

Interviewee: Lynne McKenney Lydick
Interviewer: Megan Murphy
Date of Interview: October 9, 2007
Location: Worcester, MA



Abstract: Lynne McKenney Lydick was born in Maine in 1955. She is married with three children and lives in Worcester, MA. In this interview she talks about how important it was for her to give birth to her children at home and the causes she is involved in including Planned Parenthood, Worcester Women's History Project, the Jane Fund, and the Red Cross. She is passionate about her one-woman show, "Yours for Humanity – Abby," about the life of Abby Kelly Foster that she performed at the Worcester Women's History Project's Women 2000 conference and continues to perform in schools and venues throughout the community.

Megan Murphy: Can you please tell me your full name?

Lynne McKenney Lydick:: Lynne McKenney Lydick

MM: When and where were you born?

LML: Bangor, Maine on June 21st, 1955.

MM: Do you have any children?

LML: Three children, Thomas age fourteen, Driscoll age twelve and Madeline age nine.

MM: Are you married?

LML: Yes

MM: How many years?

LML: Twenty-six years

MM: Can you tell me about your parents?

LML: Yes, my mother is still alive. She was born in New South Wales, England in 1926, my dad died eighteen years ago. He was born in Lubec, Maine in 1918. They met during

World War II. My mom was what they affectionately call a war bride.

MM: How old was your mom when she came over here?

LML: My mom came over when she was twenty.

MM: And she met your father in the, the states?

LML: In England.

MM: Oh in England, oh.

LML: Yes my dad was stationed there during World War II. And they met and ah my mother came here and they got married here.

MM: Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood?

LML: Oh my childhood. I had a very great childhood. [pause] With one younger brother and an older sister. I remember fabulous times with family and I'd say a very sheltered life... but great traditions and, and we lived in a big, old house and we walked to school. I had a great time in school, all elementary, middle and high school. I loved going to school. Lots of friends, it was just really, quite idyllic.

MM: Can you tell me your favorite tradition as a child?

LML: My favorite tradition. I guess it would be at Christmas time, we, as a family went over town, as we called it, which was the town across the river that had all the stores and we would go down Main Street, and it would be all decorated for the holidays. My father gave us five dollars and he and my mom did shopping and we children sort of spilt up with our five dollars and bought everyone a Christmas present and had money left over with the five dollars. Ah and then we'd meet back up and have hot chocolate or, at a local restaurant right on Main Street. So it was really like Main Street USA.

MM: That's great.

LML: Yeah, great times.

MM: That's wonderful. So how long did you live in Maine for?

LML: I moved from Maine when I was twenty...-five, I must have been. I moved to California with some friends who were moving there. And then I moved back about a year later. I lived in Boston and my husband, Tom and I had actually met the first day of high school but had gone our separate ways and we ended up getting back together when

I came back from California. I came back from California in June of 19...80 and we got engaged in February 81 and were married in July 1981.

MM: Where did you guys live when you were first married?

LML: When we were first married we had moved from New York, Tom was living in New York but we he had moved up to Massachusetts. We lived in Boston. We lived on Beacon Hill for the first two years we were married.

MM: And when did you move to Worcester?

LML: Moved to Worcester in 1986

MM: And, so your kids were all born here?

LML: All three children were born here in Worcester at home

MM: Ohh

LML: At our home on North Parkway. We had a midwife and an attendant, a midwife and a midwife assistant for all three births. So if we leave that house it would be very difficult because all three were born there.

MM: Can you tell me more about those births?

LML: Oh, that was uh, that was just a great experience. Tom and I had been married for twelve years before we had children. We had gone through infertility testing and all that when we had decided we wanted to have children and then we couldn't get pregnant we went for some testing and so we did go through one cycle of in vitro and uh and out of that Thomas was conceived and actually he was a twin. They have this event called disappearing twin. Most women don't even know that they are pregnant but when you are going through any type of infertility issue, they monitor you every day or every couple days, so we knew that there were two fetuses, anyway about eight, eight or nine weeks, one sort of disappeared. So Thomas was, we call him our test tube baby. And we had decided that we had gone through so much technological interference that we just really didn't want to go to the hospital. We wanted to just stay home and have the baby like they do in other parts of the, other countries where infant mortality rates are far lower than they are here in the United States. So a friend of mine was a midwife assistant and her midwife lived in Brimfield, BJ MacKinnon. So we contacted her and had her over for dinner to decide if we wanted to have the baby at home. And we decided that we wanted to. The thing that made it so different is that with a midwifery appointment when you're pregnant, it's an hour long appointment. As opposed to when you go to an obstetrician, it's three minutes with the doctor himself or herself and the rest of the time is nurses weighing you and taking your temperature and all that. So we just liked the idea

of not going anywhere. That when it was time to have the baby, the baby would just come and we'd already be home and plus I didn't want to pack a suit case. Ok, no that's not the real reason.

MM: [laughs]

LML: But we had, I was very lucky, with all three births. Driscoll and Madeline, Driscoll is my middle son and Madeline, we didn't have any technological interference with those births. We got pregnant naturally, which I guess can happen quite often, I guess they base it on hormones or something. I don't know. But all three births were from beginning to end, from first labor pain to birth, two and a half hours.

MM: Oh my gosh.

LML: At home.

