

Interviewee: Lori M. Connolly
Interviewer: Stephanie Dudek
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Transcriber: Stephanie Dudek



Overseen by Dr. Lisa Krissoff Boehm, Worcester State College

Abstract: Lori Connolly was born in 1975 and is married with two daughters. She earned her degree from Worcester State with a major in Occupational Therapy and a certificate in Gerontology. In this interview, she talks about the differences between her growing up years in Worcester and her children's as far as freedom to play outside or walk in the neighborhood; caring for her two daughters, one of whom has cerebral palsy; and her work as an OT. She also shares memories of what was fashionable during her teenage years and of Christa McAuliffe and the Challenger tragedy.

SD: Today is February 28, 2009. We are at Lori Connolly's home in her living room. Okay, what is your full maiden name and your married name?

LC: My maiden is Lori Miller and my married name is Lori Miller Connolly.

SD: When were you born?

LC: October 10, 1975.

SD: Do you have children?

LC: Yes, two.

SD: What are their names?

LC: Meghan and Emily.

SD: How old are they?

LC: four and half.

SD: What cultures and/or ethnicities do you identify with? What is your family background?

LC: Well I am Polish, mostly from my mother's side. My father is German. I don't know exactly when his ancestry came and he was born in Pennsylvania but my mother was born in Poland and my husband is Irish even though I am not Irish, I guess I associate myself with being Irish (laughter) by marriage. My kids are Irish.

SD: You are married. What is the name of your husband?

LC: David

SD: Where have you lived during your life or where have you lived?

LC: Well, I grew up in Millbury with my mom and my dad. When I went to college, I lived in Millbury for a little while and then I lived at Worcester State. Actually I lived at Assumption College for a year and then I lived at Worcester State for three years and then I lived in Auburn with my boyfriend at the time who is now my husband. Then we moved to Leicester, where I live now.

SD: Can you tell us anything about your neighborhood, where you grew up?

LC: I grew up in Millbury like I said. In a big house, very big, I think. But it was near a park and there were definitely kids that were there. It was nice. It was on a busy street but I never, looking back, I never thought of it as busy or dangerous and we always knew to just stay in the yard and we would go to the park by ourselves. You know, even when we were young. Something we would never allow the kids to do today. I don't know, it was really nice. I really like growing up in Millbury. Making friends with the neighbor's kids.

SD: So you don't live in Worcester but do you have any Worcester connections because you went to Worcester State.

LC: Yup, I went to Worcester State, I went to Assumption College for one year, which is in Worcester. My mother lives in Worcester. She grew up in Worcester, even though she lived in Millbury for awhile. But she's in Worcester now. My dad lives in Worcester. My stepmother lives in Worcester. A lot of my cousins live in Worcester. Some aunts and uncles. I have one aunt in Worcester, I think, Bozena. One uncle, my grandmother lives in Worcester. So there is a lot of people I know who live in Worcester. Friends, Worcester.

SD: So you said your mom and lot of your family live in Worcester. Growing up, did you spend a lot of time there or did you mostly stay in Millbury?

LC: No, we actually spent a far amount of time in Worcester because my grandmother lived near the park in Worcester and there was a pool. A swimming pool and they had swimming lessons so

we used to go there every summer and the water would be like 30 degrees and we jump in at 8:00 o'clock in the morning even though it was freezing, for swimming lessons.

SD: So you are 31? Sorry, Thirty...

LC: 33.

SD: 33...

LC: So you've been around Worcester for a long time and the surrounding areas. Is there any changes you have seen in Worcester that are for the better or have you see for the worst?

LC: Well, I think where my mother lives. There have been lots of changes. Unfortunately for the worst, I think. I mean, it was a very safe neighborhood when I was growing up. You know, when I would go to my grandmother's, my mother would give us or my grandfather would give us some money, like a dollar. And we would walk to the store and I mean, I was young. I had to be under 12 years old, probably like 10, 9, 8. You would never...you would never allow, I mean granted you could be in the best neighborhood and you probably wouldn't allow your children to walk that far alone. In today's world especially. I don't know if I would allow that in that neighborhood. Like, there is a park, the park that I mentioned earlier. Like, even my mother who now lives with my grandmother wants to bring the kids to that park and I just don't feel safe for her doing that on her own. Because my mom...doesn't have the best safety sometimes (laughter) to begin with. But yeah, I do think there definitely have been some differences, unfortunately.

SD: Yeah, too bad.

SD: For education, you said you went to Assumption for a year then you pursued your bachelor's degree at Worcester State.

