

Interviewee: Lorraine Connolly
Interviewer: Lisa Perry
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Transcriber: Lisa Perry



Abstract: Lorraine Connolly was born in Worcester in 1931. She resided with her parents and siblings in the lower Franklin Street area and went to area schools including North High School. She attended computer programming school shortly after the birth of her daughter and has worked steadily ever since. She describes the Worcester she knew and how it differs from today's Worcester. Her advice to women of today? "I guess you just have to set your goals in life and stick to them, no matter what your goal is. You don't have to be a movie star or the President of the United States, but you know, decide what you want to do--stick with it."

LP: My name is Lisa Perry, and I'm here with Lorraine Connolly, on August 12, 2011, and we're talking about the Worcester Women's Oral History Project. 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 Women's Rights Convention in Worcester. We are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics/community involvement. We don't have a special focus today, we're just going to talk about life in Worcester during that time period, and thank you for your help with this project. Do I have your permission to record your oral history with your name and the date?

LC: Yes, you do.

LP: Thank you. What is your full maiden name, and if applicable, your married name?

LC: Lorraine Langone Connolly.

LP: And when were you born?

LC: May 8th, 1931

LP: And, we know you were married...do you have children?

LC: Yes, yes, one daughter.

LP: And...do you have grandchildren?

LC: Two grandsons.

LP: And what cultures or ethnicities do you identify with..what's your family background?

LC: Italian, and my mother was Spanish.

LP: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

LC: They were hardworking people, my mother was a homemaker primarily, until the war broke out and then she went to work, but primarily she was a homemaker. My dad was the maintenance foreman at the old Worcester City Hospital.

LP: Could you tell me what your mom did during the war, for work, do you remember where she worked?

LC: She worked at a company called Cornell Dubelier. I don't know what they did, but they were right down on Grafton Street in Worcester for years, but I don't know what they actually did.

LP: Okay. Thank you. Was your mother; did she come from Spain?

LC: No, she was second generation.

LP: And where have you lived during your life?

LC: Worcester, Holden, and Sterling.

LP: In what neighborhood in Worcester did you grow up in, what area?

LC: Of the Franklin Street area, lower Franklin Street.

LP: Okay. What was the neighborhood like generally, from when you were a little girl, to when you got older?

LC: The whole neighborhood you mean?

LP: Yes, what was the area like where you grew up in Worcester.

LC: It was all middle class workers, there were the firemen, the policemen, all that sort of thing. There was no class distinction per se because everybody was just about the same.

LP: Did people live in mostly apartment buildings, or were there a lot of little houses at that time

LC: There were a lot of single homes and there were quite a few three-deckers. So they either lived in an apartment or they had a little single home.

LP: And were there different ethnicities that lived in the same neighborhood?

LC: Yes, they were all different.

LP: Okay. Did you know why your parents decided to live in Worcester?

LC: No, I had no idea.

LP: And did other family members live in the same area?

LC: Not in Worcester, but they were close by; they were in Holden, West Boylston; close by.

LP: Okay. What, one of the questions here is, 'what challenges do you think the city of Worcester, still faces' ?

LC: Let's put it this way, I don't think I would want to live in Worcester now. Because the Worcester now, is not the city that I knew. The Worcester that I knew, my main enjoyment was going downtown on Wednesday nights because the stores were open. Of course, the stores weren't open on Sunday, and they weren't open nights, so Wednesday night all the stores were

open, so everybody hopped on a bus and went downtown. You can't do that anymore in Worcester.

LP: Because?

LC: The stores are open all the time for one thing, and there aren't that many good stores left in Worcester. They've all moved out to the malls. So, it's just a very different atmosphere in Worcester.

LP: Did you feel safe when you lived there, and do you still feel safe now, when you work there?

LC: I definitely felt safe when I lived there, I feel safe when I work there, because I work during the day, so I don't face any of the night crowds or things like that, so yes, I feel safe. I don't know if I would if I...well I don't go downtown Worcester now, at night.

LP: Is that where you work now, downtown?

