching and twisted their hips to the rhythm of the music. It was a dance in response to the release of the song entitled 'The Twist' by Chubby Checker in 1959.

I said, "Oh, I didn't know that." And I mean occasionally I went to—I went to proms, I went to sophomore prom. But for the most part I didn't—again for all the reasons you mentioned, I didn't interact a lot with the other gender.

10:02

De Angelis: How old were you when you went on your first date?

Sheehy: I guess I was, huh, my first date? Let's see I was probably fifteen, fourteen or fifteen.

De Angelis: And was that the average age—at least for your household to go out with a—

Sheehy: Yes, I think so. Again my parents monitored and were not unreasonable with things. But I mean you go out in groups first and then you can go out to a movie or something like that. My trick was to go to Wednesday nights. There was this kind of religious event at the church so we would go down to the church. So it gave me an opportunity with young ladies before and after the event.

De Angelis: Do you remember some normal dates that you would go on?

Brother Edward: Yes, I do. After the football game we went to—they had a little dance. It was a victory dance. But of course we didn't win. So, it wasn't a victory dance. Movies, occasionally going to the movies. Getting a soda some place. You know they were so big with this cherry coke and vanilla coke and things like that. So your basic things that people would—bowling, things that people would normally do particularly in a small town where it's fairly easy to get around either by bus or walking or bike or whatever.

De Angelis: Did you ever have a steady girlfriend in high school?

Sheehy: No. No.

De Angelis: Just some dates.

Sheehy: The closest would be the last couple of months of my senior year. A young woman asked me to go to her prom so I asked her to go to my prom. We kind of hung out but no, no. Uh, let me rephrase that. I guess my junior year. For the first half of my junior year I was in a pretty steady relationship.

De Angelis: So by your senior year you were thinking about the Christian Brotherhood.

12:17

Sheehy: Not until April. Not until next month, 49 years ago.

De Angelis: All right. So up until that point did you have a set plan on how you wanted your life to go like?

Sheehy: I was going to go to La Salle.⁶ I was going to major in either history or political science. Then my plan was to go to graduate school at a good—Georgetown or Princeton.⁷ Of course, that was pie in the sky. And then probably enter the Foreign Service.⁸ I mean that was my plan. I had a great interest in diplomacy and in foreign policy, which I still have. So that's what I was going. And I was going to come here to the university, to college at the time because it was just a logical step.

De Angelis: But what about personally like did you want a marriage? Did you want to get married? Did you want kids?

Sheehy: I hadn't really thought about that. I mean that was something in the future. For someone who had moved around so much I really haven't made any plans. My parents had moved to Wilmington so two weeks after I graduated from Cumberland from high school, you know, I left Cumberland.⁹ It was very clear to me that I would not be returning. That was a very sad experience for me cause I liked it very much. But I knew that my life as it usually was involved moving around and things like that.

De Angelis: So when did you actually decide to go to La Salle College?

Sheehy: I guess it was second semester of my senior year. The Brother who was in charge of admissions came to La Salle High School and pretty much accepted me on the spot. And once he did that I didn't have any reason to apply anywhere else. Again cause my relationship with the Brothers was so positive and I

⁶ La Salle is in reference to La Salle College, now La Salle University. It was founded in 1868 by the Christian Brothers. The name change occurred in

⁷ Georgetown is a university located in Washington D.C. and Princeton is a university located in Northern New Jersey.

⁸ Working in the Foreign Service requires one to work in other countries in the United States in order to promote peace and prosperity.

⁹ Wilmington is in Delaware.

enjoyed my time at La Salle High and I had been up here at a forensics' tournament, an oratorical contest in January, and liked it very much and it was obviously fairly close to my family.¹⁰ It's only about forty-five minutes to an hour away. So it all fit in very logically for me. A lot like I think kids from La Salle High School might look to come here just as a natural continuation.¹¹

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De Angelis: So you never applied anywhere else?

Sheehy: No, I did not.

De Angelis: Were your parents leery about you only applying to one school?

Sheehy: No, they had no problem with that. I think again going from a Catholic high school to a Catholic college was—I think it's still is in many ways it's a very logical step for people who went to Father Judge or Roman Catholic or Neumann-Goretti or any of the women's school to go to a Catholic college.¹² They're comfortable to the values, comfortable with the education. I think it's a very logical step. And my parents again because it was relatively close I wasn't applying to University of Colorado or University of Washington or something like that. They were satisfied, pleased with it.

De Angelis: Well you mentioned yesterday that you didn't live with your parents the last semester of your senior year.

Sheehy: My parents left Thanksgiving weekend. They moved Thanksgiving weekend.

De Angelis: So were they involved a lot in your college making decision.

