Salve Regina Oral History Project

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Narrator: Daniel Titus, ’94, ‘00

Interviewer: Lindsay Wright, ‘21

Wright: The following interview was conducted with Daniel Titus on July 14, 2020 at the Rose Garden near Gerety Hall. The interviewer is Lindsay Wright, Class of 2021. So, Dan, thank you for being my first interview. So what was it like for you to grow up in Newport?

Titus: Newport was a great place to grow up. We lived down here in the Fifth Ward[[1]](#footnote-1), in a gardener’s cottage, or a cottage as they called it. I grew up with a lot of kids in the neighborhood, store across the street, high school was right up the street, the primary school was over the hill. So it was a real family-oriented type of neighborhood.

Wright: So I understand you had a relative that worked at one of the Cliff Walk Estates?

Titus: I did.

Wright: Is this where your love for Newport preservation began?

Titus: I think so, probably. My father loved history, so he was always talking about Newport history. I know his father, whom I never met, my grandfather, also liked history. So I think it something that is maybe genetic.

Wright: Yeah, definitely. So, what led you to choose Salve as an undergrad?

Titus: Well, at first, I didn’t choose Salve actually. My sisters, both of them, went to Salve. They graduated here in 1984. And then when I went to school, I didn’t want to follow in my older sisters…footprints, of course. So I chose to go into the military at first. That didn’t work out as I planned so I went to CCRI first, then I went to Bryant [University]. I was a business major, an accounting major, which I eventually got my degree here from Salve in accounting. And I went up to Bryant. I got sick when I was at Bryant and I came home and lived, and my grandmother had moved in with us- my oldest grandmother, living grandmother at the time. So I stayed at home and I said, well, I think it was my mother who probably said you should go to Salve…[It was] close, my sisters went there, and I think my mom wanted me home. I was the next to youngest so I don’t think she wanted to… lose all her kids.

Wright: Yeah, and did you have an enjoyable experience here?

Titus: Oh yeah, Salve’s been wonderful. I remember one of the first days being on campus… seeing people who would eventually become friends, doing kind things for other people… It’s just a friendly environment and it’s obviously beautiful as we sit here in the Rose Garden… looking at Wakehurst[[2]](#footnote-2) and the trees and the grounds. So yeah, it’s been a great experience, the people working here. I work with great people, but I guess you kind of expect that. You come to a university and you expect to see a certain type of person who wants to improve themself.

Wright: Great, and what was your graduating class?

Titus: That’s a good question. My graduating class I believe was 1994? And then I think it was ’99 or 2000. And then technically I owe one more class for my CHP degree but it might be listed as 2004.

Wright: Okay, so you have an undergraduate degree in?

Titus: Accounting.

Wright: Accounting? Alright and a graduate degree in?

Titus: Information Systems.

Wright: Information Systems. So right now you are serving as the Associate Director of User Support Services, correct?

Titus: That is correct.

Wright: And what is your experience with that?

Titus: Well I worked in the library here as a student. I took a work-study job as an assistant in the library. And I enjoyed it. It was great; I had a lot of fun working there with the people there. At the time the library was at McAuley Hall, so there you go I’m dating myself there.[[3]](#footnote-3) It was just a lot of fun. When I came to Salve I was extremely shy. But working in the library as a work-study actually expanded my personality in meeting new people.

Wright: Yeah, that’s amazing.

Titus: So that was nice. It was really a good time working as a librarian. But when I got to the masters program, I figured I probably should be working in IT (Information Technology). So an IT position opened. It was great. I applied for it, I got it, and I started my career in IT, which I love.

Wright: That’s exciting! So what’s your [job’s] role?

Titus: Well in technical services, we are now the TSC, Technical Services Center; we went through a name change recently. It’s really like the help desk; what we do is we’re helping everyone with their technology. Whether it’s helping students get connected to technology, or whether it’s helping faculty and staff in the classroom; teaching technology to different groups of people. We teach technology to students, faculty and staff, and also to community members. I like the Circle of Scholars or other classes that we run.[[4]](#footnote-4) We also run the testing center so people can get certified in testing. And the card office where we can give credentials to people so they can get their card activated. So we do quite a bit. We touch a little bit of everybody around here.