LC: On Shrewsbury Street.

LP: So, what would you change about the city?

LC: Oh, that's a tough one, I think going back to the old Worcester would certainly be a help, where people would feel safe going downtown anytime, where there is a reason to go downtown, and I don't think right now there's any reasons to go downtown.

LP: What changes have you seen in Worcester over time, besides the fact that the stores all went to the mall.

LC: I think there were so many things that were done wrong, like putting the mall in the middle of Front Street, that seemed like ridiculous thing to do; building a DCU Center , when how much is really going on there? I think they've done a lot of things wrong, but unfortunately, how do you make them right?

LP: What distinct characteristics make Worcester the place that it is?

LC: I don't know the answer to that one.

LP: Where did you attend school, what were the names of the schools?

LC: I went to grammar school at Bloomingdale School, and then I went to Grafton Street Junior High and then North High.

LP: Did you pursue any educational programs like did you go to vocational training , beauty school, or college or...

LC: I went to computer programming school.

LP: Do you know about when you did that?

LC: I have to stop and think. Susan was still a baby, so probably, 45 years ago, (laughs) wow.

LP: What were your challenges in education?

LC: Meaning what?

LP: They didn't expound on that so I'm not sure if they meant: what were your favorite subjects, or, if it meant you had to go a long distance and there wasn't bus service, say. I'm not sure what challenges they mean. So you had a baby, did your husband watch the children while you went to school, or did you take her to school with you?

LC: No. My father was alive at the time, and my father babysat for her while I went to school.

LP: When you finished your education in computer programming, what did you see as your options. What was available to you?

LC: Actually there was quite a bit available which surprised me because when I got out of school, I had no trouble finding a job. In fact I had two or three offers so it was great.

LP: And so were those offers all in Worcester?

LC: Yes.

LP: Do you remember what companies were looking for people with your skills?

LC: The first one I accepted was Paul Revere, and then I had one from George Meyer Company, and eventually I went there.

LP: What Support networks and mentoring have been important to you?

LC: Support networks for...?

LP: Like your dad supported you when you needed babysitting; did you ever need any other kinds of support, whether it be physical, emotional or...

LC: Not really, not really.

LP: Okay. And do you work outside the home now?

LC: Yes.

LP: And, what do you do?

LC: I am the office, actually, It's a vending company.

LP: And how did you come to do this work?

LC: It's a funny story, my cousin owned the company, and I was out of work at the time. He asked if I could go in and help out for a couple of weeks, that was 19 years ago and I'm still helping out.

LP: (laughter) That's great. Can you tell me how long did you work at Paul Revere?

LC: Maybe a year at Paul Revere. I did programming for several companies, and the last one I was at Riley Stoker where I was the manager of the programming department, and then layoffs came, I was laid off from there and that's when I started with my cousin's company.

LP: So, in your lifetime, you've worked almost non-stop?

LC: Yes.

LP: Fantastic. And most of it has been in Worcester?

LC: Yup.

LP: Is there anything you... like what did the work mean to you, like working for earlier companies.

LC: What did it mean to you?

LP: Yes, what has the work meant to you...we can pass on that if you want to; I suppose it means: it meant, it was the paycheck, maybe security, was it fun, you know what I'm saying?

LC: Of course, it's always the paycheck, the security, and, I liked what I was doing. I enjoyed it.

LP: Did you work with other people? Was it a big place?

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LC: Yes.

LP: And what were your primary responsibilities concerning housework.

LC: (laughs) The normal, ordinary housewife duties, the laundry, the cooking.

LP: Did you work full-time?

LC: Yes.

LP: Did you share the housework with anyone?

LC: Yes, my husband helped.

LP: To what extent did you share it with him?

LC: He always did the heavy things, the washing the floors, the painting in the house, all of those things, he did, that was his job.

LP: How has housework changed for you over time?

LC: Ha-ha; it's great, because I don't have to do it anymore.

LP: When did you stop?

LC: When Susan took over, I guess you could say when we moved to Sterling.

LP: When was that?