Sheehy: Not really. I mean I pretty much made the decision on my own. I mean I talked it out with them but they left it to me. Again, they were very, very good about saying "we expect you to do your best. So you have a responsibility and you're accountable for that responsibility. If you don't do your best then we need to talk about it." So it was never, you have to get a hundred, you have to do this, you have to do that. It was always. And it was demanding to do your best. I mean again

¹⁰ "Up here" is in reference to La Salle College in Philadelphia, PA.

¹¹ La Salle High School is an all male high school located in the suburbs of Philadelphia.

¹² These are high schools located in Philadelphia, PA. Both Roman Catholic and Father Judge are all male institutions, while Neumann-Goretti is a co-educational high school.

because except for the math and a little bit of the sciences, I was pretty good in the other subjects. It was a high bar but it was the one that should have been set.

16:12

De Angelis: Was your LaSallian high school the first time you interacted with the Christian Brothers?

Sheehy: Yes, it was. Yes, it was. Gonzaga was Jesuit.¹³ However that's not entirely true because again my dad went to a Christian Brother's high school. One of his teachers was a very good family friend and would visit us several times a year. So I would keep in touch with the Brothers that way. He taught my dad history and a *very, very* fine individual. He retired at CBA Lincroft then passed away about 30 years ago.¹⁴ So I did keep in touch with the brothers but I had no interest in it.

De Angelis: Did the high school— the LaSallian high school, did it really drive home what the Christian Brother values were for you?

Sheehy: Very much so because I only had Brothers. In my three years I didn't have a single lay teacher.¹⁵ So it was very, very much an emphasis on La Salle and the Brothers. And it was a relatively young group of Brothers too so that was also—and very much involved. Cumberland they simply taught everything and they were involved in everything. They didn't have a car. The Brothers didn't have a car. They walked to games and again it was a small town you can do it. But you really did have to be pretty young and pretty sturdy to be able to deal with that kind of life and they were.

De Angelis: What was your understanding of the Christian Brothers prior to your entering the institution?

Sheehy: That's a very good question too because my understanding was these were guys who enjoyed teaching, enjoyed living together as a group, enjoyed interacting with people. I didn't realize at the time the amount of discipline and the prayer life. I didn't realize at the time they were getting up at five o'clock in the morning or 5:30. I mean they said but it never really sunk in because I never really saw them. Although, a Brother

¹³ Jesuits are members of The Society of Jesus, which is a religious order founded by Saint Ignatius Loyola. The term Jesuit was first used between 1544 and 1552.

¹⁴ Christian Brother's Academy in Lincroft, New Jersey.

¹⁵ When using the word "lay," it is in reference to an individual who is not a member of a religious order.

who's the football moderator said he had to go over at five o'clock for prayers and to come get him if there was a problem. So I mean I thought that's interesting, so they prayed at five o'clock. But I didn't get a sense of how intertwined the prayer life was. They were great teachers, great men, great mentors, and very interested in helping young people and that's what I saw and that's what attracted me to them.

18:52

De Angelis: You mentioned you started seriously thinking about entering the Christian Brothers at the very end of your senior year.

Sheehy: Yes, that's correct.

De Angelis: What kind of swayed your decision?

Sheehy: Well I was in the principal's office. Again, it's a relatively small school so I was in the principal's office for something. I didn't remember what it was. It wasn't anything bad. His name was Jeremy, Brother Jeremy, a very sainted man. And he said, "Did you ever think about being a Brother?" And I said, "Not really." You know had my plan what I was going to do. "Well the Brothers had a meeting and we thought you might make a good candidate. Would you think about it?" I said, "Eh not really." "Would you think about it?" So I thought how much I admired him and them and I went away and thought about it for two days and said yes. And then called my parents up and said "I'm going into Brothers." They were a little surprise by that because it came right out of the blue. It wasn't something that we'd been talking about. I wasn't considered a "holy roller." I was very much involved in activities in school and everything else. And outside the class was pretty lively and pretty—I mean late in my senior year a couple of my sidekicks pushed me up so that I was at the second floor window of one of the Brother's classrooms. And I was just looking in the window from the second floor. So he didn't know what was going on, how did he get there, and blah, blah, blah. So I mean most people—again as I think I said yesterday most people don't expect someone they know to make that kind of commitment. But he asked me. I said yes. There it was. He doesn't ask me. It doesn't happen.

De Angelis: Why did they think you were a good candidate as opposed to everyone else in that school?

Sheehy: Good question. I never asked them. I never asked them why they thought I was a good candidate. I guess cause maybe they saw something in me that I didn't see in me. And again I was young. I wasn't seventeen a month before I graduated from high school. I guess it was just something that they saw.

21:05

De Angelis: Do you think that you can make an informed decision at that young age to change your life?

