

Appendix F

Transcript of Dr. John P. Rossi Interview #2

Interviewer: Gregg Pearson
Narrator: Dr. John P. Rossi
Date: March 22, 2006
Location: La Salle University, Olney Hall, Room #340, Dr. Rossi's Office
Duration: 1 hour, 13 minutes
Equipment: Sony ICD SX25

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Pearson: I am here today with Professor John Patrick Rossi. Today is March 22nd, 2006 and this is our second of two interviews on Professor Rossi's time at La Salle University. Good afternoon Professor Rossi.

Rossi: How are you?

Pearson: How are you doing today?

Rossi: Good, good.

Pearson: When we finished our first session, we started to talk a little about your career at La Salle. When did you start as a lecturer at La Salle?

Rossi: September '62.

Pearson: I believe, if my research was correct, you were promoted to assistant professor in '65?

Rossi: Yeah, I was a lecturer for the first year and then they hired me full time as an instructor. I was told that if I received the PhD by a particular period of time, I would be promoted upon reception of that to the rank of assistant professor. I got my PhD in June of '65 and they set up the contract so that I started as assistant professor then in September of that year.

Pearson: OK. You were promoted to associate professor in 1970?

Rossi: About '70, yeah.

Pearson: How about full professor?

Rossi: I think it was about '75 or '76, I'm not absolutely sure.

Pearson: Is the progression still the same for faculty members at La Salle?

Rossi: Certainly from instructor to assistant to full professor, yeah. I don't know if they still use that rank of lecturer anymore because we have so many adjuncts they may have a different category. I am not sure about that, but instructor to assistant, associate to full professor, yeah.

Pearson: Are there any special requirements to get promoted?

Rossi: In my day, you had to have a PhD to get at least to the associate degree. I think people were promoted to assistant if they had been in time or they had special talents, without a PhD, but there were faculty members in my time, many faculty members, who did not possess a PhD or doctorate. It was also absolutely the rule that you could not be a full professor without the doctorate. That changed too.

Pearson: Did it change? When did that change?

Rossi: I don't know, but I know a couple of people were promoted on the basis of their distinguished teaching, scholarship and service to the school, even though they did not have a doctorate degree.

Pearson: When did you receive tenure?

Rossi: The tenure came ... (laughs). When I started here, La Salle did not have a formal procedure of tenure. I think they were pressured by the Middle States [an accreditation association] that they had to do that. They had been pressured in the '50's to install a salary scale which they didn't have. You pretty much negotiated your own salary. The Middle States evaluation in one of those years in the late '50's said that they needed a salary scale, so La Salle adopted a salary scale which was in effect when I came. You see, you knew what you were gonna get and you knew what raises were built in et cetera. Tenure, they were also pressured by the Middle States about tenure and they hadn't done it except in kind of an off handed way. I think it was about 1969 or 1970, they sent out letters to a number of people saying that you have been awarded tenure. I went to get my mail one day, with another fella, and I opened my mail and said "Oh, my God, look. I just got a grant of tenure." The fella I was with, who was a good friend of mine, opened his and was told that he was not going to be tenured. It was very painful visit to the mail room.

Pearson: Is the process different today?

Rossi: Oh yeah. Today it is a much more structured process. That was a blanket granting on the basis of time and place, possession of degrees et cetera, which the school, I guess, felt it should do. Then it set up a very elaborate tenure and promotion procedure. You go through your department. The department makes a recommendation and it goes to the tenure and

promotion committee where your case is considered. A recommendation is made on whether to go forward or not and that is approved by the president of the school.

Pearson: What are the tenure decisions based upon?

Rossi: They are based upon your teaching, your scholarship and your service to the school.

Pearson: You were associate editor of Four Quarters Magazine and made many contributions to the publication. How and why did you become associate editor?

Rossi: Well, I had published a piece or two in Four Quarters and I liked Four Quarters especially under the editorship of John Keenan. He dropped it and another fella took it over for a while, who was also a good friend of mine, named John Kleis, he just died a year ago. It became under, I mean John was a wonderful guy, but he was a bad editor in one sense, he was a great editor if you gave him a manuscript. He could take it apart. He was a bad editor in a sense in that he didn't have a real feel for the kind of things that would make a journal a success, I don't believe anyhow. He took it over and I don't think his heart was in it and it was really running down. One day about '85 or '86, I was having lunch with Keenan and a couple other people. The idea was they were talking about trying to revive it. They wanted to revive it, but they didn't want to make it a purely English Department and a purely fiction literary, poetry type of journal. They wanted to broaden it into non-fiction and reviews, so they asked if you [Rossi] would be interested in helping out. I said "Yes" and I was the associate editor for about nine or ten years. I loved it. It was very fun I learned how to judge short stories. I never learned about how to judge a good poem. The editor who was a very skilled editor, John Keenan, said my taste in short stories was very good, but my taste in poetry was appalling.

Pearson: You won the Lindback Award for excellence in teaching in 1997 ...

Rossi: 1977.

Pearson: 1977, excuse me. How did you feel when you won the award?

Rossi: I felt great. The way they did it in those days, I don't know whether this is still the case, I think it is. I got called by the provost, who was then Brother Emory. I was told that I had been designated as a Lindback awardee and that was to make sure that you showed up to graduation. I was told not to tell anybody except my wife. I told her and she came down to the graduation with my daughter, who was then four years of age

and practically wrecked the place, you know. They are bored stiff after a while. Anyway, I think it is a great honor because you are singled out by students and faculty for your teaching qualities. Unfortunately, in my time you got \$500. It used to be \$1,000, but they split it between two faculty and instead of giving each \$1,000, they gave them \$500. I understand from one of my colleagues who recently got it (gestures to Dr. Stow's office) that it's about \$3,500 now so I've demanded an upgrade, but I haven't gotten anything (chuckles).

Pearson: Do you think you're gonna get one?

Rossi: No.

Pearson: I noticed in some of your writings that you have written quite a bit about George Orwell. Why does Orwell fascinate you?