Wright: It definitely sounds like a busy office.

Titus: Very busy.

Wright: So you are also an adjunct faculty as well correct?

Titus: I am.

Wright: So what do you do with that?

Titus: I teach IT, since my master’s degree is in IT. And I teach mostly certifications; teaching students how to use the Microsoft Office suite, how to use technology, productivity software mostly, and how to pass these certification tests. Which, in a lot of cases, students will need in their work life. People are looking for certifications. People want students who can actually say ‘I have a demonstrate-able knowledge of this product’, versus someone just saying, ‘oh, I know how to use this product,’ let’s say Word. So that certification actually gives the employer, a potential employer, the confidence that the person knows how to use them. Seniors love the class. Mostly I have seniors because they really want to beef up the resume. I mean, they’re competing with thousands of other students looking for these same jobs, so how do you make yourself different? You bring these certifications into it.

Wright: Wow, it’s definitely a valuable… skill. So do you have a preference over working with User Support Systems versus being a faculty member?

Titus: Wow, that’s a good question. No, I work a lot with the same groups of people. Working as a faculty, I’m dealing mostly with the students, which is nice. Besides the IT class, I teach the FYT[[5]](#footnote-5), so I am working with the freshmen. Probably my favorite group to work with is the freshmen. Mostly because I see them and they’re petrified… they’re freshman, this is all new to them, the freedom, they have the ability now to do what they want to do to a certain extent and not be called out on it by their parents! So I enjoy that, but I also enjoy working with the faculty and staff. So I think they compliment each other nicely. So it’s nice to say that I have my hat in the three different areas: faculty, staff, and students.

Wright: So you also work with the work-study students.

Titus: I do.

Wright: Alright, have you observed a change in the years [in terms of] societal culture within the students?

Titus: Well, let’s see. I have always had a lot of work-study. I have about 30 a semester. And, I’d say if there has been any societal changes, technology obviously has been in that change. And I think, by that I mean technology has changed the way people relate. For instance, in the day you had face-to-face meetings, you called people on the phone. Then I saw the advent of the cell phones on campuses and now you don’t have to go to the front desk and call up from your dorm to pick somebody up. So I think the instant communication technology has definitely changed the way people react and interact with others. And I’m not saying it’s all good too, by the way. I think there are some downsides to that. As a technologist, I say that there is a downside. But yeah, that’s been the big change in how people relate to each other because of technology.

Wright: Yeah it is definitely a great observation. And so your job seems to revolve around computers and technology. So over the past 20+ years, how has this changed?

Titus: Oh wow, it changed quite a bit. In the old library systems we used to work with, everything was done; well first it was the Dewey Decimal System. And I’m not so old where I was here with Dewey Decimal, but I was here for the transition from dewy decimal to library of congress. And it was all by hand. So if you wanted a book, you’d take the book out on the card, they would stamp the card with the date… they filed it. Towards the end of my library career, we started getting much more [technologically] driven libraries. So we had these mainframes in the basement of the library, McKillop, when it was first open in 2000, and that is when they really started changing. So I’ve seen a lot of changes in the workplace with technology. We used to rent computer space. We didn’t have computer labs. We had labs but we didn’t have our own servers; it wasn’t a client- server based style model at the time. We rented it from a local contractor here in Middletown. And at the time, the labs were actually in O’Hare Academic Center. They were beautiful. They overlooked the water. So yeah, there’s been quite a bit of changes with technology based on my job.

Wright: Yeah, I’m sure. So given that Salve is a historic campus, is this challenging when incorporating more technology?

