

Interviewee: Fran Joan Lubin
Interviewers: Jillian Geyster and Katherine Sullivan
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Transcribers: Jillian Geyster and Katherine Sullivan



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Abstract: Frances Joan Lubin was born in 1938 in Portland, Maine, where she attended both primary and high school. She then went on to Simmons College to pursue her undergraduate degree in psychology. Fran was married in 1959. She then moved to Worcester, where she would eventually pursue a master's degree in school counseling at Assumption College and become a social worker. Over the years, she has worked as the Director of Volunteers of Court Appointed Special Advocates [CASA] in Worcester, MA, as well as holding positions at many other places such as, Community Healthlink in Worcester, MA, working on cases concerning kids in and out of homes, and then as a School Counselor for Worcester Public Schools. Currently, she is happily married to her husband, has 3 children and 6 grandchildren, and volunteers with her dog at libraries reading with children. She is a part of the WISE [Worcester Institute for Senior Education] program offered at Assumption College and is in the program because she has always loved to learn. In this interview, Fran talks about the different ways being a woman has affected her in her academic life, life at home, and life during her career while working with kids in and out of schools and homes.

Quotation:

“...Speak up, if you see in equity or discrimination, just stand up for what you believe in and it doesn't mean that you have to be aggressive, nasty, not get along with people, but you can't let people walk all over you and you have to speak up and certainly in this day of MeToo you have to be very careful I think what you do in life girls do any way.”

Transcript:

KS: Ok, so we're gonna start with just some general questions, what is your full name including both your maiden name and your married name?

FL: Frances Joan Lubin is the married name and Posner was my maiden name, Francis Posner Lubin, I guess.

KS: When were you born?

FL: May 7th, 1938.

KS: Have you ever been married?

FL: Yes, I am currently married.

KS: What was the name of your spouse?

FL: David, is, is...

KS: ... Is...

FL: ... David Lubin.

KS: And when were you married? When did you get married?

FL: August 16th, 60 years ago actually, '59, 1959.

JG: Wow.

FL: Yes wow. That's what I think too!

KS: Yeah, it's a... must have a secret going!

FL: Yeah, I don't know.

KS: Do you have any children?

FL: I have three children.

KS: What are their names?

FL: Sheryl's the oldest, Steven next, and Jennifer is the youngest.

KS: How old are they?

FL: Sheryl is 56, Steven is 53, almost 54 and Jennifer will be 50 in a week!

KS: Happy Birthday!

FL: Yeah, right!

KS: Do you have any grandchildren?

FL: Yes, I have six, Alex is 22, his siblings are Emma, Ben and Rachel and they're triplets...

JG: Oh!

FL: ...and they are 19. Then my son has Gus and Eliza who are twins, and they're 10.

KS: That's so funny, I am actually a triplet!

FL: Are you really?!

KS: Yes, I am, so I relate to that really, we're all 20.

FL: Oh my gosh!

KS: Yeah, it's so funny, it's a small world.

FL: Yes, it is!

KS: Yeah!

JG: My brothers and sisters are triplets actually too.

FL: You're kidding!

JG: Yeah, they're 19.

FL: How is that happening?

KS: It's wild.

FL: Its really...

KS: That's wild yeah, I know!

FL: ... I have to tell my husband that is amazing!

KS: It's not every day that you find two people that are directly into triplets!

FL: I know! I know, I know, I know that's amazing! Are they all in college?

JG: Mhmm.

FL: All of yours?

KS: Yeah, my brother is actually at the College of the Holy Cross, right down the street, and my sister, I'm actually from Connecticut, so, she goes to a community college down there, so yeah.

FL: And your siblings?

JG: Yeah there one at Worcester Polytech, and then Fitchburg State, and then Endicott.

FL: Oh nice, nice, ours are all in college too. It's amazing!

KS: Where have you lived during your life? Did you always grow up in Worcester?

FL: No, I grew up in Portland, Maine, and went to college in Boston. We lived in the Boston area for the first, almost three years. We were married in college, and lived in the Boston area until we graduated, and my husband worked—we worked. And then we moved to Worcester.

KS: Did you—in the neighborhood that you are living in now, what is the neighborhood like?

FL: The neighborhood is right down the road. It's right off Salisbury Street but we did not always live there. We for about forty years or more, lived in Newton Square, which is off of Pleasant and Highland right in that intersection, and moved up here almost 10 years ago, it's an over 55 community right up the street.

KS: What do you think about women's experience in Worcester? How has it been generally?

FL: The women's experience in general needs improvement. I don't know if it's different in Worcester than it would be anywhere else, I think that probably a little provincial here, not quite as sophisticated as other cities, I mean I don't know if you've found that out. I think women's issues, they've come a long way, naturally, but there's always room for improvement.