Rossi: As an undergraduate, in one of my courses a professor listed a batch of books. You had to read a book and one of the books was called Collected Essays of George Orwell. I had read, this is like in the mid-'50's, I had read Animal Farm and 1984 on my own and I really liked Animal Farm, but I really didn't care too much for 1984, still don't. I said, well I liked that so I picked up this collection of essays and I was utterly fascinated by them. There was a series of essays that Orwell wrote on very diverse topics. What Orwell was doing was exactly what I, down deep, wanted to do and that he was writing about what interested him, whether it was serious, scholarly or not. There were essays on comic postcards, there were essays on detective stories. There were serious essays on literary figures like Kipling. There was one essay in particular which really caught my attention. It was called Politics and the English Language. It is an essay Orwell wrote which deals with how to write and in a sense why you write and it just, ... it just took me completely off guard. That hooked me on Orwell. From that point on I read everything I could get my hands on with Orwell. After maybe twenty years or so, maybe less, I started writing about him myself and had a lot of success getting some of the stuff published. Now mainly I write about his essays, I'm not really interested in the novels, although one of them is very good called Coming Up for Air and another one is pretty clever it's called Burmese Days. The novels aren't what fascinate me as much as the essays. He was a wonderful essayist, he the greatest essayist of the 20th century, I think, and maybe the greatest essayist ever.

Pearson: Maybe that is why I have noticed that you have written on a variety of topics; Irish history, English history, 20th century Europe. How did you become interested in those particular fields?

Rossi: British history was my field and part of the academic understanding is that you have to publish in your discipline and “publish or perish” used to be the phrase. I wanted to do that. I got my degree in '65. I did a couple of book reviews for The Review of Politics which was published at Notre Dame to get my feet wet. Then beginning around 1970 I began to publish in my specialty. I eventually took my dissertation, did some further research and published that as a book, that came out in '78. In the mean time, I published a whole series of essays on various aspects of the English history that was in my area of interest, that is 1870's, 80's, 90's period. At the same time, I always had this kind of fascination with writing as a kind of fun thing. If you look at my resume that I gave you, you can see that in the '70's along with the scholarly stuff, I'm also publishing in other areas, like Orwell and a few other odd things that cropped up that caught my interest. To me it is A - Fun and B – it is a way in which you keep yourself from getting you know boring, stultifying an academic bore.

Pearson: What struck me about your writing is that it covers such a wide variety of topics. A very eclectic mix of things.

Rossi: You see in the old days, ... and I think I was probably influenced and I know I was influenced by Lukacs because he did the same things but in a much bigger way. In the old days, the academic professor was expected also to be a generalist. You would be a professor and you would write in your specialty, but you might be a book reviewer, you might be a novelist on the side. I tried a couple of fictional things, but haven't been really successful because I think with fiction, I think I get a little too uptight. It is not as natural as the other stuff.

Pearson: How has the La Salle History Department changed from when you were a student to the present time?

Rossi: When I was a student the department was very small (counting) ... I think there was ... four full time faculty. You got a tremendous basic education in history because you were required to take an enormous amount of material. I think I mentioned to you last week that I had fifty some hours of history. The department was small. They tried to give you a good well rounded collection of courses. It prepped me pretty well for graduate school. By the time I came back, the department had practically doubled in size and that was a reflection of the student enrollment by then. By the early '60's you started to get that baby boom generation coming to college. One of the reasons I was hired was to teach that baby boom generation.

Pearson: Was that [hiring] one of the ways the department has adapted to the increase in students?

Rossi: The department

Pause (7 seconds) Due to Technical Difficulty

Pearson: OK. Ahh, as we were saying. The history department has changed.

Rossi: It actually, ... I think it might be, might have been bigger in the 60's and 70's than it is today. What happened in the 60's is around the time I got hired, just before me beginning around '60 they began expanding the size, partly as a reflection of the growth of La Salle and history was a required course in those days. I think you had to take (reflecting) ... 6 hours of history, so it had quite a bite in the curriculum. Ah, ... they expanded the department, they brought in younger people. When I came in, for example, ... I was 26 there was a fellow with me 25, another fellow 28 was here another fellow would be about 29 or 30 and a couple people came later who were also young. So that between oh, ... , let's say I left here in '58, in seems that between 60 and 70 they might have hired [counting to himself] ... one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, they hired seven people I think maybe eight. The department just expanded. And also, what happened then is they tried to hire to fill the gaps that they had. They hired, I did British history, somebody did American Colonial history, somebody did the Civil War, somebody did this you know, so we had a Renaissance & Reformation historian, we had an absolutism and enlightenment historian. So it was that kind of thing that was happening, we were trying to fill the gaps. The result was that by about 1970 – 71, the history department when we lost that bite in the curriculum by the way, maybe a little later, the history department had about nine or ten people who were really experts, in theory, in their field.

Pearson: OK. What have you liked most about teaching in the La Salle history department?

Rossi: Well, you know it's comfortable. I mean I always felt comfortable. I fit in rather quickly. I mean I like what I do, I enjoy going into class, I enjoy most of my colleagues, some you like more than others. I have been lucky that way, I got along with most of the people. Um .. I find it a very pleasant experience, it's kind of rewarding, not just the give and take with your colleagues, I like Stow and he and I have been friends since he came here. I get along with most of the people. But anyway, Stuart Liebiger became good friends and so I really enjoy that. Plus, to me it's really a second home.

Pearson: Now when you were chairman of the history department what were your specific duties, in addition to your teaching duties?

Rossi: Well you ran the department which was not too hard in those days. I mean compare it to what the present chairman Desnoyers has to do I mean the paperwork was minimal. You had to make sure that the department's curriculum and offerings were balanced. You had to make sure that everybody had their position, had their jobs which was a hard thing for a while. Because for about ten or twelve years we did not have a required course in the curriculum so we really had to scramble. The only reason people took a history course is if they liked history or they liked the teacher, so we really had, in my time and when George [Stow] followed me into about the time that maybe George left and Theo [Faire] took over as chair, when we got required courses back, it was a real struggle. There wasn't a lot of paperwork, there wasn't a lot of administrative work other than to make sure that everybody was covered and we had jobs lined up for everybody. We weren't sending a tremendous number of students to graduate school because it didn't seem to make much sense. We would send one a year. Some were very good. Our best students tended to go in other areas, mainly law school. For the longest time many, a lot of our best students went off to law school. So you had that kind of thing. There was also, in the beginning when I was chair, I did a lot of advising since we didn't have two hundred majors, we had maybe 60 or 70 majors. I'd do all the advising. In the old days, you would divide it up. So that you had 25, I had 25 somebody else had 20, but with 50 – 60 students I had plenty of time, so I did all the advising, which I enjoyed because I had the chance to meet all the students.

