

Interviewee: Stacy Lord
Interviewers: Matthew Damelio and Marny Fappiano
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Transcribers: Matthew Damelio and Marny Fappiano



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Abstract: Stacy Lord was born in Holden, Massachusetts in 1969, grew up in Princeton and moved to Worcester in 1996. She attended Wachusett High School and Anna Maria College where she discovered her love for the arts. Stacy is a loving partner as well as mother to two boys. Throughout her life, Stacy had many jobs involving the arts and now is a devoted middle school art teacher in Worcester. In this interview Stacy discusses her love for the arts and the positive effects it has on her life, the rewards and struggles of being a teacher, and her dedication in the classroom with her students and at home with her boys. She also expresses the various community services she is involved in such as Girls Inc. and stART on the Street in Worcester, which is an art, music, and performance festival. Stacy shares that she owns the largest LEGO collection in New England and expresses the joy it gives her and her sons. In this interview, Stacy also highlights the importance of perseverance and equality for women and defines success as happiness.

MF: We are completing a city-wide oral history of the lives of Worcester women aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester. We are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, politics and community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with all of the above. Thank you for your help with this important project. So I am going to ask for your consent. Do you, Stacy Lord, give permission for us to record your oral history on Friday, September 29, 2017?

SL: Yes

MF: Okay. I'm Marny Fappiano

MD: And I'm Matt Damelio. How are you, Stacy?

SL: Very good, thank you.

MD: Alrighty. What is your full name including both maiden name and married name, if applicable?

SL: It's Stacy Anne, with an 'e'. Lord. L-O-R-D.

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MD: Okay. When were you born?

SL: 1969.

MD: Okay, Have you ever married?

SL: Yes.

MD: What was the name of your significant other?

SL: Annette.

MD: Do you have children?

SL: I have two boys.

MD: Do you have grandchildren?

SL: No.

MD: What cultures and ethnicities do you identify with your family background?

SL: White.

MD: Okay. Tell me about your parents.

SL: My parents were both born here in the states in Massachusetts. My mom was born in Sterling, Mass. and my dad was born in Fitchburg, [MA].

MD: Where have you lived throughout your life?

SL: Princeton, [MA].

MD: Okay. Did you grow up in Worcester?

SL: Princeton, Mass.

MD: Okay Princeton, Mass., that's what I thought. What was the neighborhood like generally?

SL: It's farm country out in Princeton, so I grew up in East Princeton and the closest house was about a mile away.

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MD: Did you like that?

SL: Yes, I did. I did. Very much into reading and drawing and stuff. So it was nice.

MD: Awesome. Where do you live in the city now?

SL: I live over by Elm Park.

MD: Elm Park, Okay. Have you lived in multiple areas of Worcester?

SL: Yes.

MD: Okay. Do you have family members who live close to here?

SL: Yes.

MD: Whereabouts?

SL: My brother lives in Natick.

MD: okay

SL: And that's pretty much it, my other brother lives in California and my sister lives in Virginia.

MD: What challenges do you think the city still faces? What would you change about the city?

SL: Well that's a very, very deep question. What challenges does it face? Well like any major city it has to continue doing what it's doing supporting the arts and the district and the people within it, the immigrants as well. It needs to be a safe place for everyone to come together and it also needs to, I think, money wise investing in the school system and I say that because I teach.

MD: Of course, of course. What changes have you seen in Worcester over time?

SL: Oh I've seen a tremendous amount of changes. I have been in the city over 20 years and...

MD: Positive? Negative?

SL: Positive, all positive. Yup. In the last three or four years it's been even more so. Things are moving in a very positive [direction], creating a wonderful culture in Worcester among people. Lots of great new things—opening up restaurants, businesses and the nice thing about Worcester, it's still small enough. Small enough that everybody gets along, everyone knows each other so

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you don't have a lot of segregation among the organizations of businesses in Worcester which is nice.

MD: Right. What do you think women experiences in Worcester have been generally?