MM: That's amazing

LML: Yeah and I and I chalk it up a lot to being at home. And actually after Thomas, I ended up going to the hospital with, one of the midwives stayed with my mom, my niece and the baby and Tom and the other midwife and I went to the hospital because I had a retained placenta. So I called my obstetrician because I *had* gone and seen an obstetrician and asked if he would be back up if anything should go wrong at home that we could just go to the hospital. And he had agreed. So I called and, actually it was his partner that met us there. When the nurses saw me and they said, well where's the baby. And I said well no we had the baby, the baby is at home. But I didn't deliver the placenta, so here we are. So several of the nurses said how smart it was to stay home. Because women come into the hospitals and immediately they are told that they are not progressing, they are progressing, this is too fast, that is not fast enough, you got to do this, they hook them up to all of these monitors for insurance purposes obviously and it, and it is considered that that you are a sick person and you are going to have problems, so we are here to stop the problems, as opposed to being home and the midwives, I think for the first two babies, stayed overnight. And then Maddie, I had Maddie during the day so she came and we had the baby and then off they went. But just a whole different feeling, of being in control as opposed to someone else telling you what is going on. Basically your body is in control anyway. So...

MM: That's so inspiring.

LML: Yeah, it was great. We just, I mean it isn't for everybody, obviously. You need to really, and I think the thing that made it easy for us to think about was not only that we had all that medical intervention, but we also, I just kept on thinking every other woman that has had a baby has gone through it so, and of course at home there are no drugs given or anything like that and that that was also fine but I was also very lucky. Two and half

hours from beginning to end actually after Thomas', when we had Driscoll, I said I wanted two and a half hours and we did that with Thomas and we are really going to work it and get this baby out in two and a half hours and we did the same with Maddie. We just said, we are not going to have any long labors, no I wouldn't do that. And it was great, we were at home and we had friends come visit and within an hour of the birth. It was just great, great.

MM: That's really great.

LML: And you, the other thing is when, when we first, before we decided, we had gone to one of these birthing classes and something that one of women said in that class, we only went to two and then we said no, and then we just aren't going to do this anymore, one of the things this one woman said was that she had gone to a third world country and she said that when she was there, there was a women in the village who was having a baby and it was just a big celebration. It wasn't as though she was sick, it wasn't as though horrible things were going to happen, it was part of the whole life cycle and she said it made her, and everyone was involved, the women in the village were involved, and she said, it made her realize that in the United States, you are never part of a birth until you are giving birth. I mean sure people now go into the, the delivery rooms and all that stuff but it isn't the same experience as being surrounded by, we didn't have anybody, other than my mother and my niece, at the births, but other people have extended families, there in the birthing room and that just really, really interested me when she said that. That until you are experiencing it you have no idea what it's all about. You have no forethought of, of what's going to happen to you until you're giving birth.

MM: Well I've noticed how you have been talking about we so much and I feel like a, it seems like a big part of having a home birth is making it you and your husband like the whole process. Like it seems like the husband or the father is so much more a part of it then he would in a hospital setting.

LML: Well I think so, although I kid him that his was one single cell, so what is the big deal about that.

MM: laughs

LML: But because with Thomas I had precipitous labor so I had one labor pain when I was talking to this friend who had been the midwife's assistant, and I literally dropped the phone and so Tom picked up the phone and she said call the midwife, it was ten days early. She said call BJ right now; she is going to have that baby soon. So Tom called BJ and this friend had called back and BJ lived in Brimfield so it was going to be forty-five minutes before she got there, so I said ok Tom you are just going to have to check out how does this look, how does that look and you can see any blood, can you see a head, can you see because she really thought that I was going to have the baby. Literally I had

the baby twenty minutes after the midwife arrived.

MM: Oh my gosh.

LML: So Thomas just wanted to come when he came. So Tom, that whole first part was, he was pretty nerved up, so we figured Driscoll would be the same, maybe even in an hour. Sometimes your births get like half time as they go on so we got several books from BJ and he was learning what he might need to do should he need to do it if BJ is on her way there. It is, I mean just thought that is so much more personal when you're home. You're in your own space, and lots of people that knew that we were going to have the baby at home thought that number one we were crazy cuz first off it is going to be painful and we said yes, and my midwife said, it is pain with a purpose. It is not like a broken leg that just hurts you. You hurt and then you have this beautiful baby. But it's also one of those things that when you are in your own home and people are saying where are you going to have the baby, well I said I guess whatever room I happen to be in.

MM: laughs

LML: Hopefully I'll be in the living room, but I mean the bedroom, but if I'm not (pause) I can have the baby outside I don't know, well of course, and the more they were shocked the more I said oh outside maybe by the swings

MM: laughs

LML: People were very distressed, you know and really did not, did not like to hear of that, which is very odd because that is really is the power the body takes over. So it's really just being a part of it opposed to considering it something you have to go through. Again I was so lucky, two and a half hours, you can stand anything for two and a half hours.

MM: It's true.

LML: But I think that whole process of being home made it a two and a half hour birth as opposed to a 36-hour, 42-hour birth.

MM: Did you um experiment with different massage and different positions?

LML: We didn't really. We didn't have time for Thomas. Basically when they got there, I said I have to push and she said ok and then the baby came. But with Driscoll, you know I think I did have different positions but because I really wanted the baby to come in two and a half hours so I did a lot of squatting as I did with Thomas, which is something that they don't allow you to do in a hospital because you are hooked up, on your back. Yeah, so but I knew it, I pretty much knew it was going to be two and a half hours, so you know

I squatted during contractions and that sort of helped things along. For the first birth my mom and my niece were boiling water [laughs] and so there down at the kitchen sink. I wonder if they really are just out of the way for this, but really it was the compresses and all that because midwives do a whole lot of things that are just aren't always done in hospitals. Comfort the body as opposed to trying you know trying to totally control everyone, assisted, so more compresses and all that stuff. We didn't have time with Thomas, but the other two we did.

