

Rob Robesch
His 610 Oral History
Interview One
April 5, 2006

Rob Robesch: Okay, we're recording now. What's your name sir?

Joseph Burke: Joseph Burke.

RR: When were you born?

JB: August 29th 1945.

RR: Umm... Now in the research I did about you, you grew up in Kensington. Correct?

JB: The neighborhood in Philadelphia known as Kensington.

RR: Umm, What was that like? Because now I know it is a very working class and not the greatest neighborhood.

JB: It was at that time also a working class neighborhood. It was largely, um, second generation immigrant populations including; Irish, Italian, German, Jewish, uh, I guess were the major groups. Um, certainly the neighborhood was majority Catholic and uh the Parish that I was in was Visitation which is now largely Hispanic Parish but still exists.

RR: And uh, your father was a doctor?

JB: Uh correct he was a physician. He was, for the early part of my life he was a general surgeon and also had a general practice and for later part of his career he was an anesthesiologist.

RR: And now was Kensington a working class neighborhood...

JB: Yes

RR: ...then?

JB: It was largely, prior to my time, there it had been um, a manufacturing center for textiles and other products. And in fact if you go there today there are still some of the old mills still there. Although when I was young the mills were still there and working. Uh, for example at Broad and Lehigh there was, Botany 500 was there and right near where I live was Bromely Mill and not far from where I lived was the Stetson Hat Factory, which I visited as a child.

RR: Hmm, now, so since being a doctor isn't really a working class job..

JB: Correct.

RR: ... do you, were you treated differently in your neighborhood because of this, or, was, did you have a different experience growing up there, because of that?

JB: Uh, my friends were not from anything but, uh well, I should say that... Uh, yes, yes the answer to the question that you ask is yes. I was treated differently, I think because there weren't a lot of doctors' children who lived in the neighborhood. Umm, so that, uh, you know, the people who were, the who were kind of a little bit better off were the, uh a doctors child or the funeral directors child or people like that. Um, because the majority of the people who lived on the quote, side streets of Kensington were, working class people. My grandfather and grandmother lived across the street and my grandfather was by trade a plumber. So my father wasn't the first one in his family to go medical school but he was the second one. Uh and it was still considered very unusual.

RR: Uh and also in, what I read about you is that your father worked mainly with the population in Kensington?

JB: In the early days of his career yes. I mean his career spanned from the 1940's to the 1980's so the last twenty years of his career were spent at... mostly at Pennsylvania Hospital in Center City working as an anesthesiologist.

RR: Umm, Kensington, has it changed much since you grew up there?

JB: Well its ethnically very different and I think probably its... its, the population is probably poorer and less mobile then the population was then. Um a lot of people who were there then moved, moved out of there. I mean, they simply moved, some of them...large numbers of them moved to places like Northeast Philadelphia and that's partly because the...the racial composition was changing and uh there were...areas of major eastern cities that, as industry left so did the people who worked in those industries. So, in that neighborhood there not only were mills but over not too far from there was PHILCO Corporation. PHILCO became part of Ford Corporation but they made TV's and things like that and ... it was a big company and ... it meant Philadelphia Company it was eventually brought out by Ford and uh eventually, of course all that sort of industry left the country, let alone the northeast. And all the textiles that were in Philadelphia... left the northeast for the south and eventually from the south to China where they are now. You know, and Asian markets.

RR: How do you feel about the change in the neighborhood? Do you feel any affect by it or...

JB: I don't really, I mean , I, I don't at this point have, at this point in my life have a lot of really long memories the neighborhood. I mean it really is interesting that the, the, priest who is our Chaplin at La Salle, Father James Dever was my best friend growing up

in the parish. He went to North Catholic and I went to La Salle High School. Uh, I don't know what more you want on that? It's up to you.

RR: I guess that's it?

JB: Okay.

RR: Umm...had some childhood memories or how you feel the neighborhoods changed for the better or the worse or...

JB: Well the buildings, the block where my father's office is, is completely demolished so there isn't a lot there that is reminiscent of it. But I mean, Episcopal Hospital is right there, that's, that's, you know, still there and operating and the parish, Visitation is still there, and as I say that is largely Hispanic Parish. Most of the factories are gone. They have been torn down, umm. Although, I know of places in North Philadelphia where the factories still exist. Umm the next neighborhood over if you keep going over from there and you go down towards center city, umm, you actually eventually come into the Fishtown area of Philadelphia which is now a very... very hot area. That's um I think officially part of Kensington but its close enough to Center City, its right above Girard Avenue that that's now a very desirable place for people to move. Umm that hasn't happened at Front and Lehigh which, which is where I grew up. And when I say grow up there I mean, keep in mind by the time I a sophomore in high school we had moved.

RR: Well, where did you move to?

JB: East Oak Lane.

RR: And that's where you...

JB: To Steve Longo's house... the house that Steve Longo now lives in that was our house. So that would have been around 19... that would have been around 1960. that we moved, 60...61.

RR: Now you brought up LaSalle High School. How was your experience there? That's kind of an open ended question.

