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Interview of Eugene Colucci


Eugene Colucci

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Field Notes

Interviewee: Eugene "Gene" Colucci

Interviewer: Robert G. Seelhorst Jr.

Interview Date: 3/18/13 afternoon & 3/20/13 afternoon

Interview Location: Buena Regional High School Room B105

Field notes written between 3/19/13 and 3/22/13

The Interviewee:

Eugene (Gene) Colucci was born on February 18, 1948, at the heart of the baby boom generation. All four of his grandparents had immigrated to the United States from the area around Naples, Italy. He grew up in a strict Catholic household at 2308 South Lambert Street in South Philadelphia. He had a Catholic school education that began at St. Monica Elementary and continued until graduation from Bishop Neumann High School. Gene went on to earn a BA in Liberal Arts at Millersville University (1970), a MA in Bi-Lingual Bi-Cultural studies from LaSalle University (1991), and has also accumulated a number of Supervisor Certificates from Rowan University in the study of Spanish, Elementary Education, Bi-Lingual studies, and ESL (English as a Second Language). Mr. Colucci has been an educator for nearly forty years and has split that time evenly between private (Catholic schools in Philadelphia) and public (Buena Regional High School in New Jersey) institutions. Before his professional career he served in the Army National Guard and learned photography through his connections as the company clerk. He went on to purchase a photography studio and successfully run a side business shooting weddings and special events. He is currently employed at Buena Regional High School and has not indicated a desire to retire from the field.

The Interviewer:

I, Robert George Seelhorst (b. 1974 in Stratford NJ), grew up in southern NJ, earned a B.A. in History with a minor in Art History from Rutgers College, Rutgers University, New Brunswick NJ, in 1998. After a short stint working for a financial institution underwriting and processing mortgages, I enrolled at Rowan University to get certified to teach Social Studies. I have been teaching in the Buena Regional School district since 2003. I currently teach USII college prep, USII AP, and a Senior level Honors elective course entitled World Conflicts that focuses on International conflict and American foreign policy since the end of the Second World War. As Head Coach for the Varsity soccer team at Buena for six seasons, I turned around a traditionally poor program. Under my stewardship we went on to win Buena's first and only Cape Atlantic Conference Title. This was such a remarkable feat that the

Atlantic City Press named me the 2009 coach of the year. In 2010 I made the decision to take a break from coaching to devote my time to earning my MA in History at LaSalle University.

Background

I had originally planned on interviewing Mr. Colucci a few days earlier but a schedule conflict caused a short delay. I have worked with Mr. Colucci for almost ten years. We have a pleasant working relationship but do not often see one another unless we are assigned some special duty together (monitoring lunch, the Alternative Learning Lab, or hall duty). He works upstairs in the language arts wing and I work downstairs in the social studies hall. My workspace is further isolated because it is located at the end of the new wing which is attached to the old structure. My first year at Buena Regional High School I had A.L.L. (Alternative Learning Lab a.k.a. internal suspension) duty with Mr. Colucci. We got to know each other a little during that time but in reality I knew very little about the man before this experience.

In preparation for this interview I spoke with a number of individuals to gain insight into the professional life of Mr. Colucci. I began by interviewing Judy Minor because she has worked with Gene the longest in the Spanish department and I value the perspective of his colleagues as much as the administrators. Next I spoke with Jessica Thompson, she is new to the building but has worked with Mr. Colucci in a professional capacity. Then I tracked down Ken Soboloski, the former Principal who hired Gene and myself. He had a lot of glowing remarks for Mr. Colucci and it has been my experience that Mr. Soboloski is a straight shooter who gives his opinion with brutal honesty. Lastly, I questioned the current Principal at Buena Regional High School, Mr. White. All of these individuals gave me insight that helped me to develop questions for the interview with Mr. Colucci. Mr. White actually volunteered potential questions that he would ask if he was given this assignment. After gathering this information, I created an outline, and wrote out the eighty plus questions that I wanted to ask. I forwarded this list to Dr. Allen at LaSalle and she was able to suggest alterations and additions to my questions that proved valuable.

I wanted to make sure to have time to discuss all of the different aspect of Mr. Colucci's life so I made an outline that included the following topics: Background, Parents, Story of Youth, Education, Military Career, Photography Career, Teaching Career, Differences Between Private and Public Education, and Travel. I made sure to plan two different interviews. I felt that this would provide a needed break for Mr. Colucci so he would be fresh to provide more stimulating content. I also felt that this would give me an opportunity to review what had been captured, identify any potential problems in the interview, and allow me the opportunity to return to any topic that might need clarification. Both of the interviews occur at the end of the school day and take place in my classroom. I wanted to do the interview in his classroom but when I got to his room he told me he had to take care of a few things and he would meet me in my classroom. To be as accommodating as possible I made

the adjustment without any resistance. I decided to continue using my Iphone to record this interview because the practice interview had excellent sound quality.

