

**Brother Edward Sheehy, F.S.C**  
**Interviewed by Lauren De Angelis**  
**La Salle University**  
**April 3, 2012**

0:00:00

De Angelis: Okay. Today is Tuesday April 3, 2012 and I'm interviewing Brother Edward Sheehy for the fifth time and it is 2:37 p.m. in the afternoon. We are in his office in Olney Hall. Do I have permission to interview you today?

Sheehy: Yes.

De Angelis: Thank you. So we left off where you were starting at La Salle and you were teaching. Can you describe how your positions have changed over the years? Have you gotten any new responsibilities since you first came here?

Sheehy: When I first came here I was teaching five days a week, teaching four subjects, but three of them were the same. Three of them were the basic world history class, which was fine; it didn't bother me at all. About three years after being here I became a moderator of the basketball team, which I continue now. I'm in my twentieth season. And then a couple of years later, because of some changes that occurred in the administration, the president—I guess it's been about fourteen years. The president asked me if I would take the position of Vice-President of the University Corporation, which is a highfalutin title but basically means the charter says that the president has to be a Christian Brother. So, that if something were to happen to Brother Michael then I would temporarily assume the position of president.<sup>1</sup>

De Angelis: Okay. Let's start out first with the basketball. Were you also a moderator of another other sport?

Sheehy: Yes. I was moderator of football for the eleven years that we had it.

De Angelis: What is the role of moderator on a team?

Sheehy: Well a moderator, it's traditional in a Brother school to have a moderator for sports if possible. Says the prayer before the game, after the game, travels with the team. In my case, as long as I don't miss classes. Is available for the coaches and for the student athletes. Sits on the bench or is on the field to show people that it's a LaSallian school. So generally a liaison between that particular athletic team and the rest of the school, but also to help the coaches and the

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<sup>1</sup> Brother Michael McGuinness has been President of La Salle University since July 1, 1999.

players. For example, the fifteen minutes or so directly before every game Coach Giannini and I are in the locker room by ourselves and I try to keep his mind off the game that's coming up.

**2:28**

De Angelis: Are you the only Christian Brother who moderates?

Sheehy: There are Brothers who moderate other activities. Some have been in and out of moderating sports. And so there are some unofficial ones, but I think I'm the only technically official one who moderates a sport.

De Angelis: And do they choose you?

Sheehy: I volunteer. I volunteered at both cases.

De Angelis: And it's your twentieth year?

Sheehy: In basketball. Yes.

De Angelis: Did they honor you in any special way for your big anniversary?

Sheehy: The athletic department was kind enough to have a bobblehead produced to me which, they gave to the students after or during or before the Rhode Island home game.<sup>2</sup> That was very, very nice.

De Angelis: And this bobblehead a historical event for the Christian Brothers you think?

Sheehy: More hysterical, but as near as I can tell, and of course the Athletic Department really said, probably the only Christian Brother to have a bobblehead. I think that's probably a pretty safe bet.

De Angelis: Did you feel really honored by that?

Sheehy: Yes, I did. I thought it was very nice of them especially since it made me look about forty years younger, so I couldn't complain about that.

De Angelis: So you were only moderator of the football team for eleven years?

Sheehy: Well that's as long as we had it.

De Angelis: And why did we stop?

Sheehy: We stopped for a couple of reasons. The primary reasons was most of the schools that we did play had dropped the sport. So there

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<sup>2</sup> See image in appendix

weren't a lot of teams left. We had two options. One was to offer certain number of scholarships, which I didn't think it was a good idea on the number levels. The other was to play in a league that would require us to travel a lot like to Indianapolis, to San Diego, to Jacksonville. It just simply didn't make sense financially to do it.  
[cough]

**4:19**

De Angelis: And what did you enjoy more moderating basketball or football?

Sheehy: It's a good question. I enjoyed both of them very much. Generally speaking, we weren't very successful in either one of them up until this year in basketball. We only had two winning seasons in football and we only had four in basketball over the twenty years. But I would say I enjoy them both very, very much. I didn't always enjoy the long bus rides and coming back at two and three in the morning sometimes. But I mean still I thought I made a contribution and I enjoy sports, so again an opportunity to stay involved.