MM: I am so glad you are sharing this with me. I just did a paper on it last year.

LML: Did you?

MM: And I was so inspired, but I had never talked to anyone who had actually had a homebirth. And I was like -- I want to have a homebirth!

LML: Oh, well I tell you I-, and the thing is also being in Worcester, there are how many hospitals around? You can throw a rock from our house and hit a hospital. So, even though by the second birth this doctor said, no his partners didn't want him to say that he would be emergency back up. You go into any emergency room and they have to help you. So I mean you are not without.

MM: Right.

LML: So, you know as far as I saw it we weren't taking any chances by this decision. I really thought we were taking more chances going to a hospital. I just, I didn't, I just didn't like the whole feeling of, well the doctor gets credit for delivering the baby, number one, that's annoying, and really they just catch the baby, and sometimes they don't even do that because the nurse does that cuz the doc is who knows where. But yeah, it's a whole different, it's a whole different experience, I'm sure and the midwife, BJ is, has this whole midwifery network that they're trying to fund for homebirths. And of course homebirths for awhile, for awhile were increasing and cesareans were decreasing and now it's going the other way around, more and more women are scheduling when they are going to have their c-section, which is just really too bad. You know we put such, such, you know we hand over all of this to the medical profession, who is usually a man and has never been pregnant and has no idea about, I mean, who knows book learning. It's true, it's so. I don't know I, I am an advocate and I want everyone to have a homebirth, but it isn't for everyone, I mean you really just have to decide that you can do it because women have been doing it for millions of years [huge emphasis]. So you have to trust that your body knows what it's going to do. And if there are complications, you can get help.

MM: It really is amazing, after looking at just like what you do in a hospital having a baby that women still want to keep going back there time after time.

LML: I know, I know. And I remember speaking, I mean of course the big thing they want to go to the hospital, they want the shot, they don't want to feel the pain. Uh so I remember asking BJ, ok let's talk about the pain thing. She said yeah, it's painful, *it's* painful, there's, there's no way around it. And in the hospital you have to go through quite a bit of pain before they give you the epidural anyway.

MM: Right.

LML: And then you know, you're numb and you're just anyway. We were just very happy and and and we just had good births. We were lucky. Very lucky. I keep on talking to my neighbor. She just had her third baby. She went to a birthing center with all three babies, she was home within six hours or whatever, so that's almost as good as a homebirth.

MM: What's a birthing center?

LML: You go, it's a, you go to a place at a hospital where you give birth, but you are not overnight, and, and you put a plan together about you don't want episiotomy or this, or you don't want this to happen or that to happen. You don't want this intervention, you don't want that. So you make a birth plan and it's in rooms that look like your bedroom and you bring your own music and all that and anyway, long story short you just don't stay over night. You're not admitted and stay over night. So it's as close to homebirth as it can be when you're really in a hospital.

MM: Right.

LML: But I just think if more women saw what a real birth could be like and not the televised version of screaming women, on their backs, and I'm sure in your study that, that came about.

MM: Right

LML: Because what king wanted to see the babies being born. He wanted to sit to watch the baby being born and make sure it was his baby and so the women had the legs up and was on her back and that's how it's been done for generations.

MM: We saw a video of a beautiful birth in class of a, I think it was from Argentina, this woman was just, it was beautiful.

LML: Yeah. Yeah, just amazing. And we didn't into the whole candles and everything like that, which some people do. So but it's just an experience that I would love to have another baby, I just don't want to raise another child.

MM: [Laughs.]

LML: Friends of mine who are going to adopt, I, I and were having some issues, I did say you know that if they wanted me to be a surrogate I would do that. I don't know if Tom was as keen on it as I was, but I said I could definitely do it because I love being pregnant. I had a great pregnancy, all three pregnancies. I didn't even know I was pregnant for Driscoll until I was four months pregnant because..

MM: Oh my gosh.

LML: ee thought we had to go through all that infertility stuff

MM: Oh right.

LML: And I was four months pregnant and I didn't even know it. So it was a four month pregnancy really and but I said to her I would definitely, you know I will, I will have that baby for you. I love being pregnant, I love giving birth. And then you can have that little baby. And I will only have my three to raise.

MM: [laughs]

LML: That would be good. That would be good. Oh I'm so glad, I would like to read your paper.

MM: Oh yeah.

LML: That's, that's great.

MM: It was. It really was amazing. I was actually in Ireland last year so it was an interesting take on it from them.

LML: Well and I was reading an article in I don't know if it was *Mother*, well whatever magazine it was, can't can't remember. It was talking about Ireland in particular, they have these like birthing centers, but everybody has a midwife or a doula.

MM: Right.

LML: And, and, and women and the statistics with women have shorter, labors. Is absolutely tied to the fact that they have comforting, knowing women assisting them. And their, their labor times were in half or I think the average time was three hours or something.

MM: Which is just amazing.

LML: Amazing. Yeah, so, I'd like more women to have homebirths, but you know

people get, they really are looked as, well first off it's, it's a disability.

MM: Right

LML: It's considered a disability. That leave of absence, disability leave of absence. It's all in the way we look at things. I was just reading an article this summer, that said the mortality rate in 41 other countries is lower than the United States.

MM: Right, I remember, I mean I remember reading that in, in a natural, non-complicated birth with no problems, it's, midwives have a better percentage than hospitals do.

LML: It's amazing to me, I think, I'm trying to think of the countries, I think Cuba, Taiwan, and another have better, have lower rates of mortality than the United States. How is that possible? I don't know how it's possible. I don't know. I can't, I can't even fathom how that that, and how we continue to say we have the best health care in the world and we have to go to the hospital to have a baby. Because the other thing is that insurance will not cover homebirths.