Sheehy: Looking back in retrospect I think that things should have—I think and my mom thinks that too; that it would have been better to wait till after college. But at that time most people entered right after high school. Some people entered the Brothers, went to high school in what we called the “junior novitiate.” Some people entered at like twelve or thirteen, entered into the planning to be a Brother. I think what we do now is we want them to have at least two years of college and preferably four and I think in retrospect that would had been the better way to go.

De Angelis: And why did you think that though? Did you have issues?

Sheehy: Well again I was young. I was young. I did not have the kind of social relationships that college would have given me. I *thought* I knew what I was “giving up” but most of that was theoretical. So I think after college you can say, “well I’ve seen this, I’ve seen that. It’s time to make a decision and I know precisely what it is that I’m choosing.” Now I thought I knew that but it was the book aspect of it rather than the real aspect of it that I knew.

De Angelis: And did these Christian Brothers that said you’d be a good Christian Brother did they try to help you—inform you what exactly you’re giving up?

Sheehy: Not really. I mean again theoretically I knew but it was that fifteen months of novitiate, postulancy and novitiate, that grilled it into you.

De Angelis: And you had already decided to go to La Salle.

Sheehy: Yes.

De Angelis: And when you went—when you decided to become a Christian Brother, did you just call up La Salle and tell them?

23:07

Sheehy: No. They knew. I mean the Brothers, the connection, the network, so it wasn't a problem. I mean I delayed it for a year, so instead of entering in September of sixty-three ('63), I entered in September of sixty-four ('64). And as I said I spent that 15 months in what I often called "Brothers boot camp," but it's called the novitiate.

De Angelis: And where was the boot camp?

Sheehy: Beltsville, Maryland. It's outside of Washington. It's closer to Washington and Baltimore but it's in between. At the time it was off Route One. I mean it's still off Route One but ninety-five (95) runs right by it now too.

De Angelis: And did you have any choice whether or not you wanted to that place or did you have to go to the Baltimore place?

Sheehy: I mean technically I guess I could have gone to one of our other novitiates but since I was from this particular province or district as we call it that was a very logical place for me to go.

De Angelis: And when exactly did you enter the novitiate?

Sheehy: Saturday, June 15, 1963.

De Angelis: And how scared were you?

Sheehy: I wasn't. I really wasn't that scared. I mean it was unknown. I mean again I had an idea because I had an idea what the schedule was going to be like. But again one of the advantages of moving around a lot is it makes you resilient, it makes you adaptable. I mean if there's anything that I'd been able to do in my life—I mean people do not accuse me of being flexible and I'm not flexible in a lot of ways. But one of the ways I am is being able to adapt to different situations. So I wasn't—again when I was growing my mom was taking care of my siblings. My dad was working. So I was very much on my own. I mean I'd be off on my own for a while because of activities. Sometimes I'd be away. So I was self-reliant. So I wasn't scared. It was another adventure.

25:07

De Angelis: And when you left your family to go into the novitiate, what were you allowed to bring?

Sheehy: They gave you a list but it was very basic, *very* basic. What you might usually think in terms of clothes and things. No magazines, no books. Actually, I had a gym bag and my trunk didn't arrive for a week. So I was living out of the gym bag for a week. Because once you got through the three months of the postulancy, you got your robe and that's what you wore the whole time. So black pants, white shirt, the robe, you didn't really—and then of course stuff for recreation and work and things like that. So, it was pretty much—pretty basic in terms of what we brought.

De Angelis: And up until that point did your parents ever try to dissuade you at all?

Sheehy: Never. I think what they—the Brother who's in charge of vocations met with my parents. I was there for like 5 minutes and then I said good night, went off. No. I mean in some ways again at that time, it was much more typical for people to do this. You know first son to the Church, second son to the military kind of thing. I guess they were probably a little surprised. Again because I'd been away, I went home maybe one weekend a month. I went home at Christmas. I went home at Easter. But I was basically on my own. Maybe they were a little surprised but they were very supportive. They didn't have any—not only had no problem with it, they were enthusiastic about it.

De Angelis: So can we talk about I guess the actual Christian Brotherhood. Can you explain the stages I guess you had to go through that year?

Sheehy: Sure. You had to, when you made application you had to have physical. You had to have an all day psychological test. You had to take these tests—draw a person, draw the person of the other sex, draw a house that kind of thing. Here's a set of pictures, a woman looking out the window. You had to write a story about that. The Rorschach Test which is the inkblot test.¹⁶ I took it in Pittsburgh I guess in early May of my senior

¹⁶ The Rorschach Test was invented by Hermann Rorschach in 1921 as a monograph. It was a psychological, interpretive tool used in the 1940s and 1950s in clinical psychology

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year and for some reason I passed.¹⁷ Well I think part of it had to do was I just played the crazy captain in the school play so I knew what crazy meant. It didn't mean I didn't think it was true I just knew that wasn't the right answer.