JB: Uh yeah... the first year that I was at La Salle High School it was located right here it what is now Wister Hall. And my second year the uh, the, uh La Salle High School move to Wynnmere, Wynnwid...whatever the hell it is. On Cheltenham Avenue. And uh...uh, and that year my second year I still, we still lived in Kensington. So... I don't know how I did this but, we, I took a bus from Front and Lehigh, which is, Front is first street, the 14 blocks to Broad St. then took the subway out to Broad and Olney and then took the S bus or I think it was the 26 or whatever, that took you to La Salle High School. Not to La Salle high school, at that time it was before SEPTA it was Philadelphia...not PECO, Philadelphia...Philadelphia Trans.. P... PTC. PTC, that's going back quite a ways, umm and it drop you at the top of the hill at La Salle high school and you'd walk

the last mile to La Salle High School. So getting to school was probably an hour, an hour and a half or more, umm, but I don't remember it (laughter). Which it good. Umm La Salle high school was in a lot of ways a good experience for me and in some ways not a great experience umm...

RR: Well, how was it a good experience?

JB: Well, it was a good experience because I had some very good teachers, particularly a guy named Gerry Tremblay who was an English teacher. And I've had some encounters with him over the decades since then, when he's been honored by different groups and stuff like that. Um, but, that certainly was where my interest in the Brothers came about was at La Salle high school 'cause I would...and so um... you know and I... pretty much my activities I was interested in, I wrote for the school newspaper... that was pretty much the only thing I did as an activity that I can recall.

RR: What were the bad experiences?

JB: There, uh, there weren't bad experiences I think I was, uh I wasn't uh you know there were, there were like it a lot of situations there were the cool kids and the uncool kids and I was clearly not a cool kid (laughter), you know, so uh I think that probably was part of it. Um I, most of my mixed reservations about La Salle College High School have nothing to do with me being there as a student. They have to do with my experiences as being a University person and, and some of the ways that I think La Salle High School perceives it self. But I don't think that is germane to the oral history of anything.

RR: Yeah...did you excel in any subjects in particular?

JB: No. I was an awful student in high school. I mean I probably did best in English. But I didn't do well in high school at all. I was totally distracted. I don't know by what, uh, it probably that wonderful combination of hormones and other things, I don't know. I don't have a real good memory of it, but umm, I was not a good high school student. And I have one specific recollection of...I had a room on the third floor, this is in the house in Oak Lane, which is a big house, and I had a desk near the window and I can remember trying to study physics and seeing this tree outside and...realizing that was totally distractible. But I probably had, you know, some disorder or something, but I don't know, you know. I was a poor high school student, I was a good college student especially in the areas that interested me. I was better than a B student in days in fact where C was an average grade and in graduate school I was an A student. I mean, it just took me a while to mature. ...probably.

RR: When you were in high school, not a good student did you imagine you'd get your Ph.D and masters and...

JB: No, no ,no, and even when I was in college um, I had various...uh, remember I joined the brothers right after high school. So every time, everything after 18 years of age I'm already a brother. So... um. In college I majored in English and I thought I would maybe be an English teacher. But then I got very interested in, in, in religious studies for a while. I thought that's what I wanted to do. Teach religion or something and

then I thought I wanted to be a social worker 'cause we had all this experience working at St. Gabriel's hall for juvenile delinquents we had to volunteer there and we spent part of our summers there. We'd get split between the orphanage and the delinquency place. The orphanage is now gone. But, um, so I liked that kind of work and thought about that and then when I graduated I was assigned to teach English in Miami Florida. And I did that for two years and then I was asked if I wanted to go get a graduate degree, by the brothers, in education. The idea being that I would maybe be a high school principal or something like that. And I did that for a year at the university of Miami quickly looked for programs that were not education programs to get into (laughter). And managed to find one out in California, which was doubly good. And that's how I ended up at USIU (United States International University) and the program I went into called it self educational leadership but about six months into it, uh, after I got my first set of grades I petitioned to change out of that and into the Human behavior program which was psychology and anthropology. And uh I, and that was my last education course I really couldn't do that anymore.

RR: But you still became a teacher...

JB: It wasn't the teaching part it was the courses in education. Yeah, that really, uh... mostly nonsensical or commonsensical.

RR: And um...what was your college experience like at La Salle? Other than what you studying...doing, well what interested you?

JB: Well...

RR: was it different that you were becoming a brother as opposed to just a regular...