MM: Oh really?

LML: No.

MM: I guess that makes sense.

LML: Yeah, right. Well I didn't understand it, we paid our midwife I think 1800 for the first, and this is all the hour long appointments and then of course the first two times she stayed overnight with us. All that's included and the birth and several follow up visits and and I think the second one was 2500 and maybe Maddie might have been 2500 I don't remember, but I couldn't understand it because a hospital birth at time was 10,000 dollars.

MM: Oh yeah.

LML: So it has to be more now. And I didn't understand why the insurance company wouldn't prefer to pay 1800 or 2000 dollars. But as my midwife said, if they don't have to pay anything they save themselves even the difference, so so some do, I shouldn't say all don't but a lot don't.

Pause

MM: Ok we are going to switch subjects.

LML: We're going to go? We're going to switch!

MM: I want to talk to you about your education and the schools you went to and just your experience as a woman in education.

LML: Ok, let's see. I went to two elementary schools and one junior high, seventh and eighth grade, and then high school which was a consolidated school had several different towns who didn't have their own high schools. So this was in rural Maine. I graduated in 1973 and had not really thought about doing anything else but becoming a teacher. So I applied at BU and Tulane University because my cousin, no no, Adelphi University because my cousin was going there and University of Maine, Orono, and opted to go to Orono because I really didn't want to be too far away from home and I did live on campus and I, I mean I just loved everything about it course I loved the social aspect of college far more than class work, but being in education we had all the early morning classes, eight o'clock classes across the board for all four years, so there wasn't such thing as sleeping in or missing class because a lot of your grade was based on class participation. I don't remember any, I was absolutely not a feminist in college, absolutely not. Nor really an activist, at all. I remember one Resident Assistant who had this bumper sticker on this door and it "Question Authority." I did not know what that meant. What does that mean, question authority. I, I had had no, no clue what that was all about and I remember being asked to sign the equal rights amendment. And saying ok that sounds good, I'll sign a petition for that. I really was oblivious that any type of discrimination, of any kind against women. I lived in a bubble on campus and, and that was really it. I had a great college experience and then when I left, I graduated in 77 there were no teaching jobs to be had in the state of Maine, unless you wanted to go to a little itty bitty place that had possibly a one room school house. And I didn't want to do that. So I did, substitute teaching for awhile and then I don't know what I did after that. I guess I just continued to substitute and then I did take a part time, a teacher left for maternity leave and I took her classroom and then I took another absence who was out ill and so I took her classroom and then I moved to California, in 79 and came back 80.

MM: So what subject and grade were you teaching?

LML: It was elementary, so I had it was English major in elementary education. I was certified through grade eight. My certification in courses has long since run out.

MM: So how many years did you teach for?

LML: Well, I moved to California in '79. So I think I did substitute teaching then I had those two extended teaching sessions so it would have been the end of '77 til probably the beginning of '79, well through to April because we moved to California lived with some friends in 1979. So, not long. Not long.

MM: So do you work outside the home right now?

LML: I don't have a paying job outside the home. Although I really shouldn't say that, I, I'm an actor, so I, I do several one women shows and a two person show and my husband and I do a Christmas show and mystery dinner theater. But I do a lot of volunteer work which is not paid.

MM: Can you tell me about all of the organizations that you are involved in?

LML: [Gets a great big smiles on her face]. Pulls out a piece of paper. I had to write them down because I knew, I knew I would forget one or two of them. I have been involved with the Worcester Women's History Project since 1999, when I joined their marketing department or the marketing committee in order to promote the Women 2000 Conference that we held here in Worcester. The 150th anniversary of the First National Woman's Rights Convention that was held in Worcester in 1850. So I started with the project in 1999 and but I have been a member of the Worcester Chapter of national chapters of National Organization For Women and was just elected as an at large member to the League of Women Voters. My husband and I are both members of the ACLU. I've been involved with the Mass Equality and worked hard on the campaign to stop the constitutional amendment from being added to the Massachusetts state constitution, I got involved in volunteering for the Red Cross right after Katrina and I was working on that quite a bit at the beginning -- was in involved in the Worcester at the regional office here in Worcester with helping to deploy people to actually getting people that wanted to go to New Orleans to help out. Getting them through classes there are disaster classes that they have to take. And so we were very much involved with calling people and scheduling classes and, and follow through and all that doing mailings and things. I have since sort of stepped back from the Red Cross although I get called every once in a while to help with mailings or answer the phones if they need coverage there. I've been very involved with my children's schools. They are now in three different schools. Clark Street School, Burncoat Middle School, and Burncoat High School. So I sit on the Site Councils of those, all three schools, which is really a governing body for the school and in my daughter's elementary school we still have a parent-teacher organization, so I attend those meetings. And then I am a member of the City Wide Parent Planning Advisory Council which is a city wide group of parents that meet once a month. So I have five school meetings a month that I attend, and am active in helping to raise funds for all three schools and I'm a member of Stand for Children which is an organization that actually lobbies um the state house as well as will lobby local governments if you have a chapter in your city which we are in the process of setting up for Worcester that will lobby the legislature, the people in charge of the city with the school committee as well as the city council, to lobby them for money. So I, I'm involved with that. But I think the real, the organization that really has my heart and soul is the Jane Fund, which is an organization where I'll volunteer, organization, I'll volunteer for, I sit on the board with my husband and nine other board members and we raise funds for women who can't pay for abortions services. And I think this is going on our fifth year on the board. And we are really looking at what role women play in the world based on how they are regarded as far as their ovaries as concerned and their uterus because women are really not in control of their own bodies in this country. In fact Tom and I went to a conference out in