De Angelis: And regarding your role as Vice President of the Corporation, I'm sure a lot of people don't know what that exactly is. Can you describe what exactly you do besides waiting around just in case?

Sheehy: Well, when it doesn't really interfere with my classes, I attend University Council. Unfortunately, most of those are on a Monday afternoon when I teach. And I also attend the Board of Trustees meetings which are held three times a year. Sometimes in May it's difficult for me to attend because of exams, but the idea is to be there so—to listen. I don't participate in any of the discussions. I don't vote. But it keeps me up to date on what's going on at the University.

De Angelis: And do you actually enjoy that role that you're in?

Sheehy: It shows me a side of the University I didn't see any other way and I have unique perspective because I'm a faculty member. And so it gives me maybe a more of a complete picture than a lot of people have on what goes on. I wouldn't say it's enjoyable in a sense that it's like a six or seven hour meeting. But broken up with lunch breaks and things like that. I mean again because of the charter it's important that the position be a Brother and the president has wanted it to be a faculty member. So, for that reason they asked me to do it.

De Angelis: Do you think that charter will ever change?

6:29

Sheehy: Absolutely. When Manhattan College appointed [cough] a new president it was a layperson, they changed the charter just before they appointed him.<sup>3</sup> I think for what it's worth the next president will be a Christian Brother. But after that I think—I'm not sure we have enough depth. I think the next time around they'll be some good candidates. But after that I think it'll be lay person. Again, there's nothing the matter with that. We had a lay president here for a year between Brother Joseph and Brother Michael and the place didn't fall apart.<sup>4</sup> So it would be seen to be a very positive experience for people.

De Angelis: Do you think your background in being a principal, looking at the business side I guess of the institutions, did that help you kind of transition into this role?

Sheehy: It did. Obviously the budget on a high school level is nowhere near as significant as on a university level but some of the basic principles are the same. And obviously one of the most important ones is to keep a very close eye on the budget and also be able and willing to say "no" when you have to and to bite the bullet.

De Angelis: And in these meetings have you ever disagreed with how things have been running? You're not allowed to talk, right?

Sheehy: I'm not—technically I could, but I don't. I would say there's some times when I haven't, but I would say almost all the time I have. And in those occasions when I haven't, it's been so close it hasn't made much difference. The only one major thing I can think of or semi major thing it was like fifty-one, forty-nine (51-49)—So in my mind. So I said it could have been either way. I would have been the forty-nine. The president decided the fifty-one. So I think the president has made the correct decisions with the knowledge he had at the time. And I think the board generally has done the same thing. Again, I don't always agree with everything, but it's one of those things where if you disagree with somebody, but you see the other side you could say, "people can agree to disagree." And so I think that's the case. So I'm very comfortable with that role.

De Angelis: And on an academic side in the past, however long you've been here, have you been publishing a lot?

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<sup>3</sup> Manhattan College is a LaSallian college in the Bronx, New York that was founded in 1853.

<sup>4</sup> The president before Brother Michael was Mr. Nicholas Giordano who was the first lay president of La Salle University. He served from 1998-1999 because Brother Michael was unable to move from Indianapolis until 1999.

8:49

Sheehy: Bits and pieces generally. I mean I've had a number of encyclopedia articles published. I've had three or four articles published for the Brothers. We've had a number of seminars in which I've published. I've done a fair amount of book reviews in different journals and, like the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Naval History*, *Institute and Proceedings*, *Mariners Mirror*. Those kinds of things. I have an article being reviewed after the person comes back from sabbatical on Iceland in the United States Navy and of course my book which came out in ninety-two ('92).

De Angelis: And department wise, have you see any changes over the years in the history department?

Sheehy: Yeah. Obviously I've seen—I looked around the other day and I realized that I was the oldest full time teacher. Well Dr. Stow, but he handles the graduate programs. I don't know if he's teaching three or four. I think I'm the oldest teaching four. There had been a lot changes. Some of them have been small changes. Some of them—in the sense of I think we've been extremely fortunate in our hires. I think we've been very fortunate in the sense that we are a department that in terms of teaching faculty we'd been very fortunate in our hires. And that this group gets along very, very well. I think that the department gets along as well as any group that I've seen on this campus. And a lot of that can be attributed to the people who've been chair. And I think the current chair, Dr. Leibiger, is extraordinary.