Titus: Absolutely. If you talked to the guys that pulled some of the wiring in these buildings, they’ll just tell you things like it can’t be done. Now obviously anything can be done given enough money and time, but when you try to go through a three foot thick wall, and you are trying to get a Wi-Fi signal through these buildings… these buildings, not only are they stone, but they also were designed with these frames of steel… iron frames which aren’t the best for Wi-Fi signal. So yeah, when it comes to technology, whether it’s running wires for projectors, or speakers, or Internet, it is difficult. And that’s not just true of IT, it’s also probably true of environmentalists. Retrofitting buildings to have air conditioning, and heating, but yeah they’re challenging.

Wright: I can only imagine. So due to the Covid-19 outbreak[[6]](#footnote-6), and the shift to remote learning, what challenges did IT face over the last few months?

Titus: Well, the big shift… we were lucky at Salve that we had the extended spring break. So we had two weeks. While students were enjoying their extra week off, we were in, I don’t want to say panic mode, but we were in ‘what are we going to do mode.’ Mostly because there was no direction. And I am not saying that as a negative from an administrative point of view but also from the government… the state government or even the federal government, we didn’t know what to expect. Are we coming back? If so, when? How is this going to affect us? It’s easy to sit down and be a Monday morning quarterback but I don’t think people knew what this was like. So our big challenge was how do we get…

[At this point in the interview, we were briefly interrupted by campus tours and took a momentary pause]

Wright: So we just had to take a brief pause due to some noise in the garden but we are going to pick up on our last question, which was how Covid-19, the outbreak, and the shift to remote learning, and what challenges IT had faced in the past months?

Titus: … We had to face how to get everybody online remotely. And we weren’t so much concerned with students having the ability to get online. Students were going to get online, I had faith in that. We were more concerned about how are we going to get faculty not only online, but using the tools we have to teach online. And it’s two different methods of teaching. Teaching in the classroom is so much different than teaching with technology. And I think it came as a big shock to a lot of faculty like ‘wow how am I going to teach this?’ They didn’t even know what to expect. So… the big concern with Covid-19 is actually getting the faculty up and running and getting the students to appreciate the learning abilities of online learning. Besides that, the second part of it was that we had to also now deal with staff. [The] staff [was] no longer coming in. So what do we do with staff? Salve made the decision that we were all going to still work, but work remotely. Our job required that. And we were able to get staff up and running online. So that would require sometimes giving laptops to bring home. Actually a lot of times bringing laptops home, getting them the necessary software like VPNs[[7]](#footnote-7) to connect to different services we have here at Salve so they can still perform their job functions. And that was very difficult, mostly because we were focused mostly on faculty and students. As we should have been… that’s priority one is let’s get the faculty up and running so the students can learn. But then there were a lot of uncountable little problems like ‘this student doesn’t have good Wi-Fi. What do we do?’… or their computer’s old. So we had to lend out computers to students. I think even in Malcolm’s[[8]](#footnote-8) office at times [he] gave out hotspots to students to they could still learn. And that’s just the learning part, not to mention the home part. Some of the times some of these students come from families where there may be a lot of students, so how do you concentrate? So from a technology point of view, we were really busy just trying to get them up and running and comfortable with the technology. And I think that went fairly well. It took a couple weeks… I think three weeks into the Covid announcement, most people were doing well. Some faculty were more bold for trying things. Some faculty used just email to communicate… even versus using something like WebEx or a synchronous session. Faculty members chose non-synchronous method where they put stuff up there … then they talked about it synchronously. We had some foreign students, from Japan we had some students. How do they learn? They’re completely on the other side of the world so faculty had to figure out ways to get around that. … From an IT perspective, it was exciting! And I am proud to say that I didn’t miss a day of work through the whole thing. I was here every day on campus, supporting them for their needs. So it was a lot of fun. I hate to say I enjoyed it because it’s a terrible thing, a challenge, but it is what I enjoyed.

Wright: So what do you see ahead for the coming academic year in terms of technology and a shift to semi-remote?