SL: It's been an uphill climb, but you have a lot of prominent women in Worcester and in positions of power. That's really nice to see, but it's still kind of the old-boys network for now, but that's changing slowly.

MF: Where did you attend school?

SL: What one? Elementary?

MF: Elementary, middle, high school...

SL: Elementary was Thomas Prince School in Princeton Mass. Middle School was Julie Country Day in Leominster, it was a private school. High school was Wachusett.

MF: And did you attend college?

SL: Yup college, I started at Fitchburg State and then I transferred over to Anna Maria [College].

MF: Nice. And what program or what did you major in?

SL: I majored in education, art education and a minor in art therapy.

MF: What were your challenges in education?

SL: In education, can you explain that a little bit more? Like Teaching?

MD: For you in school?

SL: Oh in school thank you, thank you. Only because I teach so I wasn't sure what direction

MD: Right, right. Yes of course, of course.

SL: Growing up in school, I grew up in a very small town and...I struggled a lot in school as a kid and I grew up through Proposition 2 1/2 so we didn't have the arts, we didn't have—there's no technology. Gym was maybe once every two weeks you had a gym class or an art class, music class. Lots of all those specials were all cut it was pretty much straight academics.

MF: Yeah.

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SL: Middle school about the same. High school is where I really [started] getting into the arts. At Wachusett they had a wonderful band and music and really support the arts so that's where I really found my...

MD: Passion.

SL: Yeah pretty much.

MF: Upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options moving forward in your future?

SL: Formal education as in college?

MF: Yes.

SL: What were my options? My options, can you repeat that question?

MF: Upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options?

SL: Well I've always wanted to be an artist. I wanted to get involved in the arts when I graduated college then I went to the museum school in Boston for my post baccalaureate grad work and I got involved in the arts. I started working at a gallery in Auburn [MA] picture framing and they were an art gallery as well. They had a satellite store in Sturbridge and then that let me get involved in the city growing up. Going to a lot of these like the Bijou movie cinemas was here at the DCU—well it was the Galleria where I met a lot of like-minded people in the arts. I didn't want to become a teacher I'll say that right off the bat. My whole family and I just bought the system. I did get my education degree license, but I didn't go into it right away. I kind of did a lot of artsy stuff. I put myself through college on my art work and worked in the gallery, and then decided that a steady paycheck would be nice. I got a call from the city and I went and interviewed and the next day they hired me.

MF: So how long have you been teaching for?

SL: 15 years.

MF: Wow good for you. What support networks and mentoring have been important to you?

SL: Friends but also resources within the city. My reason why my network of mentees and mentors in the city being involved in the arts, you know, breaking out of my comfort zone and stopping in on a group of artists who posted they were having a get-together, bring your art work and talk, and really reaching out. A lot of this has to do with me reaching out to the city now to

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explore and find out what's there and that was my support system because as things continued, they were people I looked up to, who I to learn to be like, and that was also the encouragement to keep me going.

MF: What was your first job?

SL: My first job was a convenience store, the first one in Princeton, it was about a half-mile from where I lived.

MF: Cool. What other jobs have you had and what do you do now?

SL: Oh other the jobs not all that many...

MF: I know you mentioned working at an art gallery...

SL: Yeah I worked at the Framers Gallery in the Newland Graphics I think it was in Sturbridge. Easy art gallery frame shop for multiple years then I got into teaching so I haven't bounced around a lot with jobs.

MF: You kind of already answered this but how did you come to do this work, teaching?

SL: I decided I'd mention earlier that I didn't want to become a teacher. I did get my degree in it and my certification because my dad was always like, "Always have a backup. You can go and be an artist, but have a back-up plan." So that's what I did and at one of my schools that I will not mention I didn't like the way they taught art and I had a hard time with a teacher, I butted heads with her and I'm like, "This isn't how art is supposed to be taught." It's not a make and take it's not you know as I call it a Bob Ross style if you know who Bob Ross, like a Paint Night style, this is what you're going to do, this is what it's going to look like, and this is how you're going to execute. And we're in college, this isn't okay. Art should be more of having your own individual voice. So we got along, but we always butt heads and I bought the system a lot but that really kind of like made me stop and think and say, "Wow." I mean I've taught at the Worcester Craft Center, I did education kids programs. I taught adults at the Art Museum while I was still working at the frame shop so I was kind of moonlighting, as well as teaching in CC Lowell's workshops and I really found out that I do love teaching. So I went to the museum school in Boston got my post-baccalaureate and that's when I got called for a full-time teaching position and I took it.