Pearson: Now what do you consider most scholarly work and why?

Rossi: Geez (thinking) ... my most scholarly work, hmm. Well, when I published my book that grew out of my dissertation it was reviewed in the American Historical Review and the English Historical Review and both reviewers gave good reviews and the man in the English Historical Review, who is still alive by the way, he just retired, a man named John Vincent and he is the dean of political historians in the 19th century and he said my book filled the gap between the history of the Liberal party at one phase and another phase and I was the one who filled the gap. It was referred to a couple of times as necessary for an understanding of this phase of British history. It is no longer necessary because people have gone beyond what I had and taken.

Pearson: But at the time it was ...

Rossi: Yeah, in a scholarly way that's the most scholarly thing. The book I liked the most that I wrote, I liked the last one about the '64 Phillies, but the book I think which is in some ways is the best written book that I wrote is the one on the history of baseball. Called The National Game ... because it

got pretty good reviews and sold pretty well, it sold a few thousand copies, but a couple of the reviewers said that it was well written.

Pearson: So that meant a lot to you?

Rossi: Yeah. I liked the idea that somebody says you can write.

Pearson: That's good. Now switching to couple of different topics here, I talked to Jack Reardon and he mentioned that one of the seminal events when he remembers his early days at La Salle is the assassination of JFK. That occurred early on in your time here at La Salle. What was your reaction and what was the reaction of the students?

Rossi: I was headed off to class, it was a Friday. Headed off to class I guess it was after lunch and I was heading down the corridor and one of my colleagues was coming down the corridor and he said that Kennedy and Johnson had been shot, both were shot. I was kind of flabbergasted and amazingly we didn't have a radio in the department, no one had a radio. So I went in to class and students were talking about it and I said "Look, there is no point in trying to hold class." So I dismissed class. Now here's even a better one. I didn't have a radio in my car. I drove home not knowing what the story was and as I pulled into my house one of my neighbors was standing in the doorway and he was a retired detective. I said "What happened?" and he was the one that told me Kennedy was dead. So that was on Friday, when I came in on Monday it was kind of, you know, people were just reeling. He [JFK] spoke here at La Salle when I was a junior or senior, Kennedy, and I remember I was on the aisle and I was on the aisle he came down.

Pearson: So was he a senator at that time?

Rossi: Yeah, he was a senator it was '57 or '58. The only thing I remember was it was January and he had the darkest tan I ever saw (laughter).

Pearson: Now what was the reaction of the students?

Rossi: I don't have a real clear memory. I remember we talked about it in class because that was all they wanted to talk about. I wasn't keeping a journal at the time so I couldn't even go back and look at that. I don't remember anything other than the fact that people were kind of reeling, they were kind of off balance.

Pearson: Right. When you first started teaching here, obviously it was in the 60's and the Vietnam War was a significant event in the nation's history. How, in your opinion, how did the Vietnam War affect life here at La Salle?

Rossi: Well, because you know they had a draft and you needed exemptions et cetera so it impinged on college kids in a way that the present war doesn't. Somebody said to me "Why aren't there any protests?" and I said "I can tell you why there are no protests. In Vietnam you had a draft. If you had a draft you would have protests". Anyway, it did impinge. Initially La Salle was very sympathetic to the war, but that faded really quickly and you had a protest movement grow pretty quickly, by '65, end of '65. By '66 the campus, ... at La Salle there is a time lag. We are not on the cutting edge of what's happening in the academic world, so there is always about a year, 8 months, 10 months, whatever it is and we caught up and we had our protests and our you know sit ins and all the things and ... they the one thing I remember very clearly is the reaction to Kent State. They asked if we would cancel class and have discussions with the students. I do remember that and ... I remember a fight in the cafeteria. Two guys were arguing about the war and being 19 or 20 years olds the argument led to a couple of punches being thrown. But I also saw a couple of faculty members get into it one time, now it didn't go to blows, but it came pretty close.

Pearson: Yeah, what was the reaction amongst the faculty members?

Rossi: Well, as I say La Salle is not on the cutting edge of anything so ah ... we were a little slow to get involved. We had a pretty big ROTC program on the campus.

Pearson: Was it [ROTC] still mandatory at that time?

Rossi: Yes, it was. They dropped it around the end of Vietnam, around that range, I'm not sure exactly when. But the faculty got caught up in the protests. It took lots of different ways. There were, you know, petitions circulated, you could go to a protest and all kinds of what did they call those things "teach-ins" or something like that. I remember some of that stuff. I was not sympathetic to the war, but not for the grounds that most of the protesters were. I just thought it was a waste of time. As far as I was concerned; "the hell with Vietnamese". But, you know, I didn't get caught up in the emotional side of it and I do remember I had a very good friend who worked at the Army War College. Very early in this whole thing I remember we were at the shore [New Jersey shore] together. This was about '62 or so and I said "What do you think is going to happen?" and he was very pessimistic about being able to put down the troubles in Vietnam. He said that because and he gave the various reasons and they were more rational and intelligent than some of the stuff that I heard like Ho Chi Mihn was actually George Washington or something. That kind of stuff never registered.

Pearson: So how do you feel the university adapted to the turmoil over the Vietnam era?

Rossi: They adapted to it slowly, but in the fashion that most colleges and universities did. You had a very significant anti-war mentality by about 1969 – 1970. La Salle probably was a fairly conservative school in many ways, but by like '69 – '70 we caught up with the trends in academe.

Pearson: OK. Women entered La Salle in 1970.

Rossi: Yes.

Pearson: In your opinion, how did this impact the school?

Rossi: Well it turned out to be the salvation of the school in a way. I mean I don't know whether we would have survived as a single sex school. Um ... when the women came aboard you noticed right away a slightly different tone. The women raised the tone a little bit. The manners softened a little bit. Behavior was a little bit better in class and outside of class. I remember one of the things that strikes me is that I am walking through the student cafeteria to get to the faculty cafeteria. I was walking behind two of the secretaries, two very pretty women, young girls who worked in the library. I was about ten paces behind them. I didn't know them very well. I knew one of them well enough to say hello to. They're walking through to into the faculty cafeteria and there are guys yelling and hooting and doing wolf whistles. One guy was up on a table banging the table as the girls walked by. I had never seen that before, you know, and I remember saying to the one I knew "I don't know how you could put up with that". She said that it was raining or we would have taken the long way around. So, when the girls arrived, that kind of stuff stopped. Plus, they [women] were probably a little better, more serious students than the fellas.