JB: Uh yes it was very different. And it was at a time when, when everything was changing. Uh I mean I was in college from...I graduated from high school in 1963, I entered to the brothers which meant I had a year of novitiate so we entered college a year than our peers. And we lived in a residence, two big residences that were in Elkins Park Pennsylvania right outside the city. One was an old big mansion the Fitzdixson Estate which you can find out about in the art museum if you're ever interested in and then there was a modern facility there. At that time there were probably 60, 70 young brothers living on that property and all of them going to school here. Um, but it was also the time of the second Vatican council and so lots of things were changing. And so the first year we came to school we came over in our robes and I the second year we came over in suits and I think by the last year we (laughter) we were wearing anything we wanted. I mean, it was enormous changes going on and, and also dramatic numbers of departures from the brothers and from all religious orders at the time. So when we kid about the fact that Edward Sheehy and I are in the same class, he was, he was the class conservative, I was the class liberal, umm, we're the only two left out of thirty that started. And probably at Elkins park there were 22, 23 of us still there when we started. By the time we graduated maybe there were 5 who graduated. So it was a very different time. So going to college it was an all male school it was compulsory ROTC, uh for, not for the brothers. Um so it

was a very different world, from the world that greeted me when I came back to teach in, ten years later. So I mean, I remember being in classes and I remember um I some some very good teachers and I remember being, uh you know um, having some good experiences with different faculty members. As I say I was an English major but we also did all the education courses for education and we also did about half of the masters level courses in theology in addition to the regular theology. So we typically had, um 18 to 20 some hours of, of class work, each semester and we also went to school in the summer.

RR: But, I mean...you're experience was probably much different form the lay students, just from the clothes you wore, not having to do ROTC.

JB: Well, those were different. Although I think most of us made friends with a lot of the other students. Um, I mean it, it, wouldn't be, it just, it wasn't, it didn't seem unusual to people in those times. 'cause we're transitioning out of the 50's early 60's thing, and, and you know, its, its just um... the amount of change that took place in that four years even on this campus was remarkable. There were anti war protests there were all kind of stuff going on.

RR: Were there anti war protests when you were here?

JB: Yes, yeah anti Vietnam War. There weren't elaborate ones but there were some.

RR: did you participate in any of them?

JB: No.

RR: were you not allowed?

JB: I don't recall. I don't think, I don't think we would have been disallowed. I mean, keeping in mind that Br. Daniel Burke who later, was you later, later the president of the University was actually part of a group of Clergy that protested in front of the White House. Much to the Dismay of the Board of Trustees probably, but that is a whole other story. (laughter)

RR: And the interview is not about him..(laughter) and I guess another thing I kind of wondered about doing this interview, uh why you became a brother. You said because of one teacher in high school, but...

JB: No I wouldn't say that, and if I said that I didn't mean to say it. Its very had to know why I did that then. I was at that time in my life a very religious... in a sort of old fashioned sort of way of being religious I think. And I think its always been the more important question is, why did something... the more important question is always why did they stay as something. It's the same kind of question as why did so and so get married as if there were on reason. You know, I was in love with her there for I married her and she loved me. Well that's true, but there's more to it than that. There are lots of other social and psychological that make them happen. So what particular mix, uh I

certainly was very attracted to the idea of teaching that was a big deal. I saw the brothers life, what I saw as the brothers life seemed to me to offer a certain amount of security. But I don't know because I can't remember I can't capture that. I just know that I was very attracted to it. Umm and it was viewed as, as a viable option in those days for people. I mean priesthood and religious life was still very popular, popular thing to do in the catholic world and so it seemed particularly logical to do it. But I don't know beyond that what my motivation was.

RR: do you remember what first made you consider taking that path, uh, other than the community of the brothers or your attraction to teaching?

JB: Well I think it was the teachers that I had clearly, some of the teachers that I had were, umm... you know just...exemplary teachers and, and I was also involved... one of the people I knew, this is, one of the people I knew that I really admired was a guy by the name of Br. Azarias. Azarias was a name that he was given as a religious. And we called him Snazzy Azzy. But he later left the Brothers and became a Ukrainian Catholic priest, which he still is today. And I've seen him with in the last ten years...and he was a great teacher. Um, but he also got us involved, I think as early as my sophomore year of high school doing, doing um, doing what would later be called community service. That is we would go on a Saturday or something like that down to Casa Del Carman which is a place for Hispanics and we would do things...I don't know what we did, I think we taught kids or tutored kids or something like that but we're talking now 1960, 1961 and this is long before anyone did things like that. But he was very good. He also was very much involved in handing out Catholic materials to, to people coming in from foreign countries on ships. Where the local churches were, you know things like that. So he was very much of an activist. And he was Ukrainian Catholic but he joined the brothers anyway. But then um, he later decided to become a priest and I think was actually higher than a priest somewhere within their, within their hierarchy. So he was one. And there were several people like who were big influences on me.

RR: Um...In a Collegian Article I read about you, you said... right when you were inaugurated president. It was an interview with you and a student. (laughter).

JB: Who was the student, do you remember?

RR: Uh I have it in here I don't remember.

JB: Oh, I was just wondering if it were Chris Lillianthal or something think that. Go ahead I'm sorry.

RR: Umm, and you said you don't know, why you became a brother. You said you didn't know then. And I guess you've explained some of it to me now. But do you have any...why, like why Joe Burke now became a brother or why you stay with it?

