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# Interview of Kevin J. Harty, Ph.D.

Kevin J. Harty Ph.D.

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## **Field Notes**

**Interviewee:** Dr. Kevin J. Harty

**Interviewer:** Meghan Skiles

**Interview Date:** March 21, 2019 (afternoon)

**Interview Location:** Dr. Harty's office – Olney 169

Field notes written on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019

### **The Interviewee:**

Dr. Kevin J. Harty was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1948. He grew up in Brooklyn, until his family moved to Chicago when he was about twelve years old. His father worked for the telephone company, which spurred the family's move to Chicago, and his mother stayed home and cared for the family. Dr. Harty attended high school in the suburbs of Chicago, graduating when he was fifteen and a half years old. Between high school and college, he worked for a year in a department store, and briefly considered going into the fashion industry. He attended Marquette University for his undergraduate degree, graduating in 1970 at the age of twenty-two, with a B.A. in English and German. He then attended the University of Pennsylvania, earning a master's degree in English in 1971 and a Ph.D. in English in 1974. After earning his Ph.D., Dr. Harty began his teaching career at Centenary College of Louisiana, and taught for brief periods at Rhode Island College and Temple University before starting a position as an English professor at La Salle University in 1982. Dr. Harty won the 1992 Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching. He went on to become the chair of the English department, and served as chair from 2002 to 2018, winning the Faculty Distinguished Scholarship Award in 2015. He recently stepped down as chair, and continues to teach a wide variety of English courses at La Salle. Dr. Harty is trained as a medievalist, and is considered a specialist in Medieval Literature; Chaucer; Vikings; literary traditions of King Arthur, Joan of Arc, and Robin Hood; film representations of the Middle Ages; cinematic adaptations of literary texts, and pop culture as related to AIDS. He is a renowned scholar, and has written several books and many articles on a variety of his specialties, many of which have become industry standards.

### **The Interviewer:**

I, Meghan Skiles (b. 1994 in Ephrata, PA), grew up in Lancaster County, PA, a middle child and the only girl among four brothers. I graduated from a small public high school in 2013, and attended La Salle University for my undergraduate degree. I earned a B.A. in English in 2017, and stayed in Philadelphia after graduation. I worked for a year at the Museum of the American Revolution in Old City, as well as working as a tour guide of the city of Philadelphia and a sales associate at the non-profit store Ten Thousand Villages. I now work evenings as a Public Services

at the Connelly Library at La Salle University, and am currently working towards my M.A. in History with a concentration in Public History.

### **Background:**

When I was an undergraduate student at La Salle University, I studied in the English department where Dr. Harty served as chair. I had some limited interactions with him as the chair of the department, and I always got the impression that he was friendly, funny, and a bit of a character. His reputation as a successful scholar and an excellent teacher preceded him. Over the years, I heard many stories about Dr. Harty, and he became a bit of a legend to me. Professors in the English department seemed to like and respect him, and I learned that he was a world-renowned King Arthur scholar, which fascinated me. Friends who took classes taught by Dr. Harty informed me that his courses were often difficult, but that they were rewarding. I also heard stories about how entertaining Dr. Harty was in class – that he was energetic and often sarcastic and snarky. I never had the opportunity to take a class taught by Dr. Harty, but I always wished I had.

When I learned that Dr. Harty had not yet been interviewed for La Salle's Oral History project I was immediately interested in interviewing him, and somewhat surprised that he had not yet been interviewed. I reached out to Dr. Harty via e-mail in late February to ask if he would be willing to let me interview him, and he quickly responded saying that he would. We arranged to meet up the following week to discuss the details of the interview and to arrange a date for the interview. We met on Tuesday, February 26, 2019 for about fifteen minutes. We talked about where the interview would end up on the Digital Commons, as well as the length and other requirements. We discussed potential dates, and I asked if he would be willing to do a second interview if our first session went longer than two hours. He told me that he would be willing to do a second interview, but that he doubted he had enough interesting material to take up that much time. We discussed possible days and agreed to check our schedules and touch base the following week via e-mail to finalize a date.