De Angelis: And has there been any changes in the department that you have not totally agreed with?

Sheehy: Well I have a personal feeling about the development of the graduate program. The other day we had a meeting, and Dr. Leibiger was talking about the percentage of classes that are taught by adjuncts both the percentage of the foundation courses and all percentage of all history classes. And he looked at me and I was smiling. And he said, "You know you were right. The graduate program has cut down on the number of full time faculty teaching in terms of the underclass people." I just think—again I'm traditionalist in many ways, not everything, but many ways. I think that the Brother's should only have graduate programs in theology and education cause I think you dance with the girl who brought you, and in this case the girl who brought you was undergraduate education. I mean my position has been—given a choice who wouldn't want to teach a small group of people who are interested as opposed to a foundation course at eight o'clock in the morning. Given that it went through, I have no problem

with it. We joke about it and since I have no problem with it. I don't go around grumpy about it or anything. And I've stuck to my guns in terms of not teaching in it.

**12:06**

De Angelis: And is this a feeling a lot of Brothers share?

Sheehy: I have not talked with a lot of Brothers about it so I don't know if they share it or not. My temptation is to say it's not a big issue with them. It might be a bigger issue if it was within the department that they were working in. It is something that I felt strongly about and just felt that I could not put myself—and the other factor is the lay faculty, they have more mouths to feed than I do. And so there's an advantage to them doing that. And I understand all of that. Again, most of the time, *most* of the time, if I get into a discussion about something and I lose the argument then I move on. It's not something that I can control. The same thing is true here. I can't control it cause I'm on the graduate program. I'm glad it's doing well. But that's fine, but I deal with what I can deal with.

De Angelis: And do other Lasallian Institutions have a lot of graduate programs?

Sheehy: I don't know a lot about a lot of them. I do know Manhattan does not have too many. Manhattan's primary one is in engineering. St. Mary's in California makes a bundle of money on graduate programs mostly taught by adjuncts. Actually in Minneapolis, which is a branch campus, that was the situation. I don't know if its still is. That's a couple of years ago. The rest of the schools I really don't know. They're relatively small, so I'd be kind of surprise that they had a lot of them but I just don't know.

De Angelis: Recently, in recent years I guess, do you find that the area around La Salle is getting more violent/I guess "bad" for a lack of a better word because today we had a bank robbery on campus at the Shoppes at La Salle. So do you think that reflects a growing trend?

Sheehy: Not really. My day here we were also needed to be prudent about where you went and what time you went and make sure you went with other people. I think there were a couple of more organized local groups that were up to no good. I can think of one, the Summerville Street Gang was their name. I think when you add amenities, like the Shoppes at La Salle, that increases exponentially the possibility if something happening. But in terms of what was available and around the time I was going to school. I don't think its any worse.

14:48

De Angelis: And would you ever think about leaving La Salle?

Sheehy: Almost every time I've gone somewhere it has not been my decision, almost every time. The decision to come here was my decision, to apply. But it happened to occur at exactly the same time an opening occurred at the University. There had been one or two times in the past when the Brother in charge, Brother Visitor, has asked me to consider something else. I have decided not to because again the reason being—the reason I walked away from administration was because I joined the Brothers to teach. I'm not sure I can put the energy into the high school scene that I used to put in. But again it would depend on the situation. One never says never, but I don't anticipate leaving. I have no intention to do so. We call it work because ninety percent we don't like what we do. I like what I do, so I don't plan to change it unless something outside encourages me or forces me to do that change in health for example or something like that.

De Angelis: You just said that you don't think you have enough energy for high school setting. But how would you describe your teaching style in the classroom. Would you say you're energetic?