Pearson: What did the university do to help integrate them, integrate the women into culture of the university?

Rossi: It took a while because the Brothers [Christian Brothers] didn't understand women at all. There were the Brothers whose influence was very high at that time, and there were a lot of Brothers at that time, they would kind of throw their hands up and didn't know what to do. It took a while for them to recognize that you need ladies rooms; you need to accept the idea that this is a different kind of group. So I think it took a while for them to get on their feet about that. You started have women faculty come on board in larger numbers. There were only a handful of women on campus before that and then from the '70's on there were lots of hires of women. It took maybe three or four years. I don't think the school, at first, was really

prepared. Maybe they were, but I don't think so. They were kind of surprised by what this means.

Pearson: OK. We have a slight controversy in class right now. Who was the first full time women professor at La Salle?

Rossi: I think it was a woman in our department Weinstein, Minna Weinstein. I think she was, I don't know if there was any woman full time faculty then. I am almost sure she was first. She came on board about '67 or '68.

Pearson: All right. La Salle has changed from primarily a commuter school to a residential school. How and when did this ahhh occur or did it occur over a period of time?

Rossi: It occurred over a period of time. I would say, you know, slowly but surely all through the '60's and in the 70's and into the 80's you could see this trend growing. I don't know when the tipping took place and it went more commuter, err resident than commuter, but again, La Salle was following the tradition of other schools. That was the tradition of even so called urban schools. In my time I would bet than 85% of the students commuted, but probably by the '70's that was down to well over 50%. You can probably find these statistics out. You know the dorms exploded.

Pearson: Was that primarily ... how the university adapted to the demographic shift?

Rossi: Yes, they had to keep building dorms and ahh it was also as part and parcel that you wanted to diversify your student body. You not only wanted women but you wanted to diversify from where you drew your students.

Pearson: Now how did that kind of effect student life? I mean, you certainly were here as a commuter, all male school, how was life different now that it became a residential school?

Rossi: I used to come here a lot in the evenings when I first was teaching here because they had various things. They had music, what they would do was when I was a student this place in the evening was virtually empty, except for the students, the night school students who came to class and left immediately. Well, once they had residents they had to have activities for them. I remember coming to see they had movie programs on the weekends, they had concerts about once a month. As a matter of fact, this funny thing they had here in one year they had the Smothers Brothers, they had a folk singer Odetta, who was very popular at the time. I came to see that. They had ohh ... what's the singer that did "*Johnny Be Good*"

and you know the black guy. He's in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (searching for a name) ohh ahh he did "*Mabelline*" and all those.

Pearson: This is not good. You're testing my music history here.

Rossi: Oh geez, this guy is in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. He's regarded as one of the great guitarist and does the funny walk with the guitar.

Pearson: Chuck Berry?

Rossi: CHUCK BERRY (emphasis), right. Well the next week after Chuck Berry was here, there was an article in the school paper that you could look up if you wanted to. Why don't we stop bringing these old "has beens" in and get some really new talent. They had a lot of stuff like that and I guess you could get an act in those days like the Smothers Brothers and Odetta for a small sum of money. Then they would have, we used to have the history department we ran a speakers program and we would have a speaker a month, practically. Because I was the director of the History Club at one time so there was lots of activities. That you started to notice and that continued and that's one of the things that all resident schools try to figure out. How to keep the kids happy at night and on the weekends in particular, so they don't go wild (laughter).

Pearson: Another topic here, how has the, you mentioned earlier that the Christian Brothers had a difficult time adapting to the women being here, understanding the idea.

Rossi: Yeah.

Pearson: How has the role of the Christian Brothers changed here at La Salle?

Rossi: Well they are disappearing. I mean that you know that I went to a Christian Brothers high school and I cannot say that it [high school] meant much to me, but the Christian Brothers I had in college impressed me. There were some good scholars and some very impressive men. When I came aboard here I appreciated the role of the Christian Brothers were playing. Over the years, the number, beginning in the late '60's the number of the Brothers began to decline. I think it's been one of the real losses of the school that personality, that impress that they had on the place. A certain kind of standard, a certain kind of quality ... disappeared because their numbers disappeared.

Pearson: Do you think it is totally gone now?

Rossi: Not totally gone, but it's I mean I think maybe the youngest Brother that we have on campus that I know may be in his fifties. I don't know if there

is much future in the Christian Brothers. I don't know of any younger ones. I used to teach young Christian Brothers. I'd have five, six, seven a semester. I have not had a Christian Brother in class, ... I can't remember the last one.

Pearson: How do feel long term that it's going to effect the university?

Rossi: Wow. The university ... I don't know how long it's going to be able to hold onto that Christian Brothers image. The present president must be in his fifties and who is going to replace him? I wouldn't be surprised if the next president of the school was a lay person. In which case, the Christian Brothers would follow the same route as all the colleges and universities in America in the 19th century which were run mostly by various protestant denominations and you know they just couldn't contain it anymore.

Pearson: Would it be fair to say that the role of the Christian Brothers has not changed, but the diminution of the numbers has changed their role?

Rossi: Oh yeah, sure. It's very, very hard for them to have a pool to draw on. In the old days, if they needed a dean they didn't have to go to search committees. They knew that there is so and so out there and he's trained and we'll bring him in. No questions asked, no committee to look at it ... I don't know what they're going to do in the near future.

Pearson: You kind of seem to have a little bit of reticence about the shrinking influence of the Christian Brothers.

Rossi: Yeah, it's a shame because I think their presence, ... don't get me wrong, not every Christian Brother was a giant. They brought a certain quality to the school which made the school unique. They are very humble. One of the things that sets the Christian Brother apart from the priest is that they are not treated with such awe. They are kind of humble people. So sometimes their humility is both a positive and a negative thing, sometimes they were too humble. But I think it is a real loss as their numbers began to shrink.

Pearson: Did you ever notice any conflict in your association with the university between the Christian Brother faculty and the non-Christian Brother faculty?