So that and then you were accepted. And we arrived. We came here and the Brothers took us down to Ammendale. And we then began the process. And the process is basically clearing your mind to the world and putting in studying about Saint La Salle, studying about the church, studying scripture. There was a lot of work involved. I generally mowed the lawns, shovel the snow and things like that. So we would get up—I mean I guess two weeks after coming in at 5 o'clock in the morning I was getting up at 5 o'clock in the morning. Actually I was getting up at 4:45 cause I was the youngest so I was the bell ringer.

So I had to get up at 4:45 in the morning. Ring the bell forty doubles, forty singles then give the signal. You know "Live Jesus in our hearts forever." Then the day started with an hour and a half to two hours of prayer, then breakfast, then work, then studies, then back to prayer again, then work in the afternoon, reading, spiritual reading, directed reading, etc. And Tuesday afternoon, Thursday afternoon, and Sunday afternoon we had recreation. Occasionally, we were allowed to talk at meals but very occasionally. For the most part it was done in silence except for recreation. And then we had night prayer at 8:30 and we were supposed to be in bed by nine.

De Angelis: So that's a lot.

Sheehy: Oh yeah the days went fast. And I saw my family four times a year.

De Angelis: Wow. How much of a shock was that?

Sheehy: It was very different but again I had not seen them every day since Thanksgiving. I still remember the Brother in charge calling me and then telling me my sister Katie had been born. It was different but it wasn't—again, it was, it just was expected. I mean we were only off the property a couple of

¹⁷ Pittsburgh, PA.

times. No newspapers, no TVs. Kennedy was assassinated.¹⁸ I didn't see any of the television of it till after I left Ammendale.¹⁹ So it was very much a disciplined environment. But it was—I mean once you got into the swing of it, it wasn't a problem.

30:34

De Angelis: So you basically spent fifteen months in silence?

Sheehy: Yup.

De Angelis: And what's the philosophy behind that? Why give up talking?

Sheehy: So you can discipline yourself to concentrate on the important things in life. You can concentrate on prayer. You can concentrate on interior recollection of the presence of God. You can concentrate on meditation and you don't get as much trouble if you keep quiet.

De Angelis: That's true. **[laughs]** And were prayers silent or where they spoken?

Sheehy: No, they were both. They were both. There was meditation. Meditation I guess an hour a day, half an hour in the morning, half an hour at night but there was Morning Prayer. There was mass every day. Sometimes the Mass was in Latin and sometimes it was in English cause we just at the time a Vatican council and the changes they were going through. There was a variety of prayers too. And obviously during Lent, you know, things got ratcheted up a bit in terms of prayers and things. I remember I guess it was Holy Thursday into Good Friday we took half an hour turn staying up all night in front of the Blessed Sacrament. And I was the youngest so I was the last one. So like 4 o'clock in the morning they'll wake me up **[mumbles as if asleep]** and off we went.

De Angelis: The psychological test that you had to take. Do you know of anyone who—like a lot of people who would fail that?

Sheehy: I did not know of a lot of people who failed it but I know that there were people who failed it. And at each step along the way you could be, *you* could make the decision to leave at

¹⁸ President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963 by Lee Harvey Oswald in Dealey Plaza located in downtown Dallas, Texas.

¹⁹ Ammendale, Maryland.

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any time. But at the end of the novitiate you had to go through a process where the Brothers in charge would decide if you would be accepted. Not everybody was accepted.

There was a fellow a half year ahead of me who was not and there was a fellow a year behind me who was not. And then you take vows, temporary vows. But each time you take vows like for a year or three years in those days you had to come up for what we called a chapter, a vow chapter. And actually there's one that's going to be going on this weekend for people who are in formation.²⁰ And then when you get to the point of taking your final vows the same thing occurs. So at each time along the way, you make the decision but also the Order makes a decision about whether they want to continue to have you.

De Angelis: So that first fifteen months when you entered, did you take a vow or no?

Sheehy: No. You don't take vows until the end of the fifteen months. Thenovitiate was the year and a day. So you got the habit on September first. So June fifteenth to September first you were called the postulant so you wore a suit, coat and tie and shirts except when it was really hot. And then a year later on the September second sixty-four ('64), I took my first vows. Because I was young my first vows were a year as everybody else. But the second time it was for three years. So I basically took one, one-year vow then two sets of threes before I took my final vows.

De Angelis: And that's just because you were young?

Sheehy: Because I was a year younger than everybody.

De Angelis: And during at least your first year, did you ever want to quit?

Sheehy: No, actually not. Even though we had fairly significant attrition rate, no, no, I was very happy in the novitiate. I think that what happens is, is that along the line, however, anyone who says they never thought of it is not telling the truth, I think. I think there are times when you get down and you think about it for any number of reasons. Maybe you're not successful in classroom. Maybe you don't like living in a

²⁰ That event occurred Sunday March 11, 2012.