LC: Eleven years ago.

LP: How have you balanced different priorities, responsibilities, roles and interests in your life...how did you keep the balance on everything?

LC: You just had to do it. You had no choice. You went to work, you came home, you knew what you had to do at home; took entertainment as you could. We owned a condo in Mexico and we went down there every year for 25 years. So you just have to strike a balance, and you learned to do it over time.

LP: What type of entertainment did you have in Worcester, what was going on that you did? You and your family, or just you...

LC: It was mainly the movies. There wasn't too much else going on in Worcester so the movies provided most of the entertainment.

LP: Were there any winter things happening in Worcester?

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LC: Not that I knew of, but I'm not a sports enthusiast, so I wouldn't know that kind of thing, and other than that, there was nothing spectacular. And of course you know you couldn't get around as easily because there weren't as many cars. So anything that you did you had to either take the bus or find another way to get there and it wasn't always easy.

LP: Okay. Grocery shopping: how did you do that?

LC: You took the bus.

LP: How many bags could you hold, did you have a cart or something or did you just use...

LC: I think we just carried them, and there were a lot more little neighborhood stores so you didn't go to the big supermarkets, you went to the neighborhood stores, so it was easy to carry the groceries from there.

LP: Oh. I see. Were there any personal or professional costs of your chosen path?

LC: Meaning?

LP: Did you have to give something up, is there something personal you had to give up... if you want to pass on this...

LC: I'm not sure what it means.

LP: I'm not sure what it means either...and the benefit was the paycheck right?

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LC: Yes.

LP: And were there any other benefits to working?

LC: It gets you out of the house, it gives you a reason to get up in the morning 'cause you know you have to get to work, so yes, there are a lot of benefits to working.

LP: What type of work did your husband do?

LC: He was a telephone repairman.

LP: And did he do that in Worcester, or did he have to travel?

LC: Worcester.

LP: Do you consider yourself active politically?

LC: No.

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

LC: Nope.

LP: Have you ever been involved in church stuff?

LC: Not really.

LP: What role has religion played in your life?

LC: How do I answer that one. It's definitely a part of my life. I enjoy my religion. I enjoy my church. Other than that I can't say how else I've been involved in it.

LP: That's okay, what about health; how have health issues impacted your life or people in your family.

LC: Thank God we haven't had many health issues at all. We've been very lucky. My husband was diabetic and at the end of his life he lost his legs. Other than that, we were very very lucky.

LP: Were you able to access quality affordable health care?

LC: Yes. Yes, I've been lucky because we've always had health insurance.

LP: Whose health are you responsible for beside your own?

LC: No one.

LP: What major historical event in Worcester occurred during your time there and did they impact your time there

LC: Historical event?

LP: For instance, there was a tornado; I don't know of anything else...

LC: I don't...

LP: So they didn't impact you?

LC: No.

LP: Okay, how old were you when you were allowed to date?

LC: Oh My. Let me think about that one. I would say I was probably seventeen and going to my senior prom.

LP: Where did you go on dates once you started dating?

LC: Usually the movies.

LP: What was considered fashionable when you were a young woman?

LC: What do you mean fashionable?

LP: Maybe the clothes, makeup...

LC: Well we didn't wear jeans or pants, we were not allowed to wear pants, we wore skirts or dresses. Nothing else was really...you know we were very sedate, I'd guess you'd call it.

LP: What was your favorite particular style through all the decades? Did you have a favorite style?

LC: No, you just go along with the style that's in.

LP: Alright. What was your favorite musical group or song?

LC: Musical group; I liked Abba, and of course I liked all the singers of the day, you know the Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, all that group.

LP: Did you go to any clubs in Worcester, or dances, was there a place that had that?

LC: There was one dance hall, but I was not allowed to go there.

LP: How were girls treated when you were in school?

LC: I would say they were treated very well. I never had any problems in school. I thought the teachers were pretty good.

LP: Did you have any extracurricular involvements?

LC: In school?

LP: Yes, like after school maybe, you already said you weren't into sports, so not sports but maybe...