Minneapolis because the Jane Fund is a part of The National Network of Abortion Funds. There are 104 funds in 42 different states that do what we do, raise funds for women who cannot afford abortion services. And we went to that conference and you just realize that and even though we knew this, it's, it was stunning to us that the Roe v. Wade was passed in 1973 and three years later the Hyde Amendment came in saying no government money will be used for abortion services. And so the Hyde Amendment is now 31 years old. And women, poor women, are not treated the same way as women who have money in this country, that's not news, but what it comes down to is the basic, basic right to control your body and who has the deciding factor. Should it be those white men in Washington D.C., that are making the laws? So Tom and I are very committed to that particular organization and consider that probably our, that now and ECLU, are the top social organization that that we, we consider our duty as a human being to participate in.

MM: How did you get drawn to those two organizations?

LML: Well, we were just asked this question last night by someone who is considering joining the board. When Planned Parenthood was on the Main Street in Worcester and not on Lincoln Street, it was public property and abortions were done on Saturday morning. There were women going into the clinic for other than abortions, they were going for health consultations, pap smears, breast exams, all sorts of female health appointments but the abortions were done on Saturdays. There were anti-abortion people down there harassing women and we found this out through a friend of ours, so Saturday mornings Tom and I would go down as clinic escorts, and we would meet the women that was going to go into the clinic for any number of services, not just abortions and really sort of make a bubble around her and escort her in, even though she was harassed by priests and nuns and other people, who were anti choice, verbally attacked and in some cases almost physically attacked, to try and stop her from going in. Every woman going in was assumed that she was going in for an abortion, but that wasn't the case. So we were clinic escorts on Saturdays. And then when Planned Parenthood moved to Lincoln Street it was their own property and there was a buffer zone bill in effect that actually was going to be changed to increase the amount of feet around a woman that someone cannot step into that space or else it is considered harassment. Right, the way the bill is right now, it's very unenforceable and even though they can't go onto the property they are still within what we would consider harassing space. So they are looking to extend that buffer zone to thirty feet from the women. No one can come in contact with her. So Planned Parenthood asked us as Clinic Escorts not to come because it was private property and once you're on the property you are not supposed to be harassed. And we really started being emotionally motivated after the John Salvi murders, when he murdered the two women in the clinic. And just became such a tremendous [pause] focus for us to, to take on that that women shouldn't be harassed about their own decisions and it isn't anybody else's decision, isn't anybody else's business. So we are just committed to that it's...we put a lot of effort, time and energy into fundraising for that particular cause.

MM: So when did this, when did you start considering yourself an activist?

LML: That is a good question. Well actually, I, in looking back, because I have spoken to several different college groups, as part of a group of women that were asked to speak about their activism and I sort of thinking back. First day of high school in 1969, at a time when women couldn't wear pants to school, girls, students, couldn't wear pants. We had a big meeting in the cafeteria and all, everybody in the cafeteria wanted girls to be able to wear pants to school. And I was the lone voice saying girls should not wear pants to school. So for years I've been embarrassed by that thinking back like what was wrong with me but then I realized that I was standing up for what I thought was right. I was the lone voice swimming up stream, everybody else wanted everybody to be able to wear pants. And I said no, girls should wear dresses or skirts. So, now I look back and consider that an activist moment. Ha! Because I was a sole person standing up and saying what I felt. So I sort of now given myself the idea that that was pretty courageous, that when everybody else in the school wanted it one way, I, when did I, I, I guess it was this whole control over women um and in particular the reproductive freedom. And I had friends who were more active and I think that that, that becomes a catalyst. Who are your friends and what are they doing? Are they marching in Washington. My husband and I have been, let' see we went down once and then I have since been down a couple other times, one time another time. Sort of meld together these marches. But I think it is who you, who, who are the important people in your life and what are they doing? My parents were very socially active in organizations that raised funds for very good causes. But activism for women's rights, no even though my mother was very independent, in 1973 she still had to get my father to sign the papers if she was going to have a checking account in her name. 1973, couldn't open a credit card unless you had your husband's signature. So both, both my parents were civically involved so I that, those as role models. My mom didn't work outside the home, but she did a lot of volunteer work. Um and so I, I that always was there but as far as actually getting out and being vocal and going to, going to Boston and speaking to legislators and making phone calls and calling for candidates and things like that, that, that didn't come around until, til we lived here in Worcester and had had friends that were actively involved in politics and human rights issues.

MM: Does it help for you to have your husband as an activist and like kind of a partner in that, in what you do?

LML: Oh I think it does because I know several couples who are on total opposite ends of the spectrum and politically speaking, I cannot imagine that and I, I said so what happens during elections? How, we just don't speak about it. How can you not speak about it? How, I don't, I so I, I think we are both very lucky that way, that we both are as actively involved with standing up for human rights and that goes across everything, I, I remember when Bush won the first election I, I was very much disturbed. The next day I canceled all my meetings, I just stayed home. My friends were calling me, emailing because I just couldn't believe and then when he won again, I, I went into, really into a tizzy saying how is this possible. So if I had a husband who was voting Republican, I

guess I, that would have been very lonely.

MM: I think I would have been angry.