JB: Well, I mean I still find, I still find it a meaningful life. Particularly the student involvement part of it, um I don't, I don't have...the old fashioned religiosity that was

there, uh certainly graduate school beat that out of me in a lot of ways and I don't think I'm atypical in that regard of people. I mean I think that there are religious, personal...that is psychological and social reasons for continuing with it. Um, I, I, certainly know that if I were to stop being a brother tomorrow I would still have a job here. I would still make a very, very good salary and I would also an enormous retirement amount of money. So, I mean and the way that money is now is when I retire it goes to the brothers and they take of me in the same, you know they give me my portion out of the 300 people or whatever. So um, so I do not choose to do that, I don't so...whatever in the balance of meaning in my life apparently it balances out to be more meaningful to stay than to leave. Meaning to me seems to be the issues it isn't creature comforts it isn't, you know, other things prestige or anything like that, I don't think there's much prestige with it anymore. (RR: With?) Being a brother. (laughter) I've gotten my prestige in other ways. (laughter).

RR: Um, in other parts of the, what I've read about you is, you seem to take a lot of pride in the Lasallian mission, or what it is to be a Lasallian. Would you like to explain that?

JB: Well there's Lasallian and there's Lasallian in terms of Lasallian in the general sense, um, I'm proud to be part of a worldwide organization of brothers and lay people who continue the charism of John Baptist de La Salle. I mean I think its, you know in a world wide view it's a very important thing and, um and I certainly support some of the newer initiatives we have made nation wide and particularly in this area with trying to address the educational needs of under served populations particularly the San Miguel school in Camden and there's also one in Baltimore that we're involved with. At the same time, there is the other Lasallian, that is La Salle University and uh you know I do take a certain amount of pride in what we do and how we do it here. I don't have any, um, illusions about, you know we do not have the um, the ability as the Jesuit do to pretend that we're something other than what we are. I think we know what we are as an institution and I think I've made, um, a major contribution at a number of different levels to that institution and I take pride in that contribution. But I also think, uh, its ah, its worthy of my efforts. The institution.

RR: What do you think it is as an institution? You say you don't pretend to be anything other than what you are.

JB: Well, what I mean by that is that, um, institutions very often look at another institution and strive to be like that institution. So, like Villanova strives to be like Notre Dame, St. Joe's strives to be like Villanova. And that's okay. But I don't think that we do. I think we know what we are and we basically know what are mission is and we're not going to abandon that mission in order to be something else. Um, one of the ways you could reconsider an institution is you could decide to dramatically down size the institution and ratchet up the, ratchet up the credentials of incoming students and things like that and kind of try to transform yourself. I don't think that's financially viable for us to do. But um, I also don't think it's consistent with our mission. So um, I mean, we're always going to have a certain percentage of the children of the working class. Its

not going to be as high of a percentage as when the place was founded and people got on the subway and came here I mean or walked to La Salle, I mean its not that institution anymore. Clearly it's a regional institution. Um, but it's also never going to be Villanova. Its never going to be an elitist school. Um, at least not that I can see.

RR: What do you think the future, what do you think of the future of the brothers as a religious order?

JB: Uh, I don't think anyone thinks there is much of a future. At least certainly not in anyway the in the size that we have been. Um there, um, what seems to be happening to many religious orders is that all of there growth is taking place in places that are like, um South and Central America and Africa and Asia its not grand growth but it some growth. So I mean, I think the institution of the Brothers of the Christian Schools will continue in some form for the foreseeable future. Um at the same time, its hard to imagine a situation in which there would be the regaining of the numbers, at least in the west world...Europe it's pretty much over for religious orders. The United States, um, you know, the numbers are so small, that um, it's kind of meaningless and the same is true in Canada. So what growth you do have, and again a say its modest, it's in South and Central America, Asia and Africa. Africa, um, Catholicism in Africa is very big, but people joining religious orders is a different thing than Catholicism. Catholicism is pretty much dead in Europe, Western Europe as the pope would like to tell you about. So, I mean I'm not too sure there is a great future for, for the thing called the Brothers. But in terms of the LaSallian mission that's a different story. It will be lay, it will be lay people, excuse me, that will be the bulk of that world wide as far as I can see.

RR: Do you think that this is like an end for the brothers? Or...

JB: Well, you can look at it in a couple different ways. You can look at it as an end or as a beginning. Uh it certainly is the beginning of something...has become over the last ten years or so the beginning of something new in terms of the increasingly lay identity of, of, lay leadership of institutions and the like. Um, whether or not there's some disillusion at some point of, of this religious order or of other religious orders I don't know. Um, I mean there are still people coming into the order. But as I say where the real numbers are is not, is not in the west. So its kind of hard to tell.

RR: Um, what do you think the future of a LaSallian education is?

JB: Oh, I think that'll continue worldwide. I mean, the power, not only of the name, but also of the traditions within the brothers and within the Brothers' Schools, I think those will continue. I mean, we've gone through, we've developed a rather elaborate educational process for lay people in the United States, for example there are, there are, um programs in the summer there are programs during the year. There are all kinds of on, on campus programs for people to learn about LaSallian stuff. There are probably 20 people on this campus alone who been through that, the youther workshop that happens in California for people to train people in LaSallian Stuff. So, um that, that stuff is kind of in place now at this point. So...we'll see.

RR: And does that try to carry on the tradition of the Brothers just in a, in lay people?