LC: Yes

SD: What did you major in at Worcester State?

LC: Occupational Therapy. So I have my Bachelor of Science.

SD: Nice!

SD: Where you apart of any clubs or...you...

LC: Actually, I also had my certificate in Gerontology. I did track for a little awhile but you know, I needed to work. So I could have some spending money and stuff and pay for my car. So

I worked a lot so I didn't really do any clubs. I mean, I think I did OT student club but besides that I really didn't do anything else. That I could think of.

SD: What were your challenges in education? I know you said you had to work and be a student which must have been hard for you, but...

LC: I think...some challenges were I went to Assumption at first. And at that time, none of the kids there worked, at all and I worked a considerable amount of time. Probably like three days a week, probably, I don't know, maybe 15 hours and worked a lot of weekends. So I couldn't go out and party and do that stuff. But it wasn't really my style to begin with. But, I unfortunately, I didn't really make a lot of friends at Assumption and not that I would have not transferred because of that but that definitely lead to my decisions to transfer. Um and when I went to Worcester State, I definitely felt more comfortable there. I was in a class of, actually being at Assumption with everyone who was my age, to Worcester State where everyone was really older than me. I was probably... a third of the class was maybe my age, maybe. They were a lot older, like going for their second degree in OT. And that was good, I really didn't have any challenges, per se. Just working and you know, I don't consider myself a very smart person, so I had to study to get my grades. And I really couldn't go out and drink because I couldn't have a hangover the next day. And actually when I look back, I wish I could have done more of that! But, I don't know (laughter) I don't know if that is necessarily a challenge.

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

LC: Well, when I graduated, when I first graduated it was 1998 and the balance budget act of the Clinton Administration, I'm sure. It went into effect, I think in 1997. And what that did it; it created...it changed a lot of the Medicare rules. So the market was still okay for occupational therapist but it wasn't as good as it had been in previous years. So when I graduated. I mean I still got a job within a couple of month. I mean when you are an occupational therapist, you can work with kids, you can work with adults, you can work outpatient, you can do geriatrics. At that time...there were usually more jobs with geriatrics and I ended up working in a nursing home, sub-acute. Meaning, patients don't stay there forever. They go, they get better and they go home. It was good but you know, I was there for six months and I got a pay cut. After already being there for six months because of all the changes that was happening because of Medicare, but a lot of that has been changed. Most of those regulations don't exist and OT is doing... flourishing again and now they don't have enough of occupational therapist. But did I answer your question?

SD: Yes, definitely, Yup...So, right now, I'm assuming you work outside of the home.

LC: Yup

SD: Okay obviously you went to school for occupational therapy because it was something you were interested in. But what, I mean made you decided to go into that particular field?

LC: Well I was always going to Assumption and I always loved Science. And at that time, I was like, there is no way I could be a teacher. I don't want to work in a lab because I like talking to people too much and my mother who works in a hospital. She's a secretary said: "you know, you should think about becoming a therapist. You know maybe you should do like PT, OT you know, speech". And she actually, I set it up, so I could go observe and I liked PT as well because I was athletic at the time and I liked OT as well. I didn't really understand OT, I don't think as much as I understood PT because I think OT sometimes, you really have to educate ...well at the time and even today, people don't understand that OT really is sometimes. Um, but I applied to a lot of schools and I got into Worcester State, it was close, it was cheaper and you know, that's why I decided to go there.

SD: Yeah...

LC: And I like helping people, I should probably mention that.

SD: Yeah

LC: I mean, that was the biggest thing. I mean I love people. Initially it was kinda weird, like putting your hands all over them and stuff and then you get over that and I mean, I just love that feeling. Like today, this is a good example. I worked with a patient who could only go on the tilt table, which is kinda hard to explain. But it is like a table you lay on and she could only go up 50 degrees. Like the upright 50 degrees or she would get nauseous and she would pass out. And they have been doing this for like two weeks. And today, was the first time, she walked with a walker, thirty feet!

SD: Wow...

LC: Like when you have something like that happen, you are like, "This is why I am doing this." Like to see that. It's really humbling.

SD: Wow, Great. Let's see...How have you balance different priorities, responsibilities, roles and interests in your life? You're a mother, you actually work. Do you have any other hobbies or other responsibilities that make it difficult for you?