FL: Yeah.

KS: We are just gonna talk about some education parts of it now and Jillian is going to ask some of the questions!

FL: Alright!

JG: Where did you attend school?

FL: Simmons College in Boston and here (Assumption College) for my master's.

JG: Ok, what about high school? And primary?

FL: High school in Portland, all through high school in Portland.

JG: What did you study while you were at Simmons?

FL: Psychology, undergrad, and then I worked while we were still in Boston, but not in that field, because my husband was... is... was a dentist, is, I guess he's retired, but he was going to establish a practice right outside of Boston, so there was no point in having a permanent job at that time and so we moved here (Worcester). What was the question? I forgot the question!

JG: We started with what did you study at Simmons...

FL: Oh, what I studied! I studied Psychology and didn't work until my youngest was nine and I went back and got my master's and then I went to work in counseling. Most of my jobs were—and my latest one was—with a school department in Worcester. But I have been in mental health agencies working with children all the time.

JG: Okay. How were girls treated when you were in school, like particularly growing up in school?

FL: I don't think we ever noticed, frankly, that there was any difference, it was the 50s, it was a very idyllic time and I don't think we noticed that we were treated any differently. I think that when we got out in the workplace it became noticeable, but I don't remember noticing much. I think we were silly and probably just going along, but that was the times, I think. It was the 50s you were brought up to be married, a housewife and all that. And it wasn't until the 60s when women started to raise their voices and be heard, so I can't say I noticed anything different in those days.

KS: I wanted to ask you a question, were you in a minority in the sense of getting a college education back at that time, or was it normal for people your age and as a woman to get to be...?

FL: It was better than it was, say, a decade earlier. Everyone I knew went to college, but maybe forty percent of my class did not. My husband's too, he grew up in a very small town near here, and he was probably one of the few. More than earlier, decade earlier, and of course it got better, but I'd say more than half went to college. But everybody I knew did, I guess you seem to, you know, travel in the same circles usually educationally.

JG: Did you... being a woman, did you face any challenges in your educational journey, so, maybe in college...?

FL: Well I went to a women's college, so that's a moot point. If I were to do it today, I wouldn't advise... I'd never advise my daughters to do that. I think you get a more well-rounded education in a coed school, but it does prepare one without having to compete with men, when you're in a single sex college. And after that, in college, my master's, the graduate program here was all ages and there was no discrimination at all. I don't think women felt that at all. That was already almost the 80s by the time I went back.

JG: Did you choose Simmon's because it was an all girls?

FL: Back in the day, there wasn't the pressure to apply at ten different schools, and almost everyone I know my age and younger had very little parental guidance because our parents wouldn't go to college. Very few parents of that era did. So, we kind of went on our own, what we heard of the school. I think I applied to two, didn't get into one, and so Simmons was kind of my fallback school and I did enjoy it but I was married for two of those years, so it's not the same as being an undergraduate co-ed kind of experience, but yeah it was different. When my husband went to Tufts [University], he hadn't even heard of the school when he applied, he came from a very small town and somebody told him about it, and he applied. It was such a different time and today there is such pressure. Maybe it was better but there was never that pressure. We knew he'd go somewhere, but we didn't—it wasn't a live or die.

JG: So, we heard that you are in the WISE program...

FL: Yes!

JG: Here at Assumption [College].

FL: Yes!

JG: What inspired you to do that?

FL: I've always wanted to learn more, and I think working in schools too, you're working with teachers who are lifelong learners and I heard about it... oh it's like 10 years I've been in this program. Some years I didn't really take anything, it depended on what was of interest, but I think I always wanted to learn, you can always learn something, even at this age and I find the people really interesting and for the most part, the instructors are excellent, so that's why it is a good program!

JG: Awesome!

FL: And there are similar programs all over the country, just different names, obviously.

JG: Did you have any support networks or mentoring that were important to you throughout your education?

FL: I had supervisors that were very, very helpful and yes most of the time I did, and also in school, the advisors, I don't remember who they were, it was in '45, but I do remember the supervisors that I had were very, very helpful in pointing out things that they needed to do and what I did wrong and so forth and it was good.

KS: And were those supervisors, were they women or were they men?

FL: One was a woman, she was fabulous, and a man too was very good, a little more distant, not the same relationship but he was good, very good. Yes, women are much different in one to one relationships, that's more comfortable, and not that they may learn or teach more, but I think that all my friends want to go to women's doctors and it's a different relationship, comfortable.

KS: So now we're gonna go onto work, and the work experience for you, so what was your first job?