34:40

group. Maybe the prayer life is too much of a grind for you. But certainly during novitiate I was—maybe I was too dumb not to be upset about it. But even when we had— we had three people leave in three days once. And that was the way life was. I mean people decided it wasn't for them and off they went. But at the time, I mean I could have stayed in the novitiate forever. I was perfectly—there's a part of me on that Myers-Brigg's test.²¹ I'm off the scale on three of the characteristics but on the internal/external, I'm right in the middle, in other words, extrovert/introvert. I mean most people would see me as being very extroverted but there's a strong part of me that's very solitary and introverted and things. So that's the reason why the novitiate was not a problem for me.

De Angelis: And it seems like everything was very restricted. Do you remember what your diet was like? Did they restrict your diet?

Sheehy: Very plain. Yes. Let's see. For seventy, no maybe not, maybe sixty-four straight Saturday nights it was scrambled eggs with tomato sauce on top for dinner. So I mean it was a very basic, very basic. And there were certain— I mean it was fine. I mean it was plentiful. But there were also certain times, certain rhythms. For example on a Friday morning, we always had what we called a "fast of rule," which meant that we would eat standing up and basically you have a coffee and doughnut. That was to provide for good leadership within the Brothers. That was fasting for that particular reason. So I mean it was fine but it was not in any way extravagant or anything.

De Angelis: Were you allowed alcohol?

Sheehy: No, absolutely not. There was no alcohol served in the novitiate at all. In fact, it was a big event to have soda. It was a big event to have a soda after recreation or sometimes at lunch or something. That got us all gunned up.

De Angelis: What about communion wine. You were allowed to have that.

²¹ The Myers-Briggs test is a personality inventory that describes psychological types, which C. G. Jung first used. This test makes his theories and assertions understandable to the common individual and shows how useful this inventory can be in everyday life.

36:54

Sheehy: At that time, it was not under both species; so there was no wine, no liquor at all and of course no smoking.²² Among the Brothers for many years, you couldn't smoke unless you got a doctor note and approval from the Superior in General in order to smoke. Also owning a radio, you have to get permission to own a radio. Again those were the times. That was it. It was a restrictive, but not a overpowering of life. I mean there it was discipline but not draconian.

De Angelis: And you talked about single bedrooms and double bedrooms earlier in the interview.

Sheehy: In the novitiate, we were in a big dorm. In the novitiate we were in a big dorm. When I got to the scholasticate, when I got here out at Elkins Park, we had three or four to a room.²³ My first year we had this big what we call "common room" where everybody studied. My second year, the desks went into the rooms. You could study there. My third and fourth year, we each had our own room, but they were half the size of this room.²⁴ So it was a gradual thing, but again in the novitiate it was everybody in one dorm.

De Angelis: Like one dorm room?

Sheehy: One big, big dormitory. Yes, almost like a hostel; like thirty people in a room with no separation of curtains or anything else.

De Angelis: It does sound like boot camp.

Sheehy: Yeah, it was. But I mean again it wasn't any—that's the way life was at the time. It really was. I mean you didn't know any better in one sense.

De Angelis: And how many bathrooms for all thirty guys?

Sheehy: It was dormitory type situation so showers, bathrooms. And of course you had to get a haircut at a particular time.

²² "Both Species" refers to the celebration of both bread and wine as Holy Communion i.e. the body and blood of Christ.

²³ The scholasticate is the term used for those individuals who are entering religious orders and who are currently enrolled in college-level classes. Brother Edward lived in Elkin's Park, which was the Christian Brother's residence for scholasticates. He lived in St. Anselm Hall for two years and St. Joseph's hall for two years.

²⁴ See figure in Appendix of Brother Edward's office.

Everybody had pretty much the same style haircut. So yeah, it was regimented but it was also happy. I mean it wasn't something that everyone went around with a sour face on. It's an interesting experience. Now I mean you couldn't get away with today because of all the differences in technology. I mean we basically had television and radio then. But I mean I didn't miss it. I didn't miss either one of them except that obviously the Kennedy assassination and the Navy was having a great football season so I missed that.²⁵ I missed seeing that.

39:20

De Angelis: When did you find out about the Kennedy assassination?

Sheehy: I was outside. I was weeding the garden. I was down on my hands and knees scooping the garden. An old Brother came along. The only time you could talk was if you gave the signal. In other words, if you said, "Live Jesus in our hearts" and the other person said "forever," then you could talk. But it was only supposed to be on business or religious matters. So this old Brother comes along. In fact his name is Anselm. In fact there's a plaque to him at the front of Olney Hall. He comes along. So he says, "Live Jesus in our hearts." I said, "Forever." He says to me, "The president's been shot." I thought to myself "eh, yeah right." I believed him but I thought. So at the end of the work period, the Brother in charge called us to the chapel and said, "The president has been assassinated" and we said a rosary for him. My parents sent me newspaper clippings and I don't even remember if they were posted or not on the board. See every letter going in and every letter coming out had to be opened. So the person in charge *could* read our letters if he wanted to. I don't think he did but he could. But that was it. That was it. I mean there's fifteen months of my life is pretty much blank.