LC: Yup, I have a lot of responsibilities. My daughter, one of my daughters has cerebral palsy. And, so, she requires a lot of attention and time because she can't do things herself, that at four and half, almost five years old, should be able to do. She's come a long way, from where she was, but she still needs help, you know, most of the time. She can get herself dressed but she still needs help sometimes, not so much with feeding but getting on the toilet, getting off the toilet. Brushing her teeth you know, putting on her shoes, putting on her socks and walking. Which is a huge thing, plus not only that, you know being an occupational therapist, there is a ton more

pressure on me to...I know, I'm almost too much. So I know that if she's going to walk, then this is the time to do it. So, I mean I may work 10 weeks; I may come home and work with her for a couple hours, spend a little time with Emily, her sister. Or have Emily do the exercises with us. Most of my time is either working, doing Meghan's therapy, taking care of the kids, cleaning the house -- which is low on the priority list, to be honest with you -- and researching online, all the time, to see what's out there. You know, like going into a chat room. I belong to a chat room for people who have CP (cerebral palsy). Could be adults, kids, parents. I spend a lot of time on there just kinda figuring out what is out there for people. Um...and...um...and you know...I should probably mention my husband in there. I spend a little time with him (laughter). I do spend some time with him as well. But you know, I don't really go out, I don't have really time for leisure. I do go to the gym in the morning, so I do balance that because I feel that it is important, that's fairly new, kinda off and on. I do belong to the Leicester Parent Advisory Council. Which is a special education advisory council for the special education department of Leicester and I'm the vice chair.

SD: Oh, wow!

LC: So I do have some responsibilities that go along with that.

SD: Interesting!

SD: So you mentioned your husband Dave, What does he do for work?

LC: Dave is a general manager for the 99 Restaurants. He works a lot of hours. Which you know, used to bother me when I was single cause he was never home but now it works out good because he can take the kids to school and he can watch them sometimes when I'm working. So it kinda worked out for the best that he has a crazy schedule.

SD: Yeah, okay, so I have some other questions. You can tell me how you feel, if you want to answer them or not. Um...do you consider yourself active politically?

LC: Well I wouldn't say that I consider myself active politically but I definitely have different viewpoints on things. But actually you know, I do belong to the Central Mass Families Organizing for Change which is ...an organization made up of parents, that actually, their biggest job is advocating for their children and they actually teach us how to advocate for our children by going to the State House and meeting with our representatives...so I guess by saying (laughter), so I guess maybe I am [politically active] It's not a role I do very often but it is an organization that I do belong to and am active in. So I guess, yeah. I wrote letters to legislatures about cuts that have been made for special education. Or the department...department of...yeah...Department of Mental Retardation. That kinda stuff but it's something, I really do a lot of.

SD: I know everyone in 2009 is saying this is the year of change with the campaign. How do you feel about the new president? You can be honest (laughter).

LC: Um... (pause) I think that, he can't make too much change in one time regardless of how bad something may be. Because I don't feel that...I just think that is too much. And I'm not an advocate for Bush but when things are this bad, no matter what gets done, if it is a positive thing, then it is going to be a positive thing for Obama. Whether it's his doing or not. I guess you can say, I'm not an Obama fan, I'm not for...you know...higher taxes. I feel that, I work really hard for the money I have and I feel that any extra money that I have, goes directly to my daughter [Meghan]. I don't get any help, I don't extra...I don't get any money from the Department of Mental Retardation; I don't get any money from the Department of Public Health. I don't get any of that money that a lot of other families get due to income. I'm not complaining. It's just, that I'm just very lucky I have the job that I do and I can pick up extra hours to make the money that I feel that my daughter deserves and the opportunities that she deserves in order to be able to independently walk but I am little nervous that my taxes may change or my benefits may change that I have. Um, because I do make that choice to make extra money, so, yeah, I am considered about [higher taxes]. So when I say, yeah if it's going to be your change and its going to help me, great, I'm all for it. But if it's your change and I'm going to be taken home less money when I'm like working 50 hours a week. I'm not happy because that money goes to my daughter. It's not about a bigger house or a better car for me. But that's me.

SD: Pretty powerful right there (laughter). Okay, I'm going to take on a different twist. I know you said you currently work at um...

LC: Well I work at Fairlawn per diem. Which are adults, acute rehab. Meaning that the patients come there. It is not a nursing home and they leave. They have to leave whether they do go to a nursing home from there, that's definitely a possibility but they have to leave Fairlawn because it is not a long care place. So you get young patients, anywhere from 19 years old to hundred and something years old. But I also work with kids during the week. I work with children in the Oxford school systems. That is very different with working with adults but its fulfilling you know. The OT role is very different in the school system, then with adults.

SD: Do you prefer, one...I'm sure you like both but is there one...