Rossi: I ... never really noticed. I don't think that there was much that I could think about. Maybe in the beginning some of the Brothers were a little unhappy, especially when the influx of new faculty came in. In the '60's, a lot of the faculty were young guys. I think maybe some of the older Brothers were [unhappy]. I remember a case when I came up for full

professor. After I was named a full professor, I was maybe 39 or 40, something like that, 40 (positive). Anyway, I remember the first meeting of full professors. A couple of these older Brothers were looking over at me and I saw the one turn to the other one and I could read his lips, looking right at me; “Who the hell is that?” and I had only been here about 15 years, so there must have been some of that. That group of older Brothers faded so quickly, they all died off so quickly and they didn’t have those replacements in the slot as they had had in the past.

Pearson: Wow. Well I’m sure it’s an issue that the university is contending with in a number of different areas.

Rossi: Yes, all these schools that depend upon clergy. I don’t know how the nun schools survive. I mean that I think the average age for nuns is 65. I don’t know what they’re going to do.

Pearson: When did La Salle start to expand its offering of graduate programs?

Rossi: They had a graduate religion program, even in the ‘60’s.

Pearson: So was that the first graduate program?

Rossi: I think so. I think you could get a masters degree in theology or whatever they called it in those days. Then they began to gradually add graduate programs in different areas. I think that psychology and counseling were some of the first ... I’m trying to remember, then the MBA came on pretty early. And then, you know, others started to fall into place.

Pearson: All right. How did you feel about the expansion of the curriculum? Was it a good thing for the university or was it ...

Rossi: You mean the graduate idea?

Pearson: Yes, the graduate idea.

Rossi: I had my reservations I must say, honestly. I didn’t know whether we were prepped for it properly. I didn’t teach in it until last summer [2005], you know, your class. I heard from both Stow and Liebig, people whose judgment I really respect, they told me that the classes were very good. They were surprised at how good the students were. I was kind of surprised because I had taught graduate classes at Villanova and they were good. I enjoyed it, but you know I wouldn’t say that these people were great. Your class that I had last summer, there were about six to eight people in that class that were really top notch. I was pleasantly surprised. More positively impressed than I thought I would be.

- Pearson: I guess we'll take that as a compliment (laughter).
- Rossi: Your class was good, you were good. You probably know some of the other people I'm talking about. Some of the people in that class were pretty good people.
- Pearson: On the topic of students, how have the students of La Salle changed in regards to socioeconomic factors from when you were a student?
- Rossi: Well when I was a student we were all working class or lower middle class. Nobody had any money. I don't think I knew anybody who was the son of a doctor or lawyer. Now, the socioeconomic level rose. In my time what you had were a lot of people who saw college as a way of bettering yourself. As a result, you had some pretty serious students. As you began to broaden the kind of people you took into college, what you got were still people like that, but you also had a group of students who went to college because it was expected that you would go to college. You got some sillier behavior, some more immature behavior, I think, as the pool from which college student were drawn widened.
- Pearson: OK. How would you compare the attentiveness of students now back to when you were a student?
- Rossi: In some ways, there are students who were brighter than any of the people I went to school with; there is no doubt about it, although a couple of my friends were pretty sharp. Our backgrounds were kind of different. We had a different kind of education. We knew things that students today don't know. Information. I just had a colleague tell me, he's teaching a course in government, American government. He's 8, 9 weeks into the class and he's talking about the United States Senate. It never entered his mind and he said, as a question, "By the way, how many senators are there in the United States Senate?" Nobody raised their hand so he called on somebody and the student said "I think it's 26." Well, now I have to tell you something, we knew how many senators there were, we knew how many in the House of Representatives. I knew the capital of every state. I knew the capital of every country because this stuff was drilled [emphasis] into you in grammar school and high school. They don't do that anymore. The result is what you get are kids who are in some ways phenomenally sharp and technologically they are eons ahead of us, but they don't have that informational background to draw on. Sometimes that creates problems.
- Pearson: Do you think that's a problem with the American education system?
- Rossi: Yes, yes, the American education system, at the primary and secondary level, has created problems; has created problems for American university

education. You really, you cannot assume very much, whereas even when I started you could assume a lot. If I had a student from La Salle High School or Saint Joseph's or really a good school, Central, I could make an assumption that a lot of the stuff I'm talking about they had the basic ideas. I didn't have to say what the Renaissance was. I didn't have to tell them what the word meant. I didn't have to do anything like that. You knew that.

Pearson: As far as students career plans, do you see students as maybe being a little bit more looking towards the future now, undergraduate education is merely a stopping point, a temporary point? Can you say anything about what they're doing right now?

Rossi: Yes, there's some of that. I mean we were career oriented, a lot of my generation was career oriented ... I would say that today a good half of the students I have at any one time are focused on using college to go the next step to better themselves. You have another half of the class that are not sure what they are doing and are not sure what direction they are going to go in. I don't feel too badly. I have a lot of respect for them, for the late bloomers, because I was a late bloomer. I don't worry about that as much. What we've done, we have extended education. In my day, you were done at 22. Now, you know, the assumption is that you're going to get a masters degree and if you get a masters degree an awful lot of people are talking about getting a doctorate. You can now get doctorates on line, get them through the mail, if you want, I guess.

Pearson: [Laughter] I got one of those the other day in the mail too. I didn't respond to it.

Rossi: Yes.

Pearson: As far as general change events, I kind of took the liberty of asking about a few events. Are there any other events that you have seen in your time at La Salle that you would consider major change events at the university?

Rossi: Hmm (pause while thinking). Nothing that really pops up. When they were between presidents, they had a lay president who I thought did an excellent job. That was kind of a hint of what's coming. They brought in a fellow who was president of the chamber of commerce and he filled in for a year, maybe a year and a half. He did a wonderful job and I thought that this was the wave of the future. No, ... nothing that really pops into my mind and I say "Wow, that really blew my mind at the time."

Pearson: Why, you mentioned earlier that you kind of view La Salle and the history department in particular as kind of a second home of sorts. Is that why

you have stayed at La Salle as a professor since the early '60's? Did you ever considered leaving La Salle for another position?