MF: What were or are your primary responsibilities in terms of housework and child care?

SL: Well I raise two kids. I had a partner and I was married for 15 years and we just co-shared. We took care of the house, bought a house and you know the nice thing is I have to say when you're two women who live together is that there's never any arguing over who's going to do

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what. Everyone just jumps in and dishes need to be done, diapers need to be changed, it was very nice because everything was equally shared.

MF: What do you think are the pros and cons of the path you have chosen? I think it's regarding teaching...

SL: Pros? Lots of pros. Every time I see a kid get excited about doing something, or an adult when I teach adult workshops, when they get excited and start feeling very passionate about what it is that they created mostly because I didn't know they could do it. So getting people to really love what it is that they do. Cons? It's becoming very difficult to teach. It's a very difficult profession. There is a lot of paperwork coming down the lines and regulations that constantly change and that makes it hard for a lot of educators because what you're told to do one year isn't the same as next year. So coming down from the state a lot of things change and that becomes frustrating because you get into a rhythm, you get your curriculum and things set up in your classes, and all the sudden you're told you have to change and adapt to this next year.

MF: And how do you feel about the choices you've made in your life? Do you have any regrets?

SL: Oh do I have any regrets? That's a big question.

MF: Yeah it's a loaded question.

SL: Yeah it is, it is. No I actually enjoy—I love all the paths that I took. Bumpy or not they're all learning experiences for me and the bumpy ones I learned from and you use those for bettering yourself and moving on and then there's lots of positives as well and I love them all.

MD: Alright. Switch back over to me. Do you consider yourself active politically?

SL: I am. Yes. I vote, I do get engaged in conversation, absolutely. My biggest thing is people don't talk to me about politics unless you vote. So yes absolutely.

MD: Have you been involved in volunteer or community work?

SL: Yes.

MD: Okay. What groups have you been involved with?

SL: Oh, it goes way back. Girls Inc. was one of the first ones I got involved with back in I believe college or high school. Adobe youth voices which is our graphic design program through Adobe that I got involved with the kids. stART on the Street is volunteer work; we don't get paid for that. So pretty much anything I do outside of my classroom is volunteer work. Junior League—the Women's Junior League...

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MD: and that's currently?

SL: It was past—yeah I kind of dropped out of a lot of things because I'm starting a new business so I'm kind of focusing my attention. Volunteer work is Massachusetts Art Education Association that I'm level director of, before that it was the National Art Education Association. I was level director for the eastern region. So it all has pertained to the arts and the field of arts.

MD: Okay absolutely, major, basic goal was arts, that was what most of it revolved around,

SL: Pretty much yeah.

MD: Okay awesome. What role has religion played in your life?

SL: You know what, it hasn't. I appreciate everyone with their—I grew up Roman Catholic going to the church every Sunday. My dad is—both of my parents are very, very religious but it's like to each their own. If it feeds you and it does something for you that's wonderful, but I'm not out to people pushing things on you so it doesn't matter what religion you are I have nothing against it.

MD: Okay.

MF: Okay. How have health issues impacted your life or those in your family?

SL: Mmm. Health issues, I have mass cell activation disorder and it is a disorder that your body starts to reject a lot of food and your allergies become more prevalent. That's something I've always had so I have a very small food list that I can eat from. So you should be on a rotational diet you know growing up not being able to eat a lot of food coming from families who cook, my aunt's a chef, uncle's a chef, but not finding out until high school that I was ill because of all that. So it makes me look at food differently and family functions and get together differently because I go and you're just like, "Hmm look at all this amazing food," and [laughs] here I am with mine. I think it's more of a challenge for my friends you or people who meet me. They're like, "What can you eat," and I say, "I don't know, I'll take care of myself I'll bring my own food don't worry about it." And they have more of an issue with it, but that would be my biggest health one and that effects everything that you do everywhere you go you know.