De Angelis: So your parents sent you newspaper but were you allowed to read the clippings?

Sheehy: No. The Brother in charge might have put them up on the bulletin board but I don't remember. He might not have. I don't think I read them. So it was—I mean it was such a significant event. I didn't know. I mean I knew what happened but I thought it was a Communist conspiracy of course, which I think everything is. Not really, but at that time

²⁵ According to Brother Edward, the Navy football team was having a great season in 1963-1964. They went 8-1 that year and were second in the country.

I thought it might have been. So, yeah, it was a very traumatic experience. But we didn't—it was a blank. Again fifteen months of a blank.

41:21

De Angelis: So were you informed of the circumstances then of the assassination or no?

Sheehy: Just very generally. Just very, very generally. Now sometimes what happened, we would have reading in the dining room and most of the time it was from a religious book. But *sometimes* it would be from like the *New York Times*. So for example, I could still remember the Gulf of Tonkin in the summer of '64. You know the reading was done from the *New York Times* account of what had occurred or what we thought had occurred. So every so often that would be our news. But it wasn't like we had *Newsweek* or *Time* or any of those magazines. We didn't have any of that stuff. Sometimes they had Catholic periodicals and things but nothing that would give any indication of what was going on in the world.

De Angelis: And you mentioned that you weren't really allowed leave the, I guess the rectory or—

Sheehy: Well to the novitiate. Once to the doctors, once to the dentist, once we had a trip to Calvert Hall in Baltimore which was real—that was tremendous. Then once into Washington to where the Brothers were studying at that time from New York and once out to Frederick, Maryland, to the provincial. So that's what? Five times. Five times in fifteen months is the only time I was off the property. [cough]

De Angelis: What were the parameters to leave?

Sheehy: Well that's funny because, it's funny in a way because I was the grounds crew. I had to like mow the lawn and hoe out along the road. So I'd be out there mowing the lawns and cars will be coming by and people would be walking by. We had what we called "modesty of eyes," which means we were not supposed to look up. We're supposed to not see other people, not look at other people. At one time, there was time there was a rule the Brothers were not allowed to look women in the face and Brothers were not allowed to teach women too for a very long time.

43:30

But in this case it was modesty sight, modesty of eyes. So I'd be out mowing the lawn and all of these cars would be coming passed and I'd be supposed to not paying any attention to them. And for the most part I didn't pay any attention to them. But we didn't get off the prop—Now *every* so often, every so often as a *special* treat. We'd have a movie or be allowed to watch something on TV. Every so often we participated in the study for shaving cream.

This company was trying to get a group, a control group. Well, we were the perfect control group cause we weren't going anywhere. So it was for hot lather. So we all did it. So at the end of it they showed us this movie, Seven Brides or Seven Brothers or some crazy—not crazy things but something that obviously was super G rated. And then another time we were allowed to watch a horror movie on TV and we're watching it and it's getting close to the end and it was time for prayer so we asked would it be all right if we continued to watch it and the answer was no. So we flipped it off as the crab monsters were getting ready to take over the world and off we went to pray. And that again was an aspect of discipline, an aspect of obedience. Obedience was supposed to be blind. You know if the Brother in charge says you were supposed to do this.

I'll give you another example. I know this sounds extremely medieval. But if we were in the chapel and we made a mistake we were supposed to kiss the floor. So during prayers I said "the" instead of "these" I was supposed to kiss the floor, again as a sign of penitence, as a sign of humility.

De Angelis: Did you find any of these rules arbitrary or "ridiculous"?

Sheehy: In some cases probably arbitrary, but not ridiculous. Again, I think my background prepared me for this. I mean I was not—I came from a house in which there were rules, not all of which I agreed with. For example, my dad—one of my dad's rules was we could not drive in a car with a teenager. So that limited—he was just concern about accidents and things like that. And it didn't really bother me cause I could get anywhere I wanted to by walking or bicycling or taking the bus. But I mean it was a rule. And I—it was his rules and he has the right to make the rules and so I said yes. And so the same thing was true there. There were rules. Almost all of which I

understood but they were arbitrary. So I wouldn't say they were ridiculous but they were arbitrary.

46:20

De Angelis: And at the end of this fifteen months you took vows.

Sheehy: Yes.

De Angelis: What were the vows?