JB: Well I mean I think that's gonna to be the majority us the institutions are going to be lay run and will still carry the name of LaSallian. Some of this is complicated by the fact of who owns what. Ha ha, you know, I mean, uh, in our particular case the brothers do not own any of the schools. But there are some religious that the, for example there's a campus near here where the nuns own the land and the buildings. And so, the might as well, the board of trustees technically owns the school but they don't have any land or school with out the sisters. That's not true here. La Salle University is a separately incorporated University. And all of the three private high schools that we have, they're separately incorporated entities. So we don't, brother don't have ownership of them.

RR: Um, back to you becoming a teacher. What originally got you into teaching? Other than the influence of other teachers

JB: Uh, I don't know I think I just always wanted to do it. I mean I think even when I was in grade school I like, I liked what teachers did. And I don't know what it is or not its just, um, its just attractive to me. I mean I think when I was younger I would say it was the influence of that guy Gerry Treblay and for, for us as kids, in high school, uh he seemed to have it all. I mean he was married, he had two young children, he had a beautiful wife and all of that and we thought that was so cool. And he was a teacher of English so we... you know kids would, you know, what do we know? I mean, that fact that he and his wife divorced not long after that, you know... we didn't care about that. (laughter) You know what I mean? We just thought that was kind of neat. And if you think about some of the people that were in class with me in high school, I mean some of them were very prominent people. For example, Dan Whalen who's the, was the, was the president of the ... what was he the president of? Verizon Pennsylvania. He was a classmate of mine he actually joined the brothers and then he left early on. So um, there were a number of interesting people in hose days. I mean high school and college.

RR: Now did the idea of teaching bring you into the brothers or did the brothers bring you into teaching? Or was it kinda...

JB: Its a package deal. I mean, part of the attraction to the brothers was that the brothers were first and foremost teachers. But I knew I could become a teacher without joining the brothers. But I don't know how much thought I ever gave to alternatives because I think fairly early on in high school I thought this was something I want to do. And, and it was questionable because I wasn't a good student. I didn't know if they would ever let me in. And why they did I don't know? (laughter)

RR: Does that worry you? (laughter)

JB: no, no it doesn't worry me at all. (laughter)

RR: You're past it now?

JB: Yes, there are a number of hurdles I'm over. That's just another one of them.

RR: Do you think your teaching style has been influenced because you're a brother?

JB: I don't know that they're related. I don't think that being a brother and, and, and the style of teaching, uh, I'm not too sure that they...you know, I mean, if you live in a community of teachers then there's going to be a lot of discussion about teaching. In that sense its reinforcing or whatever and, but, at the same time I'm um, not too sure that... good teaching is supposed to be a hallmark of the brothers. And I think most brothers are good teachers. But there isn't anything, there's nothing special you get by being a brother. You're a good teacher if you prepare well and, you know, are interesting in class and stuff like that. I don't really see those as connected.

RR: Okay, um, when you came back to La Salle as the Provost you said the most important thing you've ever done in, uh, in your life is to be a teacher and to understand the classroom. Is this still true do you think?

JB: Yeah I mean it still, certainly been the most consistently part of my core being. Uh, I don't know, I mean, I've done a lot of other things beside that...and there were. I didn't, I the three other jobs that I had; Dean Provost and President. Uh, I don't think I ever went a year without teaching a class. So, I mean, even in the years when, I wasn't officially in the classroom I usually taught a class. So.

RR: Uh, in your career as a teacher, just as a teacher what do you think you're most proud of?

JB: I think probably the success of my students. Particularly in the major, but, but, but, even beyond that. I mean uh, I've had a lot of influence on a lot of students and a lot of people have credited me for part of their success, and that's fine. I mean it was in that magazine I showed you that. Nick Rengione said my course was one of the things that shaped him. Um, but I mean its um, I don't know, when you get to a certain point in your career and you don't have as much to look forward to as you have to look back at, uh then you know, its um, it really comes down to the successes of people whom you've influenced. Who are markers of how well you did what you did. They're not the only markers in life. I mean, um, there, there are buildings around here that I made happen. And that's all, that's nice too. But I think that the human side of the equation is, is the people you have influenced in some way and who's lives you've changed. Some of them academically, also some of them personally... I forget I keep banging this thing (water bottle) and you've got that microphone... what was that noise in the background.

RR: Its okay, I've been clicking my pen too. Um, do you find that important? How do you feel that you are shaping peoples lives almost, I mean not almost, you are.

JB: Well I think that's what teaching's about. So you know. Whether its teaching or unofficial counseling or whatever else that I do. Um I mean its, a good teacher is essentially therapeutic.

RR: What do you mean by that?