Titus: Well, like we talked about earlier off the tape, we’ll see what really does happen and what type of learning this is going to be. [There are] a lot of factors that will play into this that we don’t have the answers for. Currently we are working with three separate models. Whether we are fully in person, semi-remote, or completely remote. I obviously hope for the best. I think we’ve been lucky here in Rhode Island. I think we’ve had some really good luck at containing the virus and the spread of the virus. We’ll see how that goes at the end of the summer because it is a resort town, so you don’t know who is coming in and who is going. And when we get students back on campus we’ll have to see how that goes as they return from their different places. So I think it will go well, the structure is in place. The classrooms are now being worked on so the faculty can teach these hybrid classes where half the class is in and half the class might be out. How the faculty members work that out I think is going to be up to them. Whether they swap days or whether they assign people certain modes of learning. But from a technology point of view, I think we are going to be well covered. As a matter of fact, I think we are going to be much better covered than a lot of schools. I actually attribute that to a lot of things. I attribute it to obviously dedicated staff and faculty, dedicated IT, but also good direction from administrators telling us this is what we are going to do and now make it happen. And then backing that up with funds needed [because] everything costs money. So having that money available is nice. It’s been expensive I think but it’s the only way to go.

Wright: So would you say you are optimistic?

Titus: I’m always optimistic.

Wright: Good way to live by. So you also have a background in CHP, cultural and historic preservation, and a passion for Newport preservation. So what are your thoughts on Salve’s architecture?

Titus: Oh I love this whole area. As you alluded to earlier, I love the area because I have a family history here. My father, grandfather, great-grandfather all worked on these estates. As a matter of fact, the estate right next to The Breakers. My grandfather was here when Salve first bought Ochre Court, or was given Ochre Court. He was there at the events. Everyone knew each other in this area; all these different groundskeepers. And for the most part it was their neighborhood; it wasn’t the neighborhood of the wealthy, they weren’t here much. So I have a passion for it. I also grew up right down the street hearing the stories about it from my father. And not only from my father but also from other people in the neighborhood. My neighborhood was the grandchildren and children of servants. Or of groundskeepers. Or of chauffeurs. I’ve know people whose parents were chauffeurs, groundskeepers, maids, everything. So it was nice, this is normal part of growing up in Newport during that time. Probably the tail end versus where my father would actually [know] the groundskeeper, they knew the chauffeur. And my father had wonderful stories of growing up in the Ochre Point district. Some of which are on file by the way at [the] Preservation Society [of Newport County] from his oral interview. So… it was kind of ingrained in me that this is normal. The downside is that when you grow up in Newport, you feel like, well, this is normal but it’s not normal… This is far from normal to see a Tudor mansion or an Italian mansion on the ocean. This is not normal for the average person. So it explains why people come to Newport, I get it.

Wright: Do you have a favorite building?

Titus: From Salve? Yeah I probably do have a favorite building and the building is probably one that nobody would guess. My favorite building is probably Watts-Sherman House.

Wright: Really? Why is that?

Titus: Yeah I love the Watts-Sherman House. I love the style, I love the architects that designed it: Richardson and White, some of my favorites.[[9]](#footnote-9) I also love the way you can see how it’s kind of grown. Here it was this beautiful little beginning of a style, the shingle style. And then it kind of grew a little bit from Dudley Newton additions and then the Baptist Home put on this addition when it was turned into a retirement center.[[10]](#footnote-10) As a kid I remember going there with my father who had a business. He would also, after he retired from the military, he ran a business of lawn services, cleaning out peoples houses, you know just basic handyman [work]. And we actually cleaned out the Baptist Home[[11]](#footnote-11) after they moved out. And they moved to their new John Clarke Retirement Center,[[12]](#footnote-12) so I got to see that as a kid and maybe that stuck out to me. I just think it’s a beautiful piece of architecture. Now, that being said, I am not saying the others aren’t. I’m just saying that if there was one house that I feel very fond of, it’s the Watts-Sherman house. [It is] very livable.