FL: Way back? How far back?

KS: Whatever you can remember.

FL: Oh my god, my first job was babysitting. Ok, so my first job after college, there was a new program that started here that dealt with courts and it was called Court Appointed Special Advocates [CASA] and we were guardians, they call them guardians by law actually, for children in the foster care system who had been abused. And they really are neglected and they hadn't really had anybody to speak for them. I was the Director of Volunteers, all were volunteer except for the two paid people, me and the director and we trained them to be advocates, they had to undergo extensive training and then interviews with the kids and everybody involved in the case, write a report, go to court, and it's still in existence. It's a national program, and we started the one in Worcester in 1980 actually, and I was there nine years. Talking about supervisors, the director was really... not helpful, and she ended up resigning, she really didn't get along with the board at all, and a woman, and somebody that I knew well. That was my first experience, and I did enjoy it, I loved the people. They gave themselves, in a very stressful situation with kids and the courts, very frustrating, but I did love it. Then I went on to what used to be Worcester Youth Guidance, it's now a part of Community Healthlink Mental Health Agency and I was—I don't know what my title was actually, but I worked on various cases involving children in the home, out of the home, for three years, and that was a contract, the contract was up and I moved on. And that is when I started in the school system, also stressful, because the same population, very poor school, inner-city school in Worcester. Kids are fabulous, but the parents were just hard to deal with. Mostly uneducated, some immigrants. And not that they didn't love their children, but they just didn't have a clue. It was hard to work with them, but I loved the kids. I was there for 11 years and then it was time to retire, and I don't miss it!

JG: When did you retire?

FL: Oh gosh when was it? Oh 16 years ago, when was that? It was 2003.

KS: So how do you feel you were treated as a woman during your career as a... psychologist is that correct?

FL: Social worker. By whom?

KS: By people that you worked with...

FL: Okay.

KS: Just all, all aspects.

FL: Well social services are really a female oriented field, so I worked with a lot of women. I did work with men, and because it is social services, everybody is very, you know, touchy feely kind of. They were all very, very good to each other, especially at the guidance center. That was they were incredibly sensitive people, so there was no problem there. The school department, it depends on who you work for. Most of them, they respected my position and I didn't have any problem with them, the principal was a different story, she had her own issues, and I don't think it was because I was a woman, I just think she had a power problem, control problem and I was very strong too and I don't think we got along at all, she was subsequently fired, she was just so disorganized and whatever. I was sad to see her go because she missed her pension, but she really did deserve it. But I can't say it was because I was a woman, it was just I think because of who I was and that she couldn't intimidate me. I was older than she was, and I think some of the younger teachers had a difficult time.

KS: So what has this work meant to you?

FL: The work I had was important work, I think. Very fulfilling, very stressful at times, but I think I gained a lot from it and from the people I worked with also, terrific people, most of them.

KS: How did you come to do this work? How did you decide that you wanted to do this for the rest of your life?

FL: I think I was always interested in psychology, helping people, but also, as you undoubtedly know, in back in the 50s and 60s, a lot of women were teachers, nurses, social workers. Many of them weren't going into the sciences, technology was still too new. So, I think that was one of the fields that we were drawn to because of the times.

KS: What were your primary responsibilities in terms of housework, outside of the workforce?

FL: [laughs] 100% at the time, it's only since my husband retired that he been pitching in, he did the manly things, the grilling and taking out the trash, and stuff like that. I worked, took care of kids and had dinner, you know, the typical stories of those times, and we didn't question it. I'm sure there are people that have much more equitable relationships, but that was the way my husband was brought up, his mother did it all and she worked too. Until just recently, I'd say, I think it's 5 or 6 years since he retired, he has been doing more, but he doesn't cook or anything, he will do some work around the house if I mention it, but he still doesn't do all that much. Your generation has got it all right. Right from the start, really that was how you have to do it.

KS: How have you balanced different priorities, responsibilities, roles, and interests throughout your life?

FL: I guess I have, but I think that some things go on the back burner because when you're raising children, you are really not thinking too much of yourself and what you really want to do and then when you're working you do have more time, but still it's not 'til you really are retired that you can pursue interests, and I am only speaking of myself. I'm sure a lot of people can do it better, but that's how I found it. Although, I must say, even when I was with kids, I did a lot of volunteer work, and even when I was working but I think I pursued interests after I retired. Oh, there was another job I forgot about it! After I retired, I worked for Children's Friend, and did adoption case studies. That was really—that was great because the kids had histories and that wasn't great, but they were going to homes that for the most part were going to be really great and that's what I had to report on. I forgot about that, that was good for a few years.