At the end of the interview I had Mr. Colucci sign the release form but I had forgot to get that printed on Acid-Free paper. At a later date, I returned with another proper copy of the release form and asked him to fill it out again to make sure that it would last as long as possible.

Description of the Interviews:

We sat down around two thirty in the afternoon to conduct the first interview. I turned one of the student's desks around so we could face one another and pulled a third desk along side of us so that I could position the recorder between us. Although I had taken extra precautions to write out a script for the introduction to this interview, I nervously stumbled over the date by claiming that it was March 18th, 1913. Obviously this is impossible and I noted the correction in the log of the interview. At the outset of the first interview I felt compelled to engage Mr. Colucci in more dialogue to elicit desired responses. As the interview continued he began elaborating more and I tried to make a point to limit my comments as much as possible. I found that striking a balance between engaging the narrator to pull out the desired information and remaining as silent as possible to be one of the trickier aspects of this project.

The focus of the first interview was devoted to the Background, Parents, Story of Youth, Education, and Military Career portion of the outline. I relied on the Thompson guide as a blueprint to capture the relevant information regarding Mr. Colucci's heritage and upbringing. The background questions focused on his grandparent's generation and their influence on him as he grew up. I made sure to clarify spelling for many of the people and places referenced here. In the future I don't think I would waste the time and interrupt the flow of the narrator if I knew I had as much access to the individual being interviewed as I do with Mr. Colucci. It would be easier to gather that information in subsequent follow up meetings. Although I tried to be as thorough as possible, I noticed on the playback that I failed to get his father and mother's names. I already knew their names and rushed to capture their story without it being recorded. Later I was able to find him in the hallway, collect the names and spellings, and add them to the log.

Because of my experience with the practice interview that I did with my mother, I was very conscious of how quickly time can go by if the interviewer is not careful. With that in mind, I feel that I was much more effective in managing my time to include as much material as possible while adhering to the outline I created earlier.

The second interview fell on the same day as a TAHG (Teaching American History Grant) colloquium. As a fellow in the TAHG program, I participate in trips and lectures to advance historical understanding and practice effective teaching

techniques. To be as accommodating as I could to Mr. Colucci, I spoke with the organizers of the TAHG colloquium so that I could leave the lecture early and not postpone our interview until a later date. The second half of the interview was dedicated to Mr. Colucci's photography career, his professional teaching career, the differences between working in a private and public school system, and his world travels. Also included inside of these topics are discussions about the technical aspects of photography, the influence of the state and federal governments on public school education, and the importance of leadership in an educational setting. For the second session with Mr. Colucci I abandoned the Thompson model all together. I created questions based on the interviews I had done, my correspondence with Dr. Allen at LaSalle, and focusing on topics that I felt had historical importance.

In the section that discusses the "special education" offered in NJ public schools (beginning at the 42:44 point in interview 2). I assist Mr. Colucci in describing examples of the accommodations provided in the 504 plans and IEP's (Individualized Education Programs). Since I work in the same school and deal with the same classroom issues as Mr. Colucci I feel that this assistance was valid. Mr. Colucci admits that at this time of the day his brain shuts down and he appeared to appreciate my attempt to fill in some of the blanks that he could not recall. I understand that this is not the optimal interviewing strategy but it did help us to move on with the interview and discuss further topics.

It was vitally important that I manage my time with Mr. Colucci in these interviews. He has a great deal to offer future historians and I wanted to capture and record as much as possible. Overall, I feel very pleased with my productivity and the topics we were able to record in the time allotted. If given more time I would have discussed more thoroughly how his world travels have impacted his students learning. I also think it would have been interesting to discuss his passion for the Chinese martial art, Tai Chi. It is mentioned briefly in our discussion of his travels to China in 2007 but I believe that I had left interesting information out of the interview because of time restraints. This is a decision that I consciously made at the time but still harbor regrets over now.

I was fearful that our interview would be interrupted by an announcement made over the intercom from the administration office. Luckily that never occurred and the sound is pristine and clear during the entire interview. In retrospect, I feel it was best to choose my classroom for this interview. Room B105 is located in an isolated part of Buena Regional High School, away from the hustle and bustle that may have otherwise interrupted us.

Note on recording:

For the recording I used my Iphone 4 on battery power. I did not use any additional microphone. After the interview was complete, I connected the phone to my Mac computer and downloaded the memo file onto my iTunes app. I was then able to burn it onto a CD and also transfer it to a USB drive.