Rossi: When I started here, my thesis director at Penn was a fellow who had a lot of contacts, he was well known in the field, Holden Furber. He had a very close friend at University of Rochester [Rochester, New York] and he also had a friend at Northwestern [Evanston, Illinois]. They were both very good schools, especially Northwestern. They had openings. In those days, in the early '60's, every school was hiring. He told me that, this is around the time I got hired here, "Are you interested? I'll write for you and I think I can pretty well guarantee that you'll get the job." Then it's up to you what you do with it. I had a lot of commitments here and I enjoyed myself so I guess that I wasn't ruthlessly ambitious or something, so I didn't go to either place. Which in a way is fortuitous because ... I didn't really start publishing until about 1970 – 71. At that point, I would have been up for tenure at those schools and if I had done at those schools what I did at La Salle, I would not have gotten tenure. I would have been out of the academic profession when there were no jobs. In a way I was lucky I came to La Salle and since I was somewhat of a late bloomer, you know, and didn't really start publishing until I was in my mid '30's, I think it would have really cost me.

Pearson: I mean at La Salle, you just had to go to your mailbox and you found out you were tenured.

Rossi: Yes, so that was a comfort. It really was a comfort. Then of course I had this desire to write and I started to publish and I started to enjoy it. If I had left La Salle in '62 or '63 ... (counting) ... I would have had by '68, I would have had two book reviews. That would not have gotten me tenure at any top university like Rochester or especially Northwestern.

Pearson: Just to make sure that I got it on tape from my technical difficulty early here, generally you started in '62 as a lecturer, then you went to instructor in '63.

Rossi: Yeah.

Pearson: Assistant after you received your PhD in '65.

Rossi: Yes. Associate in about '70.

Pearson: Full professor in '75 – '76.

Rossi: Yes, '75 – '76, in that range.

Pearson: We talked a little bit about tenure that there was no formal process at La Salle at the time, but then subsequently they do have a formal process.

Rossi: Right after I got it, in the early '70's they went to a very formal, structure, which they still have.

Pearson: OK, all right. Once again, it sounds like you were overwhelmed, is that too strong a word, when you won the Lindback award?

Rossi: Ahh ... I wasn't overwhelmed, but I was touched because that meant a lot to me, the idea that you were singled out as a good teacher.

Pearson: By your peers and students.

Rossi: Yeah, and it was done by your peers and your students. The other thing is that the Lindback award was only about nine or ten years old, so I was one of the earlier ones and that made me feel good.

Pearson: We talked a little bit about Orwell and you are primarily a fan of Orwell's essays because they cover such a wide variety of topics and it kind of mirrors your ... interests.

Rossi: Yeah, he did what I like to do and I know (emphasis) he influenced me tremendously as did John Lukacs. I also loved the way he writes and I didn't know it when I was at Four Quarters, the editor of Four Quarters was a very, very clever editor. Editors are special people, it is a talent some people have and he had it. He read a couple of things of mine and he was taking about something I had written and he was trying to tell me what was good and what was bad. He was saying that what your talent really was is that you write as though you are talking directly to a single person. I hadn't really thought about it, but that's exactly what Orwell did. I must have, without realizing it, copied his style, although, I can't write like him (laughter).

Pearson: OK. I appreciate that slight back track on my account. A little bit about the neighborhood? You grew up on Ruscomb Street, as you said earlier. What has the change been in the local neighborhood from when you were a student?

Rossi: The big change has been the racial change. This was an all white neighborhood when I went to school here. A lot of Jewish people, I would say it was a good middle class, you can see those houses on 20th Street and others and they are some pretty impressive houses. The neighborhood deteriorated badly, not only here around La Salle, but even in my neighborhood, which was also all white. This is one of the great problems that La Salle has. If you can get a person on campus you can impress

them, but the problem is to get them through the bad neighborhoods to get them to the campus. It's always been one of our difficulties.

Pearson: It's not too atypical a problem I wouldn't think for a lot of urban schools.

Rossi: No, I mean every school has it to some extent. Penn and places like that were so able to widely expand; they in a sense pushed the bad areas further and further from the core campus. We can't quite do that.

Pearson: Now, why has the neighborhood changed? Is there anything you can attribute it to?

Rossi: It's just the thing that happened to the city in the '50's and '60's when the suburbs expanded and you had economic possibilities for people. They could go out to the suburbs, they didn't have to live in a row house, they could actually buy a single house or a twin and have a piece of ground. You had a car, so people became more mobile and ... the city lost its pizzazz in the '50's, '60's and '70's. The city has made somewhat of a comeback, but basically all the talk of a city comeback is downtown.

Pearson: Right. Why do you think the city has lost its pizzazz?

Rossi: Because they were crowded, they were congested. The idea that you could go out a few miles and have a piece of land, fresh air, your kids could play in nice areas instead of on congested streets, et cetera. That was a big part of it. Then of course, the thing about the country was economically, ... economically people's status was enhanced. The period from 1945, as I always tell my students, until 1973, that period of 28 years, two generations, that's the most prosperous period in history that any country has experienced at any time. People moved [up] an entire social class. Sociologists will tell you that there is no social mobility in America which leads me to say that when somebody tells me something that offends my common sense, I don't believe it. That offends my common sense because I know it's not true (emphatic). With that incredible prosperity people could expand their horizons and they looked away from the cities. Now some people are moving back into the cities, but again it's kind of a center city core idea. I don't see areas like around here making comebacks.

Pearson: So, the neighborhood has not really adapted to the change. Would you say it has been somewhat victimized?

Rossi: I would say that it's somewhat stabilized now, but part of that was because of La Salle and Einstein and places like that. Sometimes the neighbors complain about the La Salle students and I don't blame them because La Salle student's behavior can be appalling. It's La Salle and Central and

Girls High and Einstein that really have proven anchors. Just take those places out and see what this place would look like. La Salle has tried to reach out to the neighbors, but it's hard because there is a big cultural difference and the racial difference et cetera, but they have certainly made efforts. There was a lot of controversy about closing 20th Street which the neighbors really made a stink about. Years and years ago universities did this no questions asked; they just closed the street. Penn did it, Temple did it, but you can't do that anymore.

Pearson: What are some of the other ways the university has tried to adapt to the change in the neighborhood?

Rossi: They sustain contact with all the neighborhood community groups. There is actually somebody designated to deal with them who meets with the neighbors for any protests any problems they have. Neighbors can use the library. If they have proper safeguards they can use the pool. Some of the neighbors walk the track. I used to see that when I had night class. I'd come out and neighbors would be walking the track. They [La Salle University] try to be good neighbors, but it's pretty hard.

