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Interview of Richard Monastra


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Pamela Johnson
History 650
April 30, 2013

FIELD NOTES

Narrator: Richard J. Monastra
Interviewer: Pamela J. Johnson
Time/Date: 11:00 A.M./March 2, 2013
Location: Mr. Monastra's home in Wallingford, Pennsylvania

INTERVIEWEE

Richard Monastra is of the “baby boom” generation, having been born in 1946 in Philadelphia. He is the eldest of two children. He remains very close to his sister to this day. Mr. Monastra grew up in South Philadelphia in the 1950's and 1960's. He describes South Philly at the time as “magical”. He described his neighborhood as being made up of Euro-Americans who settled in South Philly after the Civil War. He attended St. Edmond's Parochial Elementary School where there were as many as 60 kids in a class. After elementary school, he attended Bishop Neumann High School. While in high school, he worked at a local pharmacy. He graduated from Neumann in 1964. Like most of his friends, he applied to LaSalle and was accepted. He majored in history. Like many of his generation, he was the first one on either side of his family to attend college.

Mr. Monastra credits the Christian Brothers with exposing students to things their “familial ancestors could only dream of”. He believes that the Brother practiced their motto; Virtus et Scientia, virtue and knowledge. He feels the Christian Brothers challenged students to question and think critically.

Mr. Monastra did his student teaching in South Philadelphia High School and graduated from LaSalle in the spring of 1968.

Following his graduation from LaSalle, he accepted a job at Collingdale High School in Delaware County, PA. He worked there from the fall of 1968 through the spring of 1970. His contract, as well as several others, was not renewed due to budget cuts. He was then hired at Glassboro Middle School in New Jersey where he worked from 1970-1972. He taught 7th & 8th grade U.S. History and Geography. Once again, he was laid off due to budget cuts. After Glassboro, Mr. Monastra obtained employment at Interboro High School where he taught a myriad of courses from 1972 until another lay off in 1983. He was called back to work there until 1985, when he was laid off again. He worked briefly at Haddonfield High School for two years, until he was hired at Buena Regional High School in January of 1989 and worked there until his retirement in 2009. He has taught, and continues to teach, at the county college level.

Interviewer

I, Pamela Johnson, was born in raised in Vineland, New Jersey, the oldest of three children. I attended Catholic school through the 8th grade and then went on to public high school which proved to be a real culture shock for me. I graduated high school in 1987 and then went on to Cumberland County College in Vineland, New Jersey. After graduating from Cumberland, I worked full-time at a local bank as a loan processor while also working part time at night as a telemarketer. I saved up enough money to go onto Glassboro State College (now Rowan University), and majored in History. After graduating from Glassboro, I worked for various attorney offices for several years. I got married 1995 and had my first child in 1996. I found working in an office to be mind-numbing and felt I was contributing nothing positive to society. This led to me return to return to college in 1998 to work toward my teaching certification in Social Studies.

I completed my student teaching in December of 1999. I was hired in 2001 at Notre Dame Middle School in Landisville, New Jersey. I began work on September 5, 2001, and exactly one week later, 9/11 happened. Needless to say, my first full week of teaching is something I will never forget. In 2004, I was hired by Buena Regional High School as a History teacher. I continue to work there, where I teach United States History I & II.

In 2006, I was asked to join the Ben Franklin Teaching American History Fellowship through Delsea Regional High School. This federal grant program allows teachers to be fully immersed in history through lectures, guest speakers, as well as historical site interpretations. I was a participating fellow until 2009, at the completion of that grant. My own school, Buena Regional High School, also received the federal Teaching American History grant. I joined that colloquia in 2011, and am still a member. In 2011, I began working on my Masters in History with a concentration in Public History. I am completing this oral history project as part of the requirement of the Oral History class that I am presently taking.

I am a member of the National Council for the Social Studies, as well as a member of the Organization of American Historians. I have been married for 18 years and have two children, ages 12 & 16.

Description of the Interview:

Upon learning that as part of the Oral History project for LaSalle, I would be required to interview someone associated with LaSalle, I immediately knew I wanted to interview Richard Monastra. I met Mr. Monastra when I began working at Buena Regional High School in 2004, and was his colleague until his retirement in 2009. I knew interviewing him would be fruitful, as he has mastered the art of conversation. He has a great memory for detail and quite a sense of humor. I immediately sent Mr. Monastra an email, asking if he would grant me the courtesy of an interview. He was more than happy to oblige. We were in touch frequently from the time of my first request and the interview. He sent me four pages of background information, which proved extremely helpful in preparing my interview questions.

On March 2, I drove to Mr. Monastra's home in Wallingford, PA on a beautiful Saturday morning. It took me an hour to get there. It is for this reason I completed the interview in one day. The interview lasted approximately 2:36. As a thank you, I gave him a nice bottle of red wine. I arrived at 10:30 and after some initial catching-up, the interview began at 11:00 a.m. Karen, his companion of 30 years, was not home. I was able to conduct the interview with very little distractions. We took our first break when a friend of his arrived to pick up Phillies tickets, and then we took another short break later in the interview.

After approximately 2 ½ hours, we finished the interview and I thanked him for his help. He gave me a tour of his home and showed me his baseball memorabilia. I then drove home to New Jersey.

Note on recording:

This recording was made on a Sony IC Recorder. On completion of the interview, I downloaded the recording to the hard drive on my desk top, as well as a flash drive. It is saved in MP3 format.