LC: I guess I feel more comfortable with adults because I have done adults longer, I mean I started working with adults. I've only been working with kids for about two years besides my own daughter. But there is something to be said...for, there is something to be said for working with kids too, because I don't know... they are a lot of fun.

SD: Definitely. Has religion played a role in your life at all?

LC: Yeah definitely, because um...I was raised Catholic, still Catholic. I can't say I am a practicing Catholic by going to church. But I say my rosary, probably every other night. When my children were born, I definitely believed that Meghan, seeing how sick she was, she shouldn't be here today and she is only here because of divine intervention and because God made his choice. Keep her here with me, so yeah religion plays a role. I pray to Him every day for her and Emily. I know, I talk a lot, I seem to talk a lot more about Meghan and I don't want it to seem that I don't love Emily and that she's not important to me. It's just that Meghan demands more of my time than Emily does. But, that's not to say that Emily is not a great kid and she's a great cheerleader for her sister. But anyway, yeah, I guess religion does play a big part of my life.

SD: So, I'm going to try and sum up this interview. Is there anyone else that you suggest, that we should talk to for another women's oral history. Do you find...I mean I find you very interesting. Do you find someone that's interesting as well, that you think, that would benefit from being in this women's oral history project? Or maybe someone who has inspired you?

LC: Jackie Brennan. She was my teacher in college.

SD: Jackie?

LC: Jackie Brennan.

SD: Okay, she is a professor at Worcester State College?

LC: Yeah. I mean she is a physical therapist and an occupational therapist.

SD: Oh, Wow!

LC: She's done kids, she's done adults and not only that, she goes to um; she goes into sabbatical like every other year or every year to like foreign countries to set up programs for kids. She's pretty an impressive woman.

SD: Wow, Okay, Has there been any major historical events in your lifetime that maybe had impacted you or do you have any memory of historical events?

LC: When Christa McAuliffe died in the *Challenger*, I remember that. I remember crying.

SD: I'm sorry, who is that?

LC: I forget, that was the...I don't remember what year it was... but I was little and for some reason I was home. I probably didn't feel good that so I wasn't at school that day. It was when the teacher, went up in space. In the NASA thing.

SD: Oh...okay...now I remember. Wasn't she *Punky Bruster's* teacher or something?

LC: I don't know maybe. Yeah...So that happened and then the Obama thing. That is a big thing even though I am not a supporter, that's still a huge historical event. The first black president. I can't think of anything that has happened in my lifetime. Well...maybe the economy. The blizzard of 78' but I don't really remember that.

SD: How old were you when you were allowed to date and where did you go on dates?

LC: (Laughter) Well...I don't really think I was allowed to date! I think I pretty much made that decision of my own. Where did I go on dates? So yeah, I don't really know if I was allowed to date at any certain age.

SD: Sneak out at night?

LC: Yeah, I would sneak out (laughter). Where would we go on dates? Movies, out to eat. You know, hang out at people's houses. Parties at people's houses, go to the park, just hang out. Those were like dates. I started dating my husband at 19 so those were the type of things we did. Go to the beach.

SD: Sounds like fun! What was considered fashionable when you were a young women? Well you are still pretty young!

LM: Yeah, what was fashionable? Cuffing your pants (laughter), wearing like six other pair of socks.

SD: Cuffing your pants is still in! I think I own a pair of jeans like that! (laughter).

LM: Wearing like six different color pair of socks, leg warmers...which are coming back.

SD: Yeah, definitely!

LC: Big belts, which are coming back. Leggings which are coming back. A lot of those stuff were in when I was in high school. Feathered hair...that isn't coming back!

SD: What was your favorite musical group or songs when you were growing up?

LC: Led Zeppelin was my favorite.

SD: Did you ever go to a concert?

LC: No, they had already broken up.

SD: Let's see...were there any favorite dances that you liked to do or a club that you liked going too?

LC: The Palladium. I used to go to The Palladium, yeah, I liked it there.

SD: And now it's kind of more of like...a concert hall right?

LC: Yeah

SD: That is a little different. Both of your parents are still alive. So what did your parent's education consist of?

LC: My mother went to technical school and she claims she doesn't remember anything from her training (laughter). My dad went to technical school as well. My dad used his training; he was a computer programmer for a long time until he got disabled. And my mother works as a unit secretary and she's been doing that for a long time. She probably uses some of her skills and doesn't realize it.

SD: What difficult transitions did you go through in moving into childhood into adulthood?