LML: Eh yes I, I, I would admit that, I'm sure there would be some screaming moments because I just don't, I just can't see, I just can't see that whole side of things. So it does make it easier, it made it harder when our children were younger. Now my son is fourteen, he can stay at home, we used to have to find babysitters to go do all these things, and that a little bit easier. So we can both go to a meeting and then my son is home or my daughter comes with us or. But that's what, what happened whenever I was campaigning for a local politician or handing out leaflets, the kids either came with me, they held signs with me um, when they did the first marriages, the gay marriages, down at the city hall, I was babysitting a friend's little boy and he came with me, and I just, I mean I think I think that's where it needs to start, you know with the kids. I did see that with my parents, although they were very much involved, my dad was involved with running campaigns and being involved in campaigns, but my mom just became an American citizen after 61 years.

MM: Oh my gosh.

LML: She has always been a British citizen and she just this summer became dual, she now has dual citizenship. So she has never in her life voted because when she left England she hadn't voted and when she came here she was an alien, a resident alien so she couldn't vote. So this will be her first election.

MM: Is she excited?

LML: Yeah she's very excited. Now she's always been very politically minded and always been one to read and uh listen and be talking about politics, but has never participated in the process. Yeah it's going to be fun, fun.

MM: So, do you think being a mother is part of your activism?

LML: I think that's a good question. I think so, I think so on many levels. I think one that as a mother, and I'm sure my husband feels the same way, but speaking for myself, I just think that we owe the next generation much more than we're giving them. I think, think the environmental issues, the human rights issues, the financial issues, I just think we owe them trying to get things straightened out before they inherit, inherit the mess. And I also think, I think you think differently about the future. It puts you in a different place. I also think as mother, as a mother of sons, it's important that, that they know that women have a place, a very important place and, and deserve and ought and should and will have a place at the table and be important in decision-making. I, I, I find that's quite a big responsibility, to be mother of boys. To make sure that you don't, so the backlash against the white males, in my case, and that you don't denigrate men but also realizing

that men have put us in a pretty bad place in this country and you have to say it was white men and there's no way around that fact. But I think it's incumbent upon us, to uh, as mothers of boys, to to have them see that human rights as human rights and, and that's the bottom line and everybody, even if you don't like something someone does, you don't say you hate that person, you may hate what they do, you may hate what they stand for, but trying to respect that people are people and everybody comes from something, a different angle and everybody has a different motive and everybody sees things and interprets things differently, even my husband and I who are same ideologically and socially we come at that with a different point of view, so respecting that. Sometimes that's hard too. Because we'll come to the same conclusion, but in the very different route, so and also being the mother of a girl, a little girl, although I must admit she is not to be taken advantage of with two older brothers. As a matter of fact, ohhhhhh, she's niiiinnne. Anyway, there you go. Yeah, yeah I think as a, as a mother uh, you know and so much of your time is taken up with just doing the daily stuff for kids, but to make them better people. To help you know any way you can, to have them be better people, to leave the world in a better place, I think that's, I think that's incumbent upon any parent.

MM: How have you balanced your different priorities and responsibilities and roles and interests and the like?

LML: I guess how have I-

Tape Over

As I said, after Katrina, I hit a point where I just said, I just have to do everything I can do to help out whoever needs to be helped and oh goodness I, so you know when the kids were at school and when I wasn't in their school doing something, I was filling every single minute with something else that I felt had to be done. And how do I choose what to do and I can't choose and not because I felt that no one else could do it but just because I had to be part of it, I, I had to be part of the solution to whatever was going on and so I was very involved in a lot of different campaigns and voter calling and stuffing envelopes and dropping literature and collecting signatures and, and I, I think now I have just come to a determination that I really just need to step back a bit and, and focus my energies a little bit more instead of just doing everything. Do the pieces that I can do because the house is mess. Let's, let's just go on record saying *that*. **The house is a mess.** I was going to come up with a bumper sticker, I was going to print a bumper sticker about a year ago when I was in the midst of all this and I just couldn't believe that was happening and nothing is happening, it's not happening fast enough. The house was in a terrible state of decline and I was going to print this bumper sticker that said "An activist cannot keep a clean house." I thought that would absolve me and make me feel better. And it did for awhile, I said, ok I'm doing other things and the laundry is always going to be there and the dishes are always going to be there and the children are clean when they go to school and they're homework's done and but now I am stepping back a little bit and saying the whole disorganization in the house is a byproduct of just doing too, too many things and being involved in too many things so just sort of stepping back

and doing what I can do and not, just not saying yes to everything and that's the balancing act that everyone has, that really wants, to see things change and be a part of change want to make the world a better place, to just realize that sometimes you have to, and its ok to say no. So that is what I have been doing. I had a person ask me to help run their campaign, I just said I really can't, not now, not that I don't, don't want to be involved at some level, but I just can't. And before I would just say yes and then just sort of fit that in. So now I'm trying to focus my energies.

Pause

MM: Asking you some more questions about inspirations. What, who is one of your heroes?

LML: Oh, oh I have, I have so many and you know I read about anyone who is doing good works and, and they, they become my hero, getting involved with the Worcester Women's History Project, who's whole sole being is to research and document and celebrate the role that women have played in the world and in, in the Worcester world and, and beyond. One woman that I portray, Abby Kelley Foster, the nineteenth century abolitionist and women's rights activist is certainly an inspiration, how she tirelessly did what she did on the road lecturing at a time when women were supposed to be submissive and not have minds of their own and certainly not be speaking to mixed audiences. She just did it, she just did it. She was committed and for human rights, she was born on the same day as Martin Luther King Jr.

MM: Oh really?

LML: She was born 118 years earlier,

MM: Oh my gosh.