Sheehy: Frenetic would be more closely accurate. I've always been that way. I was that way from the first time I started teaching. Again part of the reason is, and I've said this on numerous occasions, most of the word history is story. And the idea is to try to get people excited about the story. If you're excited, maybe at some point somebody will say, "maybe there's a reason he's excited." And maybe it has to do with learning from history and be able to grow from history and learning the values from history. And I'm not somebody—I mean my third grade report card said "anxious," "over anxious," "nervous." So I've got that nervous energy. So that's where I use it and apply it in the classroom.

De Angelis: You've been teaching during probably one of the biggest technological transitions in history. Have you tried to integrate any of that into your lectures?

Sheehy: Ice age is probably the speed at which it's working. Generally I have not. Generally I have been the chalk and talk. Every so often I'll break down and show a film or part of a video. But a couple of years ago when I realized how horrible my handwriting is, I decided to go to PowerPoint and that has opened incredible doors for me, and I'm taking it a snail step at a time but I'm doing different things each time and gradually my notes are all being put on to PowerPoint. There are

some very technological savvy people around here who are very able to help and able to give—they only need a short amount of time to show me, but they're very, very good at that.

**17:56**

De Angelis: And do you find it beneficial in the classroom?

Sheehy: Yes, I do because I can still roam. As long as they don't steal my clicker, I can still roam up and down the aisles and look out the door and put my face around the wall and things. So it has been a great help. But again the major reason was that my handwriting was so bad that I just didn't feel it fair to the students as time went on. Plus the idea being able to put pictures and things like that makes it easier than hauling all the pictures in the class, which is what I used to do particularly in things like maritime history.

De Angelis: And you have a unique test style. Can you explain a little bit of the methods behind the madness I guess of why you the ask questions you ask on your exams?

Sheehy: Yes. I think madness might be a little bit of a strong word, but I mean that is a cliché, so I'll accept it as a cliché. The plan is usually twenty percent are objective questions and I think it's important that people read closely. That doesn't necessarily mean they do. I think most college students do not. So the objective part I think is seen as being very difficult. The essays are sweeping essays the examples, which I obviously given out to the students ahead of time. What I tell them is it's just like my Brother arguing case before the Supreme Court.<sup>5</sup> He has thirty minutes to argue the case, which means he can't use all the evidence. He's got to pick the evidence that best answers the question. In fact, he got twenty-three seconds to argue the case cause then they started asking him questions. But the idea is that you present a case, that you give as many specific as you can to support your answer to a very broad question. So that's kind of then my approach.

De Angelis: And is there anything that you do on test day that kind of relaxes the students?

Sheehy: On occasion I'll bring in one of my little buddies. I'll bring in Murphy the meerkat or Snowball the little polar bear.

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Sheehy Esquire argued in front of the supreme court as a defense attorney. According to Brother Edward it was over an issue regarding a statute of limitations. A merchant marine had broken the statute because he was at sea, but Richard Sheehy argued that he should not be held accountable because he was not in contact with lawyers. He won the case with a 7-2 decision.

On occasion I'll do that. And then of course they always look forward to an extra credit question, which can be bizarre, or can be on topic, or can be somewhere on the right field.

**20:13**

De Angelis: That's so cute. And where do you see the department going in the future?

Sheehy: We're undergoing a program review right now and what the program review seems to indicate is that we are doing the best with what we have. I think the change over to smart classrooms is occurring slowly. I think some of that is for financial reasons. If that can, continue I think that that will help the department. I think the people—we hire people who can teach in the core courses but also have a specialty. But we're stretched pretty thin in terms of people's specialties, with the possible exception of United States history. But the other two, the developing world and Europe, we're stretched especially thin. So obviously the hope is to cut that thinness down and cover every area that we can, but that is again is difficult. Almost everybody in the department is a jack-of-all-trades, can teach any number of different classes.

De Angelis: And what about the University as a whole? Where do you see it going?

Sheehy: Well the University, over the last couple of years, has had a very significant change. In that sense I mean it's more mirroring the demographics of Philadelphia in terms of enrollment and in terms of diversity and I think that that's going to continue. I think, as with almost every college, we have to be careful to meet the students where they're at, not where we're at. In a sense that teaching our last graduate course or teaching the same way we did ten years ago, twenty years ago or even five years ago, we have to adjust. We have to adjust to what is becoming the catch phrase of bimodal class, meaning that there are people who are really bright and the people that need some extra help. So we have to be able to adjust to that. So it's not doing things the same way all the time. You got to make those adjustments and be flexible. And sometimes that flexibility you might teach two classes of the same subject and you might take a different approach in both of those classes for a variety of reasons.