Sheehy: The vows were poverty, chastity, obedience, stability, meaning you would stay within the Brothers, and teaching the poor gratuitously like at that time that meant teaching without getting a salary—without you getting the money and trying to teach people of the lower classes. Now some of that has changed but the basic ones have not changed.

De Angelis: The vow of stability. Since these are temporary vows were they taken seriously at least stability?

Sheehy: Yes, it was temporary but I mean it was for a year. And you can leave at the end of the year. You could be asked to leave at the end of the year. But if you left during the year you had to write a note. I mean in theory you wrote a note to the pope and said I want to leave or to the Superior General. And in some ways that's still the case, although, now they want you to wait three years. In other words, if you say I want to leave, they'd say go on a leave of absence for three years. Sometimes at the end of the three years you come back, sometimes you don't come back. So it's funny. We always talk about it's easier to get out than it was t get in. I mean that's still true to some extent.

De Angelis: So a three-year break from the Brothers does that—

Sheehy: Yes. Yes. You know or a year or two or three. If a person is thinking of leaving the Order we encourage them to do that. They're still a Brother but we encourage them to do that so it gives them the chance to make the final decision about what they want to do.

De Angelis: Does that give them permission to say date?

Sheehy: In theory no because their vows are in existence. I don't know what it means in practice. I know some people, I have some friends who went on leave of absences but I do not know of

what occurred. They can live by themselves and have a job. Again even though technically they don't earn anything, it all belongs to the Brothers, it's kind of a midway thing for somebody.

48:38

De Angelis: So what kind of ceremony was it when you got your first vows?

Sheehy: My first vows was not as big time so to speak as taking the habit. When you take the habit of the Brothers your parents can be there or your family can be there. I had to get a special exemption so all my brothers and sisters could be there. Cause you're only supposed to have like four people there. You have a brother who is your sponsor. At that time, you were given a religious name. You took a religious name. **[cough]** You had to take—they gave you a list and that would be your second name but you could pick your first name. The taking of vows was a fairly simple ceremony.

De Angelis: So your first vows you took a new name?

Sheehy: No, when I took the habit. So three months after I entered, I got the habit indicating that I was a new person and I took a new name. Now in 1966 after our national chapter, you had the choice of keeping your religious name or changing back. I changed back. Some people change back, some people didn't. So when people say how's Brother so and so doing. If it's prior to 1966 who may not know who they're talking about because they may be referring to them by their religious name whereas you know them by their "secular name."

De Angelis: And what name did you choose?

Sheehy: One of the names on the list was of a little known Hungarian saint called Emeric. And I like the name James. They said to you try not to take your regular baptismal name. So I could have taken Edward Jeffrey so I still would have been Edward J. But because of that change the name, change your life. I took James Emeric. So up until 1966 I was James Emeric and as a student here I was James E. Sheehy until 1966.

De Angelis: And you just like the name. That was the reason?

Sheehy: Yeah. That was the reason. I liked the name.

De Angelis: So what exactly did you do following your novitiate?

50:47

Sheehy: Once we took on the morning of the second, September second we took the vows, about an hour later we all climbed into vans and came to La Salle. We came to Elkins Park, which is where we were living with two big houses on campus. One was an old mansion. The other one was a more modern building. La Salle did not begin until like the twenty-first of September in those days. So we had three weeks to work on the grounds, move in, do all that, go down to Ocean City where the scholastics were.²⁶

They were down there for three weeks. See it worked out well because the scholastics didn't go back to school until the twenty-first whereas the Brothers in the high schools started right after Labor Day. So there were three where they could do down there by themselves. So we went there and then third week of September we started school. Now we were the first group that came here all four years.

Prior to that, the freshman year was taught out there, the faculty came out there. But to provide a gradual influx into the University. But my class, because we're fairly small, we came here all four years. In fact, where the Brothers park their cars now is where we park all these blue vans. We had these Econoline vans numbered A through J or whatever it was.²⁷ Or it was lettered A through J.

De Angelis: And you talk about the scholastics being down in Ocean City. What is that?

Sheehy: Scholastic was a Brother who was in college.

De Angelis: So you were considered scholastic.

Sheehy: I was considered a scholastic for four years.

De Angelis: Okay. During the three weeks was it I guess another shock that you could talk again basically have a little time to relax?

Sheehy: We could. Yeah. It was a little more but not as much. It was a very gradual thing. It was like going into cold water. It's very,

²⁶ Ocean City, New Jersey is a shore town where the Brothers had a house for vacation and retreat.

²⁷ Econoline Vans are a Ford model that was introduced in 1961 and was continued until 1967.

very gradual. I did get to see my parents. I was allowed again see them four times a year but one of those times is right after we moved up. So I could still remember doing that. And we didn't have our black suits yet. We couldn't leave the house—leave couldn't leave the property without a black suit so I have to borrow one from somebody.