Pearson: Moving on to one of your favorite topics. As a young man I was taught that Abner Doubleday, West Point Class of 1848, created the game of baseball. Is that historical fact or myth?

Rossi: Total myth. He had nothing to do with it.

Pearson: I'm destroyed now (sarcasm).

Rossi: Total myth. He had nothing to do with baseball.

Pearson: Who created baseball? The Russians?

Rossi: No, baseball wasn't invented, it evolved. It evolved from a couple of English games. Bat and ball games go back to ancient times. The British played a game called town ball. Sometimes called one cat - two cat, it was just a ball game where you hit a rubber ball with a stick and you ran, you ran around bases or posts. That game came to America. There is actually a reference in somebody's diary at Valley Forge "played a game of base today to pass the time". It evolved in the 1820's, 1830's from this town ball. There was another game, the British name for town ball was "rounders", because you went around. It did not really evolve from cricket, but cricket took a different direction. It arrived here in the colonial times and was played widely in the cities and towns and villages. In the 1820's and 30's, men who were looking for an opportunity to get together, have some exercise and then go out and have a dinner. The game you played was a version of town ball. There were many, many

versions of it, with different rules, similar but different usually because of the area and the eccentricity of that particular group who organized it. Finally in 1845, a man named Alexander Cartwright, who lived in New York and who was a member of a base ball, two words in those days, BASE BALL, two words, a baseball club sat down and wrote a set of rules to systematize things and his rules, called the New York rules, are the basis for modern baseball because he set the bases 90 feet apart. He established that there would be nine men on the team; he gave the names to the people. There were so many other things that he did in this systematizing that it caught hold. Other versions; the Philadelphia game, the Massachusetts game and other versions of it faded and the New York rules took over and were given little finesses here and there.

Pearson: So Doubleday is a fraud?

Rossi: Total fraud, yeah. Somebody went through his papers and not a single reference to baseball. The summer when he was supposed to have invented it in 1839 he was actually not in Cooperstown [New York], (laughter) but the person who spread the story wanted to make it seem as though this was a unique American invention, so baseball was uniquely American and didn't owe anything to the British, didn't owe anything to anybody else. It was invented by an American, West Point general who was a hero of the Civil War.

Pearson: Absolutely, it made for a good story.

Rossi: A good story, no truth.

Pearson: What have been the major changes in the game of baseball in the 20th century?

Rossi: Wow. Well, I mean ...

Pearson: I know you could go on.

Rossi: I have an entire book on that, yes. Baseball is not the number one sport in America anymore, its number two or three depending upon where you put basketball, with pro football being number one. It still is the closest thing to a national game.

Pearson: Why do you call it the national game?

Rossi: It was called the national game as early the 1850's. I think it is because baseball developed or grew up with the country. As the country changed, this game took root and emerged. The roots between baseball and American life and American culture, this is the essence of my course are

very tight. Whereas other sports like football and basketball they literally were invented. Basketball was invented, so the guys would have some activity inside. Football emerged from English rugby and went through a whole series of processes and football was a unique sport played by college men for years (emphasis), 25 years, whereas baseball was played by everybody. The connection between baseball and American are much tighter than any other sport. The game changed in the 20th century. It became increasingly sophisticated. It became an increasingly big business. The gap between professionals and amateurs grew wider and wider. In the early days of baseball, a professional team would beat an amateur team 60% of the time, but 40% of the time an amateur group of guys could beat a professional team. There is no group of amateurs that would beat a professional team now. In the early days, college teams would play professional teams and the college team would win. The question I ask my students is what do you think the chances of the La Salle [baseball] team would be against the New York Yankees or the Atlanta Braves. If they played a hundred games, how many would La Salle win? The answer is probably none. They would be lucky if they were only beaten by five or six runs. It became incredibly sophisticated as all sports by the end of the 20th century. The level of professional expertise is almost breathtaking. We take it for granted because we see it so often, but try any of those things and you realize how difficult it is.

Pearson: How do you think baseball, the game, mirrors the changes in American history in the 20th century?

Rossi: Oh yeah, because they say and the connections are so close and the game evolved and was not invented as I point out to my students. The game was invented by what I call WASP's, White Anglo Saxon Protestants, middle class gentlemen who wanted a leisure activity. These baseball clubs would play each other and they would all get together and have dinner and talk about the game and the exploits. In any kind of competition, when you have head to head competition, you want to win. After a while they would sneak people in who were not part of their groups. I heard so and so was a good ball player. What happened as an amateur game became slightly professionalized because on every team there would be a couple of guys who were being paid under the table to play. Then, all the talk about this being America's unique game, as early as the 1850's, started as the national game, America's game. The other thing which fascinates me is that outsiders used baseball to gain acceptance in this society, first being the Germans and the Irish. The Germans having the problem that they speak a different language, come from a kind of different culture. The Irish they have the language, but they were mostly Catholic and they came from a despised culture. Yet, both Germans, they have an athletic tradition. The Irish because they were an urban people and they gathered in urban areas, they picked up the game, their sons picked up the game.

Both of them [Germans and Irish] became accepted rather quickly. By the 1890's, baseball, which had been a WASP game, is now dominated by the Irish and the Germans. Then in the 20th century every other ethnic group that came into America used it the same way; the Poles, the Germans, the Jews, then in the '60's the Latin's and the Blacks. Now we have Asians. It is almost a perfect mirror. As the cities changed, so did the ball parks. The ball parks were built in the cities, the center of cities, then as the cities deteriorated, the ball parks were located in the fringes of the cities, where there is plenty of parking spaces because of the triumph of the automobile. You can go on and on and on with the connections. [I teach] ... a whole course, a whole course.

Pearson: If you just look at some of the ball parks, Three Rivers, Riverfront Stadium, those were imploded now.

Rossi: Yeah, Yeah.

Pearson: It's kind of come back now and you have quainter surroundings to watch the game.

Rossi: The idea in the 60's was that the ball parks were all run down and seedy. Somebody said about one of the Philadelphia ball parks that closely resembled a men's toilet and so they wanted big, modern, clean structures. You had Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Saint Louis built these multi-purpose stadiums. That was great and fine and everything like that. After a while, people began to think that they were too big, too massive, too you know too cold and aloof. You had the movement toward downtown stadiums and build them the way they were built in the past, these so called retro stadiums. You have that now, the triumph everything. Veterans Stadium lasted from 1971, it was 2003 or so, 2004, that's 30 some years. Shibe Park lasted from 1909 to 1971, that's 60 some years. My guess is that this new one [Citizens Bank] will be around for 60 years or so.