MF: Yeah, right.

SL: But other than that, health issues, my family's pretty healthy.

MF: Good

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MD: Good to hear.

SL: Yeah absolutely.

MF: What are your experiences in accessing quality, affordable healthcare?

SL: I can only say that from the outsider's point of view because I've always had health care through my employment which has been very fortunate from day one. Even now, but to qualify it's still extremely expensive so I may get it through the City of Worcester, but it's still not inexpensive and I have a lot of friends who don't have healthcare so is there a need for it. Absolutely and it needs to be affordable and affordable for everybody.

MF: I think I know this answer but whose health are you responsible for besides your own?

SL: Whose health? Oh my sons absolutely and my partner, my current partner. You know my parents as well, they're getting up there in age 78 and 86, so you know you feel responsible for them and then my siblings, my friends as well, so you know being responsible for other people goes beyond just my family circle.

MD: Okay. How do you get through tough times? What kinds of thoughts keep you going?

SL: Oh, well I tell my students at school I have the best job in the world because art is very therapeutic. So if I'm having a bad day I love to create things. I've always been like that. I have been creating and building and art is very, very therapeutic. That's always gotten me through a lot of tough times. But the other thing I do is I build. I build LEGOS. I have a very large, large LEGO collection in a huge room.

MF: We've heard that.

MD: Yeah were not gonna lie.

SL: Yeah you heard about that?

MF: We were told about...you have the largest LEGO collection in New England?

SL: Yeah, yeah, yup, yup I do. It's a 12 by 18 room in the basement ...

MD: Wow.

SL: ...and it's tables, white tables and little drawers and everything's labeled and now all the parts and pieces are categorized and my sons and I will build. We build, we build you know. It keeps me very sane and it keeps them sane to because they're both on the spectrum and when

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they were little to get them involved and to think of things and build things, it's a wonderful hobby you know and there's a lot of adults that I meet now.

MD: Just what you said about kids building things growing up that I think definitely makes an impact something about that, definitely

SL: Huge, huge

MD: Something about that...

SL: Just picturing something in your head and then being able to execute it or following the instructions, reading a blueprint that they put out and being able to get the parts and assemble them. Its not the easiest thing to do for little kids so it's nice, it's a very great skill to learn and have.

MD: How do you define success in your life? Has this definition changed over time?

SL: You know that's a tough question for me because I don't look at things as being successful, I mean other people will look at me, read my resume and say, "Oh my god, you've done this this and this," but you know I don't look at things like that. There isn't a successful point, there is no stopping point for me. I do things because I can. I see a need and if I can fill it and do something about it I do. So success for me I guess it is just being happy. It's not a monetary thing, it's not anything other than being fulfilled in what I do day to day.

MD: Based on your life experience, what advice would you give women of today and future generations?

SL: Perseverance. Just keep going and reach outside your comfort zone because as I tell my students in my classroom, if you walk around with blinders on all the time there's so much you miss and unless you're willing to take a risk and try something new you never know where that's going to take you. And I think being women, it's easy to say, "No, no we can't do that," and let that be the norm, but it doesn't have to be. Even if you fail, even if someone says, Nope, sorry we don't want you," or, "we found another candidate," doesn't mean that you give up and you stop. I think artists have a better perspective sometimes because we're very self critical about our work and then when you put your work out there for other people to look at you grow up with the sense of you take criticism or constructive criticism about things. So my biggest suggestion is for young women—and the old ones as well—is just to don't let someone else say no or stop you.

MD: Alright. If you can change one thing about how society views women what would it be?