LML: And she, and they had the exact same message, human rights, not rights for blacks, rights for this group, human rights. Equality and justice for all. I would have to say she's, she's one of my biggest heroes. But then I read about, I'm not going to pronounce her name right. Mungarra who planted the trees, how she cannot be somebody's hero? You know and, and in everyday life people just doing things to improve other people's lives. Those are my heroes, those are the people that inspire. And then you say to yourself oh so I'm complaining about laundry the house being a mess, and other people don't have a house. They don't have this they don't have that, so I'm, those are the day-to-day inspirations, the people that keep on. And I know several feminist activists that are, have spent years for reproductive rights and are still working, thirty, forty, well they were working before Roe v Wade so forty, fifty years involved um with reproductive freedom and they keep on going, um they're, they're inspirational.

MM: How did you get involved in acting and playing that role?

LML: Well that particular role, I, my mom was active in community theater, so I grew up with my mother going to rehearsals or being in plays with my mother. We didn't have a drama group in high school, although we did do a senior play, and then when I went to the University they had a very fine theater department there. I was in a couple plays. Mostly friends who were in the theater and they did um they had to do directing classes and, but I, I, I and I so I did community theater and then when I got involved with the Worcester Women's History Project and part of that celebration, the 150th celebration, Women 2000, they hired a playwright from New York to write a play, a dramatization of the 1850 convention and they held and acting, they held a call. They brought equity actors from New York and all over so it was an equity show. There were several of us that did get in the show we had to go audition and I played Woman with Basket. It was a lovely role, I delivered speaking lines, so that was, that was very exciting for me to be in an equity production and have lines, but so that's where I learned about Abby. And friends of mine, actually Carolyn Howe, who's a professor here, co wrote the play, uh "Yours For Humanity- Abby," which is the way Abby signed a lot of her letters, yours for humanity. She and Karen Board Moran were writing this play because we realized that we wanted to get not only word about Worcester's role, but about the role that women, particularly Abby Kelly Foster, played in all of the social reform movements of the time but in particular abolition and women's rights. So they were writing this play based on letters and accounts of her speeches. And actually I, I actually asked if I could be Abby. And I always say maybe I didn't ask, maybe I begged. And I think they were pleased because I was in the project and so I helped with the creative consulting part of it the dramatization of it. We, the play started out as an hour and a half long and we whittled it down, because I strongly felt it needed to be 35 minutes or less in order to have time for questions and answers and still fit into a classroom time period or civic organizations only have so much time or programs at historical museums or societies or libraries so that's, that's how it all came about. The premiere was on, was January 2004 and I am currently doing bookings in 2008. So

MM: Oh my gosh.

LML: Yeah, she's, she has a life and I would love if I could take her everywhere she went. That's probably not going to happen. I have had offers to play in Ohio and Washington DC that unfortunately for different reasons didn't happen. Yeah, she, she lectured in 63 towns in Connecticut alone and these just weren't one, one day lectures, they were several days in a row. So she does have a life of her own. So I'm hoping to take her, I've been, I've performed her at Holy Cross couple times, but we'll take her whenever anybody will have her.

MM: So, it's, it's a one-woman show?

LML: It's a one-woman play. Yes.

MM: That's very exciting.

LML: I brought a flyer for you. So you could see it.

MM: I would love that.

LML: But and on our website we, we'll soon be putting up where I will be performing. Because more of the places are open to the public. We are in the process of writing local cultural council grants to, to take to different places and but again that's all volunteer getting the bookings, you, I mean working at getting the bookings is labor intensive, but it's great to go to a school. And then speak to the kids after. Especially in Worcester here, where some kids have never seen a live performance and sure haven't seen anybody up close because I am always, I try and do it with kids sitting on the floor and and then I'm six or seven feet away. So I'm right there. They participate in the drama because I lecture to them as if they were the townspeople. So the questions afterwards are great. I also love to perform to adults because you can just be, you can be a little bit more savvy, you can take longer pauses, you can stop and give looks, with kids you sort of have to keep on going. You don't want to lose their attention. So it's a different, different type of acting experience to perform in front of adults, but

MM: It's great it's such a wide age range.

LML: It is. I, I, yes, I have performed for six years old to 100, I think was the oldest person that came to see me somewhere. And we don't know about her and she was so instrumental and, and in her day she was credited for starting the organized women's movement because in 1843 she spoke at Seneca Falls five years before the Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention and she was instrumental in pulling Lucy Stone on the lecture circuit for anti slavery as well as Susan B. Anthony. Both of those women went to women's rights and Abby's forgotten for lots of different reasons but now it's time to get her back there. And people that research abolition know, know of her obviously and I was just performing at the Antiquarian Society for Teaching American History Conference and there was someone there from Yale and he was speaking, his whole lecture was going to be on Abby. It ended up, he had to change it at the last minute but he did reference Abby and then I did the performance and he was saying that he feels that she is *the* unsung hero of the abolitionist movement. You know, when you read about a lot of the abolitionists, you read about the white males that were in control. And of course Abby was voted onto the business committee in 1840 and that that broke the movement apart for a bit because even though these men were not for slavery, they weren't necessarily for women's rights, all of them. So when she was on the business committee and female on a business committee that was a break there, for some people so, she's a woman we need to, she's a role model, really for, for human beings, not, not just women, that she dared to do what she did, to do at a time when it was unthinkable for a woman to go, to travel on her own, unthinkable, and she went places far and wide, Michigan, and Indiana, Ohio, places that took days to get to and she went [pause] so, that's, that's how I'm doing Abby and I'm also doing Clara Barton on, on my own. The project owns the "Yours for Humanity" script, so, but Clara Barton I'm researching and doing on my own, and I'm reading some of her Civil War letters, another woman who's