De Angelis: And where do you see yourself going in life. Obviously you're not sure if you're going to stay here.

Sheehy: Well my sense is— I mean I find it hard to believe I won't stay here. So my sense is that I'll continue to teach if—I think one of the problems

is that people can stay too long in what they're doing. I think if I get to the point where I cannot bring my energy to the job, then I might consider going to a half schedule as a gradual way towards retirement. But I don't anticipate retiring and I don't anticipate changing what I'm doing. The problem is that you have to be able to see some things that happen. If you become too forgetful or you don't have—bring your same level of energy to the classroom. Then you have to start thinking of other options and so I'm not stupid enough to think that that's not a possibility, but I don't see it happening in the near future.

**23:38**

De Angelis: Obviously you're a very healthy person, but did you ever have a health scare that could have possibly slowed you down?

Sheehy: In the spring of 1999 I suffered a silent heart attack while I was teaching. And I thought it was asthma or something. I had labored breath. I couldn't sleep. And so I went to the doctor and he said I want you to go checked out in the hospital. So I went to the hospital. They started taking blood, and eventually they said, "you had a heart attack some time in the last two weeks." I said, "whoa." And then said, "we'll look and see what the options are. The options could be medicine. It could be catherization instead, an angioplasty or could be something more extensive." So they look at my heart and they gave me a conclusion that an angioplasty stent and catherization would be the way to go. Fortunately, that was after exams so I was able to go through that in May of 1999. I go to the cardiologist twice a year. I see my primary physician about three or four times a year and take a lot of medicine. So far that seems to be working out.

De Angelis: So you taught through a heart attack essentially?

Sheehy: Yes.

De Angelis: And you never missed a day?

Sheehy: I've not missed a day because of illness. Now in October I unusually miss a day—no, not in October because we're on break when we have University Council meeting. In February I usually miss a day because of the board meetings. So February fourteenth this year I missed the second class, not the first one. I taught until 9:15 and then went to the board meeting.

De Angelis: So you seem pretty dedicated to teaching.

Sheehy: Well I mean it's—I gave my word that I would do it and I try to—I don't want to ever look back and say I didn't do the best I could. And

the best I could may not be objectively the best that everybody thinks, but I need to go to bed at night and at the end of the semester say, "I gave it the best shot I could."

De Angelis: And do you have any other piece of information you want the listeners to know.

**26:03**

Sheehy: I don't think there's too much other than my interests, which are sports, reading, traveling. I collect magnets. I used to collect matchbooks, but I don't collect them anymore. I have a whole collection of thimbles in my room that I collect. But other than that, no, nothing. I think this has been an extremely thorough interview and I think anybody who would have the time and/or energy to listen to it, okay, would have a pretty good idea of how I function. They may come to the conclusion I'm stark raving mad, but at least they'd know how I function.

De Angelis: Do you think you're a good representation of not your stereotypical Christian Brother?

Sheehy: That's sounds like an oxymoronic statement, right? A good representation of a non-stereotypical Christian Brother. I think people stereotype us too much. I think the difference is that some Brothers are quieter than others and therefore people can't see their individuality. Other Brothers are kind of like the bowl in the china shop and you can see them as being different and therefore you always think of people as being—people in religious life as being quiet. As I always say I basically was quiet for the fifteen months. On the Myers-Briggs I'm right in the middle, I'm extrovert, introvert. So good example of non-stereotypical Christian Brother I guess to the outside world I am not stereotypical. But the fact that were twenty-nine people who entered the Brothers with me and there's only two left says something about whatever the stereotype was.

De Angelis: That's true. Well thank you for all of your time and I really appreciate it. And I'm sure the archives do too.

Sheehy: Thank you very much, Lauren. It's been a pleasure.

**27:48**      **End of Audio**