JG: Alright, now we are going to move into community involvement.

FL: Ok.

JG: So, you just mentioned you volunteered.

FL: Right, right.

JG: What kind of volunteer was that?

FL: Then or now? Then?

JG: Both?

FL: I volunteered at our temple and at various women's organizations. There was a study for some music academy in Boston, we were doing testing on kids here. Oh I forget what else. It's been a long time. And then now I have a golden retriever and we had her trained to be certified to be a therapy dog so I do that with her now. I've done that for about a year or more. Two years, I think. There are reading programs in the libraries for the kids and they read to the dog. Kids that are shy or have some reading difficulties and they just lose their inhibitions and just read and pat the dog. She loves it. The more attention, the better. And we've gone to adult day programs where the people are disabled emotionally and physically. I just visited a neighbor in a rehab facility and I took her and she—that's my focus right now. Other than the usual extracurricular stuff I do, but that's the volunteer, that's just about all I do now.

JG: Ok, what led you to get into volunteering with your dog for therapy?

FL: I just knew that she would be perfect for this kind of—I actually was thinking about it but didn't do anything about it until she was, oh about five. I met a woman on a hike and she said this dog was perfect for it. She sent me to this place where they train them and then it took off from there, and she wasn't easy because she is very stubborn and she didn't pass the test a couple of times, a very tough test, but I kept at it because I really believed she has the personality and I knew she would be good in this role and we do.

KS: What's the dog's name?

FL: Lily. Lily. She's sweet.

JG: You mentioned the women's organizations you were involved with.

FL: Ah, yes. I don't think they're even in Worcester anymore, they were national organizations, the National Council of Jewish Women. Oh goodness what else, that's a long time ago, a temple of women, a sisterhood I guess it was called. That's not in existence anymore either, none of them really are anymore. I forget what else. There were others but that's all I can think of because I think they are all gone, everybody's working and nobody really does that anymore.

JG: When were you apart of those groups? During the movement was it?

FL: Yeah, it was, oh, say 70s 80s, well no, 60s 70s, because I went back to work in the 80s and I didn't really have much time. The first 20 years of my life here, I think.

JG: Do you wanna do health?

KS: We're gonna go into a health portion, it's not gonna be that extensive.

FL: Ok

KS: Have you had any health issues that have impacted your life or your family?

FL: No, no I haven't. I have the usual high blood pressure and things like that but everything is under control. My husband had a scare this summer. He was just falling and he spent some time being tested. They felt that his blood pressure plummeted when he stood up and they couldn't figure out why and they gave him all kinds of diagnoses which were wrong. We just found out that it's a blood vessel vascular disease but he's monitored. He's doing fine, he just has to watch his salt and all that but like we all do. But that was a bad summer until we finally figured out what was wrong with him but.

KS: I'm glad everything is ok.

FL: Thank you.

KS: What was your experience as a woman in accessing quality and affordable health care? Was it a struggle for you? Or...

FL: No, no, because I always had health insurance when I worked and my husband was always on that plan because he was independently employed so he didn't have to pay for it. And then on the school department I have a pension and that covers some of the health care costs, but I'm very, very lucky that after hearing what people go through that we've never with our insurance—and now its Medicare, plus other things—what other people have to go through and its terrible. So, I haven't had a problem.

KS: Were you responsible for any other people's health beside your own? Or your husband's?

FL: My mother. She had stayed in Portland after we moved here and my father was still alive then and when he died, after a while she moved here and her health began to deteriorate. My sister and brother didn't live here so I really was, she didn't live with me but, I was responsible for her healthcare and grocery shopping, things like that for a while. Then she went into a nursing home and I still had to keep track of things and whatever.

JS: We have some additional questions that we um put aside in case we had time and it looks like we have time.

FL: Ok.

JG: How old were you when you were allowed to date? And where did you go on dates?

FL: Oh gosh, my parents were strict or my mother was any way. Probably 16 and in those days we really didn't date. We went out in groups, we had dates for proms and so forth, but my mother was strict to a point, but I'd say 16.

JG: Was it different when you went to college?

FL: Yes, because she didn't know what we were doing [laughs], as a matter of fact, because the drinking age is what 21?

JG: 21.

FL: My father actually made me a fake id [laughs]. He really was a pushover and we used it. It was amazing that he did that. I don't think that my mother knew that.

[Everyone laughs.]

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

FL: Fashionable. Probably smoking, oh I don't know, I don't remember ever thinking of myself as fashionable so if there was such a thing I think it passed me by [laughs].

JG: What kind of clothes did you wear?