Pearson: Yes, it's a nice park. Baseball related question. Did the collapse of the '64 Phillies usher in the era of sports negativism in Philadelphia?

Rossi: That's one of my ... theories the '64 Phillies. Philadelphia fans are notoriously negative. If something good happens, they say yeah, .. wait until you see what happens next week. They can't even enjoy anything. I don't know what the root of that is. I don't remember it when I was growing up and there were some awful Philadelphia sports teams when I was growing up. The A's were terrible, the Phillies were terrible, both got fairly good. The Eagles were very good. I don't remember this negativism. I, I have a hunch and I say this in my book that I think it was the '64 Phillies. That team caught the city's attention and enthusiasm like

no other sports team had in quite a while. When the bottom fell out, it was almost as though fans said I'm not going to get hurt again. They'll all go bad (laughter).

Pearson: Last baseball question; what are your thoughts on the designated hitter rule?

Rossi: I am a traditionalists and I would prefer not to have it. I am not one of these people who write a book about it. I think it's a mistake. Baseball has made other mistakes.

Pearson: I was about 85% sure of you answer to that question. Just to wrap up here, a couple of things we kind of digressed to baseball a little bit. Going back to your La Salle experience, you are highly regarded by many former students. Many have said that you made history interesting. How do you feel about these testimonials?

Rossi: It makes me feel good. I always never wanted to make history majors, that I enjoyed certain teachers and they obviously influenced the way I taught. The ones that I enjoyed I thought about what made me like that class. Why did I like that class? What made me look forward to going to class? These were all people who took the subject, which can be dry and deadly and made it come alive. So that is what I always tried to do.

Pearson: All right. I'm told that you have a high degree of humility, so this may be a tough question.

Rossi: Haah. Who sold you that one (laughter)?

Pearson: Your friend Jack Reardon. So what do you think has been your most significant accomplishment and what achievement are you most proud of?

Rossi: I'll tell you, one of the things is that I was very, very lucky in the person I married. I was really fortunate, considering that she only lived three blocks away and that I did not know her for a while. I discovered her going to church. The most fortunate thing that happened to me is that and she has been a tremendous influence on me. She's part of the reason why I've done some of the things that I've done because she said "Why don't you do that? You're always talking about it so do it. You can do that." Also, I mean this is the serious part of it. I know people who are my age and are very unhappily married. I feel badly for them because ... I think it's one of the best things you can have; a good marriage. That's probably the single most important thing. The other stuff that I do, I try to do my best. I don't know. I try to stay on top of what I'm supposed to do and I think I do pretty well. I've lost some of the enthusiasm for the old academic scholarship, I must say. I don't know if I could get back. I was

talking to Stow about this and I don't whether I could go back to that kind of plowing through stuff that I used to do. I enjoy the essay format. It is more fun.

Pearson: OK. Finally, colleagues describe you as brilliant ...

Rossi: Oh yeah.

Pearson: extremely intelligent, intense, funny, a dedicated teacher, passionate conservative, and a baseball fanatic, yet humble about your accomplishments. In your opinion, is that a fair description?

Rossi: Wow ... maybe they ought to canonize me (laughter). I find it very difficult to comment about this. I certainly am conservative. I don't know about some of the other ones. Passionate ... I don't know if I'm so much passionate, but ... put down that he is somebody who likes what he is doing and always did. That would sum it up I think.

Pearson: Well, that's pretty much about [it]. I've gone through my list of questions. Is there anything else that you would like to add about your association with the university? It is kind of very open ended right now. You have been with the university for well over 50 years.

Rossi: I've actually been on the campus since 1950, except for four years.

Pearson: A long association with the university. Obviously you have felt very comfortable being here and you've spoken very highly of it. Anything that you would like to add?

Rossi: I think with all its flaws and La Salle has flaws there is no doubt about it, it is still a great place. You can, if you put your mind to it, get a helluva an education. There are some outstanding people here. People who will give of themselves and their time and I think that is worth a great deal. When I hear from students who have gone on to universities where there are 400 in a class, 300 in a class, or in one case 1,000 in a class and the class was done pretty much over television. Students can walk into my office anytime they want. I've had students in the past. The fellow I wrote the last three pieces with, John Rodden, University of Texas, he never took a course of mine, but he was in here once a week. Sitting right where you are sitting, or when my office was over there (points towards Dr. Desnoyers office) when I was in the chairman's office. We would sit and he would ask questions why did you like this, do you think I better read that? I would say something and he would be back the next week; he had read it. I think that's one of the great things about this place is that the faculty is relatively approachable.

Pearson: This is the third university that I have attended and I have to say that I find the faculty here extremely accessible.

Rossi: Yeah. I mean its not that everyone is out in the corridor [waving] and saying “come on in, come on in”, but the thing is that the people I know who I really admire like in my department I like Stow. I admire him quite a bit. I think Liebiger is a great addition. Barbara Allen is going to be a great addition to the campus. They are people who if you want them to help you, boy, it’s not going to be a question of if you have worn out your welcome.

Pearson: No, absolutely. Well that wraps up the session. I appreciate you making time for a couple of afternoons to sit down and talk with me.

Rossi: That’s all right. It was a pleasure.

Pearson: I really appreciate the time. I enjoyed it.

Rossi: I enjoyed it.

Pearson: I think your friend, Jon Caroulis, one of your lunch friends, also wants to interview some of the students that have been doing these interviews. One of the questions that he wants to ask is how did the narrator feel about the interview. How did you feel about this?

Rossi: Me? I enjoyed it. I’ve never had it done in this intensity. I have had students interview me about other things. I had one this semester or last semester interview me for a course. He had to do a five or ten minute interview with one of his professors. Yes, so I enjoy this kind of thing. It makes you think about things. You know, with some of the stuff you said, you kind of cringe, not in a bad sense. You didn’t tell me anything that I was going to cringe about, but when you say the positive things, you say “how do you handle that?” It’s nice to hear.

Pearson: Good, OK. Well, thank you very much.