JB: Well, that's the little value added. There's a part of teaching that is providing people with information and intellectual insight. Okay. That's part of teaching. But, um, in the lives of some students, a good teacher will be more than that. Not in the lives of all students though. That, there's not enough time to do that. Uh, but in the lives of some students it will be, there will be a connection between that student and where that student is and where you are as what she, he calls the older adult. And uh, you know, and you can provide meaning and a relationship can develop and sometimes it's a temporary thing, like you know in the couple of years that the student is in college you become good friends you might do some things together and then that's pretty much it. In other cases though, um, particularly in my life, students who I've gone through some tragedy with, their tragedy, uh um, those were very permanent relationships. There will never be a time that Mary Winn and I are not friends or Jim Black and I will not be friends or Bob Dougherty and I will not be friends. Those times just won't exist. And in those cases there wasn't tragedy, uh except in the Jim Black case, which was the case of a fellow student in the fraternity. And that whole group within the fraternity and uh you know, uh... So I mean I think that you know, that's part. If there is a charisma of the brothers or of St. La Salle I think it is La Salle's expression was the role of the teacher is to touch the hearts with children. To touch the hearts. So it's not an intellectual enterprise it's a, it's also, um, an emotional, spiritual, slash, slash, slash.

RR: So teaching for you doesn't end in the classroom?

JB: Obviously not. (laughter) no, you can edit that out. Don't put obviously not in your notes.

RR: Does this come with tuition too?

JB: Huh?

RR: Is tuition included in that?

JB: Tuition?

RR: Beyond the classroom?

JB: Uh, no I'm sorry. No. (laughter)

RR: what do you think is the hardest thing you encounter as a teacher? Maybe not on a daily basis but...

JB: Well, uh...there is a certain tedium to it all. You know? It gets old pretty quickly and sometimes it gets boring. I mean teaching the same stuff all the time and getting up for teaching the same stuff all of the time and facing, sometimes students who don't see

any value in it. In what you're trying to teach them. I mean it kinds depends on what I'm teaching. Like teaching history and systems to under grads is... they want to believe but they don't. they want to believe this is important and, and they'll do anything to make me believe that they believe. But I know they don't. At least very few of them do. So, um, that's not true for doctoral students. Now on the other hand if I'm teaching abnormal they already believe because they've already seen enough stuff around in their lives even in their short lives that they know this stuff is real and they really want to know more about it and so it's a much easier sell. It kinda depends on what you're teaching. But, um, at that same time when you've done it any number of times keeping it fresh and keeping it interesting and changing it, letting change is important. So, you know, on a given weekend I'll make a new presentation up. That I haven't used before just so I'm doing something new, that its not the same stuff. And I'll do, I'll do reading on the weekends to get ready for something. And that's not a lot of fun particularly, but it realy is the only way that, when I do go in the classroom it will seem spontaneous. Not memorized, but spontaneous. So...

RR: and you've taught at all levels; high school, college and graduate school as well...

JB: I taught high school for only two years.

RR: What do you think, uh I don't want to say, like easier or harder or more challenging... but, what is easier, harder or more challenging?

JB: Teaching doctoral students is intellectually much more challenging. Because of the knowledge base that they have to start with is pretty good. Um and also, their, their training in psychology, for example therapy is much more contemporary than mine is. Because they know things about, different approaches to things that I don't know about. I've heard of them but really don't know anything about them... so I mean, trying to keep up with them is sometimes a challenge. In part because of the twelve years out of the classroom. You know twelve years of not being in the field and not reading journals and stuff like that and then kinda coming back in, in coming back in I mean I had a lot of retooling to do. And I had some time to do it. Uh, but at the same time there are some big gaps, uh of stuff I don't know. Uh that I did know. I just don't know it anymore. Uh, I mean if you ask me to do statistics now, uh I have no interest in doing it and I knew how to do it and now I can barely remember what a T-Test is. You know, because I've been away from it for so long. And I don't care, I don't need to know that right now.

RR: So how do you keep things fresh, as a teacher?

JB: Uh, I've written several articles on that subject by the way. Uh I think there are two things. One, is you spend time when you have leisure to create uh, a design for a class and a content of a class and the notes for the class and the references and all that stuff. And then before you actually teach the class you need to sit down with the stuff, not long before you teach it and god through the stuff thoroughly again. I hate doing that, I hate doing it. 'Cause I look at the notes and I go I know this stuff. And then, no one else can tell this, but then I get up there to teach it and I'm having to look back at something and I

realize I'm skipping something and stuff like that and that's because I really didn't do and that was what I was trying to do this afternoon and that was go over that stuff one more time and just make sure that I understand it. Um, that's enough on that. (laughter)

RR: While you were a teacher here at La Salle you left to go to Hartford. Was it hard for you to make that choice to leave La Salle? What were your motivations behind that?