LC: No.

LP: Okay, what did your parents' education consist of?

LC: They were both high school graduates.

LP: Did you have any difficult transitions moving from childhood to adulthood?

LC: Not really. I think my parents did a pretty good job of raising us, so the transition was easy.

LP: Do you have any significant memories of when you were growing up that you think about?

LC: Not really because it was such a long time [ago].

LP: How about particular areas of the city, did you go to particular areas more often than others?

LC: Usually we'd go downtown, otherwise you pretty well stayed in your own neighborhood, because your friends were all there.

LP: When you were young, did you have a bicycle?

LC: No.

LP: Roller skates?

LC: Yes, I had roller skates.

LP: So, were there sidewalks to roller skate on?

LC: Well we lived in a three-decker, and we had a big, long, sidewalk, and we used to roller skate up and down the sidewalk, and then we had a big back yard and skated all around there. Most of the other kids in the neighborhood came over to our yard, because we had the biggest one so we all rollerskated together.

LP: So about how many kids were in the neighborhood that you hung out with?

LC: Probably about ten or twenty. It was a neighborhood of families so there was always kids to hang out with.

LP: You know how a lot of kids like to get into shenanigans when they're bored, were there any ever little adventures?

LC: No, I was a good girl; I didn't get into any trouble.

LP: Okay, do you have hobbies, or any leisure activities that take you outside of your home?

LC: No, not really.

LP: And how do you define success in your life?

LC: In my life?

LP: Yes.

LC: I guess living to eighty is a success (laughter) but I've always been able to have the things that I wanted—working for them, and my husband and I both worked all the time, so we had all the things that you need and all the things that you want, as far as I'm concerned, that was a success.

LP: How do you feel about the choices you've made in your life; do you have any regrets?

LC: No.

LP: Based on your life experiences, what advice would you give to women of today and future generations?

LC: I guess you just have to set your goals in life and stick to them, no matter what your goal is. You don't have to be a movie star, you don't have to be President of the United States, but you know, decide what you want to do---stick with it.

LP: Do you feel you have a legacy?

LC: I've got my grandchildren, and my daughter.

LP: Now that we are working to tell a fuller story of the history of women that's been recorded in the past, (which was zilch,) what should we be sure to include? Is there anything you think we should talk about that we haven't touched on?

LC: In the history?

LP: Yes, in the history.

LC: That's too general a question, because every woman is different. So, it's hard to pin it down to any one thing.

LP: Is there anything that you would like to talk about in regards to your experience of Worcester, and how maybe Worcester affected you, or you affected Worcester.

LC: I think I'm glad I grew up in Worcester but by the same token, I'm glad I left Worcester. Because Worcester today is not Worcester of 50 years ago. But it was nice growing up there. We didn't have all the conveniences that we have now. We didn't have automobiles, I mean not everyone owned an automobile, so getting around was a little bit harder, but you did it, and you lived through it, and, everybody came out of it alright. But I don't think I would want to move back to the city now. After living 11 years here, and we lived 20 years in Holden; I don't think I'd want to move back to the city. It's too congested, it's just too much.

LP: I should ask you, just out of my own curiosity, but, what about TV; I mean TV was relatively new when you were young...

LC: Oh yes, TV was way new.

LP: What did you think about TV then, and what do you think about where it is now?

LC: I think it's a shame the things they have on TV that children can see. You know, they should do something about it, but nobody seems to want to do anything because nobody wants to step on anyone else's toes. But some of the things they have on TV, if I had a child watching it, I would be furious. Of course there are some good programs, but a lot of them shouldn't be on there for them to see.

LP: Is there anyone else you'd suggest that we talk to?

LC: That lived in Worcester?

LP: Sure.

LC: Hmm, most of my friends are dead now, but I can't think of anyone who lived in Worcester.

LP: Okay. And before we conclude, finally, is there anything you want to share that I didn't touch on?

LC: No, I think you covered it all.

LP: Okay, thank you very, very much.

LC: You're entirely welcome.