Wright: It’s definitely cool how you get to see it as the Baptist House transition to a dormitory. And so over the years, we see how Salve has constructed or rebuilt several buildings on campus. Namely, Miley, O’Hare, McKillop Library, and the Chapel. Do you think we kept preservation in mind when constructing these campus additions?

Titus: Well, I think in some instances, for instance the Chapel. I think the Chapel is an amazing adaptation for this campus. I just think they did a really good job and same with Rodger’s Rec.[[13]](#footnote-13) Maybe less so but that’s just due to massing. It’s a big building. But often tourists will come through town and they’ll say ‘What stable was this?’ so they don’t know this. Now a case like Miley I guess I am kind of different. With Miley and O’Hare and even the old Baptist addition on the Watts-Sherman House, I think they were nice. They were International style and it kind of in a way represented its only little microcosmo; that style is one area, in one neighborhood. So it was kind of sad to see Miley Hall get renovated or O’Hare get renovated and potentially the Baptist Home they are going to remove that wing. But like anything, things change in life. Learning changes in the case of O’Hare Academic Center. You need to change the function of this building. Same with the dormitories. So yeah, I think they’ve done overall a good job. Everybody hates to look at the old pictures where Miley was and they see Whiteholme.[[14]](#footnote-14) But… talking to my friends who actually grew up [here], they’ll tell you that is was actually in really bad shape. There probably really was no way to save it. And even if there was in 1962, that wasn’t what they were thinking of. Even in 1967 when they built O’Hare Academic Center, which was built on open land so they didn’t really destroy anything besides pathways and some gardens, it was what they were thinking of… how are we going to build an academic building? And it’s interesting. Salve [was not] the only school here. There were a lot of other little schools here. There was the Hatch Preparatory School up the street here.[[15]](#footnote-15) They owned a lot of these different buildings up on Bellevue Avenue. So we weren’t the only school. I think we were the ones that… kept pace with society, that’s why we are still here.

Wright: That’s a great way to look at it! So Salve also has a lot of unique trees around campus. Can you tell me a bit about your knowledge on this?

Titus: Well I just like trees. I was a gardener actually on an estate. I went into service as a gardener. It helped pay for the first couple years of school at Bryant and at CCRI. I mostly worked at a different end of town. I worked over at Beacon Hill, although I occasionally went over to Narragansett Ave at Starboard House. I worked there when I was hired out, so I always had a fondness for plants. My mother was a gardener. Like I said, my father grew up on estates. He knew all the trees. So as kids he would drive by and go ‘Oh, that’s a fern leaf beech tree and it was probably planted a hundred and fifty years ago’ and as a ten-year-old kid, a hundred fifty years ago… I thought my father was ancient, this tree is ancient! I just gravitate toward trees because I like trees. I just love the different trees they have here. I think we’re lucky in Newport in general and definitely Ochre Point Avenue- in this whole district in particular- because these wealthy, when they built their estates, wanted to have different trees. So they brought in all [these] amazing varieties of trees. Whether it’s the different types of beech trees. Whether it’s the fern leaf or the copper-beech, or weeping beeches that we see around here, or that beautiful London Plane Tree that we see over by Wakehurst which is just a spectacular tree. [Begins pointing to the large tree on the front lawn of Gerety Hall] It’s that one over in the corner. It’s just this massive tree. You wonder, how does this tree stand up by its own weight. It’s so massive. So it’s really nice just to look at the trees. But, I don’t know which tree is my favorite. If I had to say, my favorite tree definitely was the one behind the library… as a kid I used to play on it. Like I said, my older sisters went here so we would come up here and we would play in the trees and at the time, the library wasn’t even here, so it was a big open field. But… things happen. I would say now, my favorite tree is… I am particularly fond of the cypresses they have… the London Plane I like too. I just like the look of that tree. So yeah, there were a lot of different trees. Salve has done a really good job of taking care of the trees. As we talk here today, if you look over to the side you can see some caution tape because a limb has fallen off one of the beech trees. The European beech trees over by the maze. It’s just that time of their life where they are dying . These trees were brought here in the 1880s and were twenty, thirty, forty years old then. So we are talking about trees from the 1850s that were brought here. And now one hundred and seventy years later they are really approaching the end of their life. Salve has extended that life with I think good maintenance and proper care. But as they say, nothing cheats death. So these trees, as you soon see, will fall. I hope that they do not stop planting more of these specimen trees. I know they have been with this whole push towards getting an arboretum so that’s nice.