JB: Uh, motivations were the following. I was...had been department chair for a number of years, I guess maybe seven or eight years. Um I had been president of the faculty senate. I had been on senate for many years and had been president for two years. Had been secretary of the senate. Um, had been a fraternity advisor, um...was finishing up a book and I was kind of bored. I had done it, you know, I had done this. And the president at that time Brother Patrick Ellis sent me something in the mail. And I must have said something to somebody that I was kind of bored and, and it was an ad for the, from the American Counsel in Education, which is the umbrella group in higher education that institutions belong to through their presidents. That ACE, as its called, was, had a fellowship that they've had for many years that would allow a faculty member, let's say a department chair or an assistant dean or a dean to do a one year administrative internship at another institution. And Pat asked me if, if I wanted to be nominated for it. And I said yes... yes get me out of here. So I was nominated for it, I received the fellowship; there were twenty of us nationwide. And then it was a matter of finding an institution where you would work with the president and the vice-president, let's say, um for a year. And then during that year also there were workshops nationwide and there were trips nationwide there's a lot of activities so there is really an immersion in administration. And I had a choice between a number of different places. But at that point one of the up and coming young presidents that everyone had heard of was Steve Trachtenberg who is now at GW but he was then at Hartford. He was relatively new at Hartford. And Pat thought, thought that might be someone. So I interviewed with them, um, actually worked with the senior vice president Jonathan Lawson and with Trachtenberg for that year and then when the year was over, the idea is that you're supposed to come back to your home institution, if not people would be stolen away all of the time. However there wasn't anything here but going back to the chairs permission and so um, Hartford, Steve Trachtenberg, um had a college, one of his colleges that really was floundering and he wanted someone to do something about it. And he asked me if I could do it. He wasn't going to have a search or anything he was going to put me in there. And at that point I was known a little bit at the University of Hartford, but Hartford has eight schools and colleges and it's a very different place than La Salle in a lot of ways, both in size and everything else. And so La Salle gave permission, the president gave permission so one day that dean was gone and the next day I was the dean. And I did what I was supposed to do. I was to take a unit that was highly profitable, keep it profitable but get rid of the misery that everyone was suffering in the school. In the college.

RR: What was the misery they were suffering?

JB: Um, it was a two year program for, essentially it was a two year program for rich Jewish kids. That's essentially what it was. So if the kid had not been a great high school student and wanted to get into a real good school they would take, it was called the college of basic studies, it would be a two year program. It had been largely run like a military school. So you had to imagine these wealthy Jewish kids and, and who were all miserable. They all hated the place. In this two year program it was kind of basic everything and taught with this militaristic flavor, I mean they didn't have uniforms or anything like that but it was very ridged and, and, and very negative environment. But it made a lot of money because these kids didn't need financial aid. And they could pay top dollar. And then most of them stayed on at the University of Hartford and went to one of the other schools and colleges, well though some did go on to prestigious schools. It has since changed, but the first idea was to get rid of...the kind of sort of, um the faculty felt inferior to other faculty. So it was just a very bad situation. And so, that was my job. And I did it. It was very successful... at it and I had a commitment for no more than three years and as my last year there was taking place there were, was a new president there, Humphrey Tonkin and I served as dean of the college and, as well as special assistant to the new president. And as part of my work with the new president I worked on out reach to the Hartford community for the president. Which I did. And then I was planning to come back here and the Provost position opened but in the mean they had already created a vice presidency they wanted me to take up there and I would have had to leave La Salle to do that. But that never happened the Provost job here opened, uh, I was a candidate for it, I was selected for it and that's what happened. That was in 1990.

RR: what was the transition like for you being a teacher and, I guess what seems like being thrown into administration almost.

JB: Well I had had the year fellowship and the fellowship was an intense training in administration it was all about budgets. You know, you learn about budgets and learn the dynamics of institutions, I mean, so. By the time I got into the dean's position I thought I knew how higher education worked. Um, I mean, part of the reactions to different things have to do with how old you are. I mean, at the point I was on the AC fellowship I was 40. and 40 is an interesting age in the sense that you have some accomplishments, you know some stuff and, uh, the next test is, its worth taking the next risk. Because you still have a certain amount of youth on your side. If you do that at 50 or you do that at 60 it's a more cautious person doing it, you know. So, I mean, that uh, I was probably tired of teaching. When I was dean I did teach, um, a class once a year. And it was a very different teaching than teaching at La Salle. It was just very different. I remember this one class I had they were, were, uh a lot of girls in it with all this jewelry on and stuff like that. Underneath this they were nice kids, but sometimes on the surface they were really, they were really awful kids. They resented everything, they didn't want to be there. That's how I got involved with SIG EP. There were kids in that school that wanted to start a SIG EP chapter. And so, I didn't know anything about SIG EP but I helped them do it. So um, I mean I still did keep in touch with students and what I essentially did in that school was to make, to, to, to make it a better place. I was very active and of course I had the advantage, I was connected to the president and the senior vice president personally. So I didn't want for anything. So, you know, if I wanted to remodel

something or move an office some place I would just go over and say “can I move that” and they’d say “sure, go ahead we’ll pay for it”. But I was making three million dollars toward overhead every year. So for every student that stayed at that school for those two years, what they were, what people were afraid of was that if you loosened the place up they’d leave. But that didn’t happen. What ended up happening was that the faculty ended up being happy. The people that, the people who were running it were not academics. They were, one was a former military guy, the guy who was dean was an academic but he was totally ineffective. But they had two assistant deans and the two assistant deans were running it and they were running it like a boot camp. And that was their model, boot camp. These kids weren’t boot camp kids. So, anyway. They had a big anniversary lately, they renamed it Hillary College and they’ve gotten a lot of minorities in there, which is what it always should have been doing. It’s probably not making any money anymore but, um, but that was, that wasn’t a big transition. It was, it was...I was ready for that. I wanted to do that.