never been given the credit. Everyone remembers her for finding, for founding the American Red Cross, but , or they know she was on the battle fields, but what they don't realize is that she was 40 when she went to the Civil War, she had to beg to go to the Civil War. She was the first person to really realize that, that the medic wagons had to be in the front and not far back because there's no time to treat then. And then she was sixty when she founded the American Red Cross again something that she was tireless and had to petition and had to lecture, and had to meet with government officials and then she was really a, I think her finest moment or what she feels was one, was the biggest accomplishment was getting the United States to adopt the Geneva Treaty, which we know this particular administration is not keen on, of holding the tenets of that. But, anyway she's a woman, I'm trying to get, to get more women to know more about, how involved she was and at what age. I mean go to the Civil War when you are forty. I mean people were dying not much later than that, you know 50 something, obviously people lived a lot longer than years before but to, to be that committed to something and do it, again as a woman, it was amazing.

MM: What major historical events have happened in Worcester since you have been around here or just what, what things have occurred in Worcester since you have lived and how have they affected you?

LML: Oh, let's see, historical events in Worcester. I'm sure I should know of some. Well we have our second female mayor, non elected, but and hmm I don't know at times I think that Worcester is you know is ahead of things and other times I think it's not. But I think, I think it's that way in every city and town that there are times when individual causes seem to, to move forward. Well, the historical event, the, I think it was May 17th 2005, when same gender couples could get married, that was historic. Down at City Hall and that was fantastic to be part of, to be part of that, to be down there and congratulating the couples, that was really great. Well I don't know, that's a tough question, and I should, I should, I want other people to know the answer to that, because maybe I'm not appreciating what has been going on when I have been busy doing other things, [laughs] sometimes it's stepping back and saying oh that's right, yeah ok right that's that did happen uh, but I'd say that, I mean Worcester, I don't know how many couples married that day, but that was historic, a lot of historic things happened in the past that people don't know about obviously, but what's happening now. Good question.

MM: How do you define success in life and has this changed over the time, over time?

LML: Success in life, I guess, I would guess I would just have to say, it does sounds corny, like one of those cards you pick up in the shop, but I really do think that if you, success is really the number of people you touch in your life, and making people's lives better. Working, working with people who are dedicated to improving people's lives. Yeah, I think that's, I think that's the whole reason we are here, is to leave, to leave, leave a legacy of inspiration or you know I was really honored when a friend of mine was asked why is she active and she said because she knew me and I was sort of role model and to me that is success because now I have touched her who in turn who will she touch

and so I mean I think that's success, leaving the world a better place and helping, helping others when, when they need it.

MM: What advice would you give women today and in future generations just to help them be activist?

LML: To help them be activists or just?

MM: Yes to help them be activists and to help, just the issues for women that need to be addressed.

LML: I don't know. I guess, there are so many issues that need to be addressed that I, I personally just say to myself, I just don't have the energy for that now, it's something I want, want to participate in, but I just can't do it now. I think it's, I guess one thing I would just say is to not shy away from something because it is controversial to, if you feel, if something is important to you, that you need to do it, that you don't not say something in public because it's not popular, and if you let some things slide by or some things said and don't address it because I think that that keeps things going as opposed to its ok to take a stand on the way you feel and there's certain things you don't want said or you're not in agreement and its ok, ok to say that. I, I guess, I guess just finding something that you can't reevaluate to because I think a lot of activists have not necessarily felt certain things but be able to relate to other people and see where they are so maybe pick one or two things that you feel, that you feel passionate about to help bring about change and realize that every, every little thing you do is part of a bigger picture. That you can't, you can't cure all the ills, but you, you can help work on something. I guess the other, to spur on an activist is to surround yourself with activist people. They give you energy and keep you going as, as they did back in Abby's day, they wrote letters obviously that was the only way to correspond unless you were in the same room and these letters you read talking about trying this and trying that, don't be discouraged about this, I did this, you could try this. So I, I think that surrounding yourself with people that are activist, is one way to keep yourself, to get yourself involved number one, and then to keep you involved and your spirits at a level and not fall into despair, which you can do really easily, there are so many things going on.

MM: In working towards telling a fuller story of women in history like all these oral histories are trying to do, what do you think is necessary to be included for us to understand women in the past and what is still not told?

LML: And current women as well. That I guess is what I think, I think women's stories are important, certainly, certainly all of us, this is quoted all the time by important people, that we are all here on the shoulders of the generations before us. We could not just get where we are or have the rights that we have because they were given, they were never given to anybody, they were always heartfelt battles. One of my favorite expressions, someone gave me this as a refrigerator magnet, of "well-behaved women seldom make

history,” but I think to appreciate the everyday struggles of women gives us that fabric of life, not just, not just the Abby Kelly Fosters of the world or the Clara Bartons of the world, or the people who are public and out there and are known, but the everyday lives of women tell a social story and a cultural story and I think that that’s important to tell. And, and really nobody’s story is worthless in the history of man. Everybody’s, everybody has a little piece of the story, so I think collecting stories from all age people and, and even and collecting the everyday parts of their lives. What we learn from years ago, a lot of it is from journals, and that was people’s everyday lives, what they were doing and, and the implications that have had to their lives, to the lives of their families, the lives of the community and the community within, the larger community so I think that would be it. Everybody has a story and trying to get a cross representation of that story would be critical.

MM: Is there anything else you would like to share about your organizations and your life?

LML; I think, I think we’ve pretty well covered it. There are just so many great organizations, that are doing so many great things on a shoestring, you know on, on donations, from concerned individuals, you know I think it’s just, there’s a lot more to be done.

MM: Thank you.