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SL: Equality. Just simply put, equality. The way that a lot of the men treat women or talk about them and even though the older generation I think a lot of its just they grow up with it and it's just a funny—they don't mean harm by it but even just very sexist things that they say it does effect women. And I see it in my kids too in the classroom where the boys grow up and hear certain things and say certain things and that's just not okay. "Well I don't mean anything," it doesn't mean that you don't mean anything from it but it's how the other person takes it.

MF: Who were your role models when you were growing up? And who are your role models now?

SL: Oh, growing up

MF: It can be someone that you know personally or someone...

SL: That's a tough question again I don't know if I had a lot of role models per se growing up like people I idolized. We didn't grow up—we grew up with an old TV so there wasn't—I wasn't into sports. I'd have to say my parents, I'd have to say my siblings, when I was young, my grandparents definitely, because they came over from Armenia and they made their life, and my granddad built his house by hand and I marveled at that. I love to build. But role models now, it's just it's powerful women, it has to be people who have been successful in their lives. Not so much power as in money power. I'm in a powerful position, but women who have been successful make changes and are willing to go out there and share with others what they've experienced. I'm like a sponge I absorb from everybody so there isn't one role mode, I like one person I can say this person was a defining factor in my life, you know, a little bit of everybody has been building me.

MF: Okay and this is the last question, other than being a woman, what else plays an important role in shaping your identity? Do race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, religious affiliation or anything else shape your experiences as a woman?

SL: No. I don't lead through any of that actually I am who I am and that's it. I don't associate myself with any religion, I'm an American and even in my classrooms a lot of my kids are from different countries and I say, "No I'm an American, I'm a melting pot." I don't have any part of me—I tell them, "I'm very jealous of you guys because I don't have that heritage or that cultural heritage." Religion no, I mean I think it's wonderful for people if it does get—my sexual orientation has never been a forefront of what I do. I am who I am. My private life's my private life. It doesn't define who I am and what I do. I'd have to say art is the one thing that's the common denominator in everything that I do and teaching.

MD: You can say that art was your passion growing up and then once you become a teacher almost the goodness of art led you to children and that kind of you know was art doing its job at the end giving you satisfaction with children and enjoying children.

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SL: Enjoying people in general.

MD: Exactly.

SL: It kind of saved my life in a way. I had a learning disability growing up and I didn't speak until I was in first or second grade and school was very difficult. My parents have always been wonderful and just encouraged me in whatever I did. So I would draw and draw and draw and they'd buy me whatever paper, pens, paint to draw. They took me to the Worcester Art Museum as a kid to take classes there even though they didn't have a lot of money. And full circle is when I got into high school I ended up teaching there. So here I am eight years old taking classes and seeing my artwork up on the wall and then high school I get accepted to teach at the Worcester Art Museum. So I see the benefits of the arts and I grew up in music as well and how it can change someone's perspective from being, "Ugh, I can't do this, I'm a failure," to "Oh, guess what, you can attempt and you can do things." As long as you can find that niche of something to keep you going, that passion, that drive, that place where you can fall back on when things get tough and it could be hockey you know.

MD: Come to a game next year, right down the road, we'll get you tickets, honestly.

MF: So with regards to art what is like your specialty? Is it painting, drawing, sculptures?

SL: I'd have to say sculpting right now. I bounce around. I get tired of doing the same thing. I've done portraits and oil paints and colored pencils to—interesting I do art with both my left and right hand and I do very architectural designs, very planned out in reverse on the back of things. And I cut them out with my right hand and then I do a lot of my gestural, looser pastels and portraits with my left hand. So its kind of cool because I did some shows and it was "Two Hemispheres of Stacy Lord" and they look at it and they're like this is the same person? and I'm like absolutely. I'm very rigid and tight on this side and very loose and gestural on the other side and it was actually a teacher at the SMFA, the Museum School of Boston, that said to me, "Why don't you try using your left hand," because I was struggling at something and he was like, "Why don't you just try it," and it seemed to unlock something.

MF: Well thank you so much for your time we appreciate it.

SL: You're very welcome.

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