RR: did it prepare you for being an administrator at La Salle?

JB: Yeah I mean, its um, if you look at the progression its been, chair, president of faculty senate stuff and then dean, provost, president. They’re all preparation for president. One of the things that I’ve said often is that being a dean is more like being a president than like being a provost. In the sense that when you’re a dean you have a sense of this is your school. And especially at Hartford where the schools were not independent but they, there was no core curriculum across all of them. You pretty much set the curriculum you kind of did everything, you had forty some full time faculty members. Um, you know, it was your institution and you had a president to deal with and a senior vice president for academic affairs to deal with. Um, but when you’re provost its much more of a desk job. There’s no sense of hands on there’s no sense of this is your institution. It’s a different kind of job.

RR: what do you feel were the differences in teaching at a secular, or being at a secular institution as opposed to here at La Salle? Other than what I read was condom availability.

JB: Did I say that?

RR: Yeah, somewhere in there.

JB: I probably did. (laughter). Yeah, um it’s a more diverse environment in terms of background, but the students however are very similar. The majority of students at the University of Hartford were Catholic. So, I mean its like, you know, that wasn’t an issues. With in my school, because the majority of students were Jewish and from wealthy families uh, that was a little bit culturally different. Um, but they were still good kids, I mean differences are overrated I think. There is less parochialism than there is here. Although, parochialism also exists within the wealthy Jewish kids too, I mean its just a different kind of parochialism.

RR: Did you try to apply the La Sallian philosophy at Hartford?

JB: I don't think so. I mean I did probably without thinking about it. Probably my success as a dean had to do with the sort of La Sallian took here or something, I don't know. Um, but within the college where I was dean there were among the faculty, there were also a good number of Catholics. And I didn't, uh, people knew I was a brother, but once I became dean I was referred to as dean. Dean Burke, which was the custom up there. We don't do that here but...

RR: Now, uh, after you left Hartford and came back to La Salle as, uh the provost, what were some of your goals? As Provost and in returning.

JB: Well I think goals kind of emerge once I got, saw the lay of the land. I mean, um, there's a joke that I tell that the only thing I accomplished in my two years as provost was, I got non-tenure track positions approved. Meaning that we can hire some one on a full time basis for multiple years without them being on tenure track. And that was, that was a challenge, you know, when you're a new administrator you have some cards you can play that you can't play later. And I played that card, that was, that was for the financial flexibility that the institution needed in my opinion. But, I don't remember what other goals I had, I mean, certainly one of the goals I had was internationalization...and community service were both goals of mine coming in. Building of La Salle community and things like that, but if you think about what La Salle was like in that time, the Conley Library had just been built, it was relatively new. Uh, the president, Pat Ellis was working on closing 20th street. I mean that was, was a big story. Uh, there had been some faculty issues relative to forcing people to early retirement, but they were...although the lawsuits were still going on, the issues were resolved. And you, I was replacing some one who had been in office for 19 years, brother Emory. So I really was the new kid on the block but, my first, my first um, priority believe it or not, when I was provost, was to build a new science building. And when I became president that was still my first priority. And as you can see too many other things intervened that had to happen.

RR: How did you feel when you returned to La Salle from Hartford?

JB: Oh, I was happy to be back and I was happy to be in that position. I mean, I enjoyed that position. It's a very different position than the one I had been in and certainly was a different one when I was president. But, um, I liked it. It was, um it was fine.

RR: Had La Salle changed at all from the time you left?

JB: Not as far as, I don't remember, "Oh my god everything has changed." No, it was four years I was away and I was back here on a regular basis. So um, it was always home to me here.

RR: Was it difficult returning not specifically as a teacher, even though you kept a foot in the classroom, but...

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RR: Was it difficult returning not specifically as a teacher, even though you kept a foot in the classroom, but...

JB: No, I guess I always thought that at some point I may return to teaching. But I can't say that I ever had a target, you know, I'm going to do this job for X number of years, with the exception of Hartford, I did say that Hartford was going to be three years no more. And each year I had to get permission from La Salle to stay there. And without that permission I would lose tenure, so.

RR: Do you feel you were brought in as provost or hired as provost to, in the future, become president?

JB: Um, certainly to some people, in some people's minds it was a good idea to have another brother, who had administrative experience because there had to be a president someday. But at the same time, at the time we're talking about there was no indication that Patrick Ellis was ever going to leave La Salle. And, there was certainly, he had no sense that I was to follow him in some way. Um, and at the time too there were also a good number of brothers still around, I mean, the change in the numbers is, is, you know, we're talking 16 years ago. So in 16 years ago, there was Jimmy Muldoon, Jack Dondero and Rich Hawley and there were a good dozen more people who active.

RR: Okay, I think that's all I have for now.

JB: Alright!

RR: I hope you're not worn out.

JB: I'm not.