[momentary pause for background noise]

They are starting to plant trees behind the library. You can see there is a tri-color beech which isn’t something I would say they would have necessarily planted in the 1880s or 90s, but tastes change. They also have a lot of different types of bushes here that are beautiful…it’s tough to maintain all this. I don’t know how they maintain all this. It’s a lot.

Wright: They do it!

Titus: Yeah, they do it.

Wright: So, wrapping up, what do you see for the future of Salve in the coming years?

Titus: Oh, I see a bright future. Like I said, I think we are agile. That’s one thing Salve has going for it. We’re agile, we can move quickly, respond quickly. But we also have dedicated faculty and staff and I think what you find with Salve is [that] there is something there that you can’t really put your finger on. It’s the intangible of Salve. And that’s why people come here… from talking to all my freshman to working with the Strategic Compass Committee, Salve offers something that others don’t offer. And we see this now even in Covid times. We were concerned with enrollment and come to find out, we did very well. As a matter of fact, we did much better than expected because we do offer that something. And I think that something is a smaller school. A school that has I said a valued stance behind it but welcomes all peoples. So I think that makes a difference. So it’s those intangibles. I think most parents are sold on the Cliff Walk and mansions frankly. But I think once students get here they actually see [the intangibles]. And that’s what I say when I teach these classes [is that] I don’t worry about my students. They’re all good students. We work here for a reason and that reason is why we’re here. Everybody is kind and they’re caring. One of the first things I said on the interview was when I came here, one of my first days I saw someone being kind. And it was a girl who I later got to know well, an international student, we hung out in the same group. She helped an old lady up the stairs at Ochre Court to go to the Chapel. There was an old lady going to the Chapel and I saw her run down the stairs and take this old lady and help her to the chapel. At the time [the chapel] was [in] Ochre Court. It kind of always just stuck with me and I think that’s kind of what Salve represents. So I see a very bright future. I mean, there’s going to be growing pains along the way, programs will come, programs will go. But that’s true of any school… things change. But I think Salve does have a bright future…

1. Fifth Ward is a neighborhood West of the Salve Campus. It is known for its working class resident population. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Wakehurst is the previous name for Gerety Hall. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. McAuley Hall served as Salve’s library until 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Circle of Scholars is a Salve program that fosters intellectual growth to anyone over the age of 50 through seminars across campus. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. First Year Transitions- a course required for all incoming freshman. The course center’s around a variety of topics depending on a professor’s expertise. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Covid-19 is the virus that caused a global pandemic. In March 2020, Salve made the switch to remote learning to slow the spread of the virus. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Virtual Private Network [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. J. Malcolm Smith. The Vice President of Student Affairs and Acting Dean of Students. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. HH Richardson and Stanford White- renowned architects responsible for the design of numerous Newport estates. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Dudley Newton, a famous architect from Newport, RI. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Prior to the Salve Regina purchase, the Watts-Sherman house was once the location of the Baptist Home of RI- a retirement center. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The new the Baptist Home of RI, located on Valley Road in Middletown. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Rodger’s Recreation Center- Home to Salve’s recreational and athletic facilities. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Located on Narragansett Avenue, Whiteholme was previous estate that was torn down in 1963 for the construction of Miley Hall. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The former Winchendon School currently located in Massachusetts. However, between 1951-1961, Hatch Preparatory School owned several estates along Bellevue Avenue and Ruggles Avenue. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)