LC: Paying bills...but it wasn't really that difficult because I always have been responsible, I guess. I just knew that is was something that you had to do, so I just did it. Having to handle my own health care was kinda weird because when your parents handled it you know, you just automatically assume you go to the doctor's, going to the doctors with them, everything was taken care of. Whether you had a minor surgery or when it is yourself you are like: "What do you mean, you are not paying the whole thing for this surgery?" So that was kinda ...an awakening, so for transitions that was probably the most. But I, I think I've always been responsible at a young age so it wasn't really too much of a difficult transition experience into adulthood.

SD: How do you define success in your life and has this definition changed over time for you?

LC: I think success in my life in my early 20's would have been a husband who makes a lot of money. Well, I shouldn't even say early 20's because I was with Dave at that time. I would say, because I grew up quick, I'm going to say 15 years old, okay. Like husband with a lot of money, big house like the one I grew up in Millbury. Vacations all the time, um...you know...and not having to worry about stuff, that would have been success. But today, success is, for the most part, is just having fun and trying to live in the moment. And even though I know it's hard sometimes and I get overwhelmed with the responsibilities that I have. Success to me, would be 10 years, 15 years from now someone says to my children like: "What do you remember most about your mom?" That they would hopefully say something like: "She was fun, we went

camping.” They would probably add that I was crazy sometimes but I wouldn’t want them to lie (laughter), to tell the truth. But that would be success to me. I don’t think, for me, that at this point of my life that success is how big my house is, how nice my car is because as much I do care about those things sometimes. I know at the end of the day, when I die, no one is going to say: “Wow, that Lori Connolly, she had the best house I’ve ever seen.” I’m hoping that other people, not only my children, or my husband will think: “You know what, that Lori Connolly, she really wasn’t a bad person. She really did her best. She tried to do the best for her children. She tried to do her best for her family. She tried to do the best for her family and friends.” That would be success to me.

SD: Wow.

LC: I know that was a long response.

SD: No, it was good!

SD: Okay, I have like two more questions. Based on your life experiences thus far, what advice would you give women today and in future generations?

LC: My advice would be, not to care so much about what other people think. And just try to be the best person you think you can be and to treat people...my biggest thing would to treat people the way you want to be treated. I’ve always...I mean my whole life...and I don’t know why I’ve been like that. My parents are great, don’t get me wrong but I don’t know who really instilled that in me but I’ve always tried to treat people the way I wanted to be treated. I’m not saying, I let people walk all over me because I’m too nice cause that’s definitely not the case. In some cases, I’m very assertive and people know that about me but I’ve always treat people the way I want to be treated and you what? Just have fun! Because you know what? I work in acute rehab and I have patients who are 19 years old who fell down the stairs from drinking too much and now they have a head injury or you know a 70 year old, who lost his wife while you know, driving from a heart attack. That would be my advice to future generations.

SD: Do you feel you have a legacy?

LC: Yeah, I don’t know if it is a good one though (laughter). No, I feel like my children are my legacy. I mean, how they conduct themselves, how they will grow up to be young adults. That would be my legacy, you know. The kind of person, I was and hope...you can’t always guarantee...you can be the best super mom in the whole world, which I know I am not. But you can be and sometimes it doesn’t matter, you know. And sometimes it’s just your own children’s personalities; turn out, the way that they turn out. But, I would hope that would be my legacy, I guess, to be seen as a good person.

SD: I just have one more question, just because I am taking a Women's Studies course and we are learning about all kinds of women. You know, women's lives which are primarily at home, ones that are out working, who have nannies, you know the whole shebang. I guess how would you define what a woman is or what do you think women are?

LC: I think a woman is someone who can like juggle 50 jobs because that's what women do. You know if they are at home being a housewife, they're taking care of their husband, they are taking care of the kids probably managing their house. They probably even do some of the yard, work. Like that's a women. I like don't mean to put down men but I do feel that women are much better multi-tasker then men are and I think that's what being a women is. You know, feeling powerful and I know men like feel that way too but it's just different. It's different when you can be a mother and I know every woman is not a mother but I think it's just different. It's just different. You know, we have the ability to be our children and it's a natural instinct for us. It's just different. I'm not saying men don't have that instinct but I don't think it's as strong as a women's.

SD: Is there anything that you want to close with?

LC: Yes, I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my feelings and to be a part of this interview.

SD: Oh, Thanks! I'm glad you participated and thanks for having me here! It's been a pleasure!

WORD LIST

Interviewee: Lori M. Connolly

Interviewer: Stephanie Dudek

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1. Sub-acute
2. Jackie Brennan
3. Sabbatical