53:00

But yeah I mean it was more relaxed but still fairly disciplined, again getting up early in the morning. The difference was of course once school started our main responsibility was going to school. And we tended to be—I think as professor Rossi mentioned to you we tended to be separate from the regular students—were about a hundred of us. There was a spot in what is now a food court where the Brothers tended to sit.

Once I got involved in debate I would sometimes sit there and sometimes I sit with people who I was involved on the debate team. But we have our own little conclave. We had our own intramural teams. We had obviously our work schedule so it was very much a community. We wore the robe to school every day. The only time I didn't is if I was leaving from school to go to a debate tournament.

De Angelis: Did you enjoy having those three weeks to adjust?

Sheehy: Yes. It was a very good adjustment and a very easy adjustment. I was looking forward to going to school. The Brother in charge of the Honors Program, Brother Patrick, who was the former president, he came down to novitiate and he spoke to us about what we might be taking, what we might be interested in. So my schedule was all set before I came to the University.

De Angelis: So, did all of these Brothers who came here did they choose to come to La Salle or they had to come to La Salle?

Sheehy: They had to come to La Salle. Up until 1950 it was Catholic University. After 1950, La Salle was the one. See what happened was that for many years, Brothers who had just come out of the novitiate they'd be sent to teach right away and they have to pick up their bachelors degree on the fly. And even—and then certain number of provincials or visitors decided that that was not what we were gonna to do.

And actually it happened once or twice in my time that a brother was pulled out of the scholasticate to go teach cause

they needed somebody. But up until my year—well up until a couple of years before me, the Brothers finished in three years and in the fourth year took a masters in theology. But that became so difficult academically that they stop that. So we were in the four year program but of course we went during the summers too. So I ended up with a one hundred forty-seven credits. I got nine each summers and obviously thirty each year.

55:37

De Angelis: So when you went down to Ocean City, were you allowed to go swimming and wear bathing suit?

Sheehy: Yes. We went down just for the day. But obviously later we went down for the summer. At least early when we went out for a walk after dinner we would be wearing our robes. So we'd be walking on the beach in our robes. But other than that it was obviously bathing suit. We work in the morning and then in the afternoon pretty much had off. Of course, everybody knew who we were. I mean it wasn't like these are like cute colleges kids. They all knew. Cause we traveled—you tended to travel in packs. And they kind of encourage that you know. I mean we were not like some groups of nuns in which you couldn't go out unless there was somebody else with you. But that was encouraged. And it was a logical thing to do. I mean who wants to go over to see West Catholic play La Salle in football. We list up and sign up and we'll all get in a van, get permission and off we'd go.

De Angelis: But when you would be on the beach in your bathing suit or whatever, there'd be females on the beach. Was that a big deal for the young Christian Brothers to be denied seeing any kind women for fifteen months and then seeing them in a bathing suit?

Sheehy: No, because again we'd been now been trained. We'd been trained for fifteen months to separate that part from our lives. Of course La Salle was single gender at the time except during the summer with nuns. So I mean it was not as—I mean obviously on the beach and obviously when I was out in forensics and things like that. But we had a healthy distance. We were supposed to be reserved around women. There's always a funny line. The two things a Brother had to be worried about were punch and Judy. Alcohol and women which is kind of funny cause we're always talking about punch and Judy. But yeah absolutely, we had a healthy you know.

Now there were people who were Brothers, who left the Brothers and married the sisters of some other Brothers. They come to visit the family. They get to meet them. They get to be friends and things like that. So I mean you know what happens, happens. Birds and the bees you can't deny that. But we had been disciplined to kind of again be extremely reserved around women.

57:36

De Angelis: Did you still have to do the modest eyes approach?

Sheehy: Yes. We were supposed to. Now it was much less—again when we're walking down the boardwalk in Stone Harbor or something it wasn't—the answer is yes. We were supposed to but it was almost impossible to do it unless you were a real saint. There were some those but for the most part we were just regular people.

De Angelis: Do you remember though I guess either when you were in Ocean City or even after, any of the brothers making crude comments though about women or flirting with women or anything?

Sheehy: No. No. I don't remember that ever happening. Did it happen? It may have but I don't remember it ever happening. Because again it's almost everybody watched each other's back. And so you were very seldom without another Brother with you and you tended to be on your best behavior because if you weren't then that word would spread. It wasn't like we had people who were squealing or anything like that. But I mean if you have a group of a hundred college-aged people or fifty college-aged people living in one house its a little thought to keep secrets from people.

De Angelis: Well this ends the next hour. **[laughs]**

Sheehy: **[laughs]** But we even haven't gotten to my teaching and everything else yet.

De Angelis: Next time we'll talk about your actual college and how La Salle was. So thank you again.

Sheehy: You're welcome.

59:58 **End of audio**