Preparing for the interview, I looked over Dr. Harty's CV and his impressive list of accomplishments, and started compiling possible topics. As I did more research on La Salle's Digital Commons, as well as on the internet in general, my list of topics grew. I became convinced that two hours would not be enough time to cover all I wanted to cover. I e-mailed Dr. Harty and asked if he would be willing to plan two sessions from the start, rather than trying to do the whole thing in one sitting. He responded, saying that he was intrigued by the volume of what I thought there was to talk about, that he was not that interesting, and that humility was not one of his strong suits. We agreed to meet on March 21<sup>st</sup> at 1:00pm, and that we would schedule a second session if needed.

### **Description of the Interview:**

On March 21, 2019, I arrived at Dr. Harty's office at 12:55pm. On my way to campus, I stopped to pick up two bottles of water – one for myself and one for Dr. Harty. When I arrived in his office, Dr. Harty was sitting at his desk, using his computer. He was wearing jeans, boots, a denim button-

up shirt, and a plaid sweater vest. It was a rainy day, but his office was quite cozy. Dr. Harty has a wide array of posters on his wall, mostly pertaining to his areas of study, and the shelves along his walls were packed with books, many of which he authored. The floor of his office is particularly interesting, because while other offices have a standard tile floor, he has covered the floor of his office in what appears to be wood paneling. The office had a very inviting atmosphere. As I was putting my things down and pulling out my notebook, Dr. Harty offered me a bottle of water, saying that he had a case in the corner. I pulled out the water bottles I brought with me and we both laughed at how prepared we were.

Dr. Harty invited me to sit in a chair positioned next to his, behind his desk and angled toward his own chair. Before we started the interview, he asked me to remind him what class the interview was for. I explained to him that it was a project for my Oral History course, mentioning how much I enjoyed the class and thought that Oral History was very interesting and important. Dr. Harty agreed with me, saying that he believed it was important to get people's stories before they were gone. He then told me a funny story about his grandparents, explaining that his grandmother was the eighth daughter in her family, and that his grandfather had gone down the line asking each daughter for her hand in marriage until Dr. Harty's grandmother finally said yes. He told me that no one in his family ever knew more details about the story and that he wished someone had thought to write it down or record it for posterity. I had Dr. Harty sign the legal release form and explained where the interview would end up. I told him that I was going to use my phone to record the interview, and placed it between us on his desk.

We began the interview and it lasted three hours. Around the two hour mark, I told Dr. Harty that we had been interviewing for about two hours, but that I had some more questions for him about his career at La Salle and about his scholarly work. I asked him if he wanted to stop for the day and resume the interview at another time, but he said he would rather keep going. He said that he originally had another appointment that afternoon, but that the rain had caused his appointment to cancel. I joked that their loss was my gain, and we continued the interview. Throughout the whole interview, Dr. Harty had an open, honest, and agreeable demeanor. He is a man of a quick-wit and a sarcastic humor, and I found myself laughing often throughout the interview.

After the interview, I thanked Dr. Harty. He commented on how surprised he was that he had talked for three hours. He then asked if he would get a copy of the interview, and I explained that I would send him a copy and that it would also be posted on La Salle's Digital Commons. He joked about sending the link to all of his friends and family. He then asked me about my studies, remembering that I had majored in English for my undergraduate degree and asking about my plans for the future. We chatted for a few more minutes, I thanked him again, and I left.

### **Note on Recording:**

For recording, I used the voice memos application on my iPhone XR. I uploaded the recording to my iCloud, then downloaded it onto my computer. My iPhone saved the recording as an .m4a file, so I used an online application to convert the recording to a .wav file. I then backed it up by

uploading the .wav file to my iCloud and to my Office365 drive, as well as saving it to a USB drive. To write the log for the interview, I simply played back the recording on my phone, stopping and starting as needed.

### **Writing the Log:**

Some of the decisions I made when writing the Interview Log included:

- Omitting stories and information from certain early sections that was talked about later in the interview
- Omitting certain information that was repeated
- Omitting some anecdotes and stories for the sake of readability and length
- Naming Dr. Harty's colleagues by their full title (i.e. Dr. Bryan Narendorf) the first time they were mentioned, and by a shortened title (i.e. Dr. Narendorf) each time thereafter