FL: Oh, yes, well the bobby socks and the plaid skirts and the poodle skirts. All the stuff that you hear about from the 50s. We all had the same clothes pretty much, the saddle shoes. You probably don't even know what that is do you?

JG: I do, I did that for Halloween once.

FL: Oh did you? We had all that. Everybody looked the same actually.

KS: Did you have a particular favorite item of clothing that you would like to wear?

FL: No, no I think they were just all regular clothes.

JG: What was your favorite musical group or song?

FL: Oh of course Elvis Presley, not so much the Beatles, but definitely Elvis Presley. I had a lot of his records and all the rock and roll musicians. I still listen to it on 50s on Sirius radio, it's wild. [laughs].

KS: Did you have a particular dance. I know there might have been dances at your school was there like a particular dance move that was your favorite?

FL: Oh, just the rock and roll, jitterbug, yeah that was all we did. Slow dances.

JG: What memories of significant historical events that took place while you were growing up?

FL: I remember when Roosevelt died, I was very young but it sticks in my mind. And the end of the war, the Second World War, the Korean [War] because my brother was drafted. He never went overseas, but he was drafted after college and then, of course, [President John F.] Kennedy's death. All very significant and I'm sure there was more, but those really stand out. For most people, I think they do, they always remember where they were during those times and then some of the assassinations of John Lennon and of course, the other Kennedys and Martin Luther King—all of them. They're just, you never forget.

KS: How were girls treated when you were in primary and secondary school?

FL: I don't think we were treated any different than they probably are now as little kids. Teased by boys, but I don't remember being discriminated against by teachers because we were girls in

primary years. I think we all got along well. I don't think we were taught the kindness the way kids are today. They don't see color; they don't see the kids are different. I don't think we were brought up that way. There was a lot of discrimination. I personally didn't experience it even though being Jewish we were in the minority, definitely in the minority in Maine, but I never, never was. My husband said he was. He grew up in North Brookfield which is so tiny near here and he says he did but I really don't think he did. He was president of his class and what he experienced was minor. But I can't say we were treated differently because we were girls, but we just went along with—we were silly kids [laughs].

JG: What was your relationship like with your parents growing up?

FL: Not the same as say my children had or my grandchildren had. My mother was strict and my father was very—he just went along. He was a really sweet guy. We didn't have the same privileges that kids do, we didn't speak our mind, we didn't have opinions. It wasn't that we couldn't speak at the table, but I don't think we ever did it because it wasn't that kind of situation because you started to discuss your day and that they're actually interested in it. They had, I think they had a struggle just to get along themselves and childrearing wasn't the same, wasn't as child-oriented. I mean today it's over the other way I think but it was different than it is now but it wasn't bad, it wasn't bad.

KS: Ok.

FL: It wasn't bad, it was just the way it was.

KS: Did that ultimately affect the relationship you have with your parents. I think you've already touched upon it a little bit. Did it influence the way you raise your children?

FL: Yes, and then of course, the times do change and you read things and you have more information, you treat them more equally and listen better and I could have done a better job about that too, but it was much different. I do think that did influence—yes, everybody's upbringing probably did influence the way they brought up their children.

JG: I have one more that I'm thinking of. When you were not at home growing up, where did you usually spend your time?

FL: Friends' houses the same as every kid I think. Friends' houses, movies, we had youth groups that we went to, belonged to. They had dances and activities and it was a close community of friends that we had and I still am friendly with several of them now all these years. Went to kindergarten with, it's amazing. We spent as little time at home as we could. [Laughs] You know, in high school anyway, junior high/ high school, you wanted to be with your peers and that meant being out of the house [everyone laughs].

KS: I think we have a couple concluding questions. The first one being how do you get through tough times and what kind of thoughts keep you going?

FL: I don't know actually, that's a tough question. I see myself as strong person and we have had some difficult times as my daughter who has the triplets was and so we had that to deal with and help her with the kids. I think you just do it. You don't even think about it, you just do what you need to do and then illness. My mother died, my brother died, just about five years ago, you just whatever strength you have, faith, you just rely on it and hope you get through it and you do, you do.

KS: How do you define success in your life, how has this changed over time?

FL: I think when we were first married, what we wanted in the 50s was some tall dark and handsome guy who was gonna make a lot of money [everyone laughs] and then, of course, as you mature and bring up a family, you really just want them to be healthy and happy and have some success in their life, but not tied to money, just doing something that they are happy with and I think that's what changed as you do have children. And even if you don't you just think that that's not everything, you, as they say, have your health and you're happy and that's about it.

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

FL: Speak up if you see inequity or discrimination. Just stand up for what you believe in and it doesn't mean that you have to be aggressive, nasty, not get along with people, but you can't let people walk all over you and you have to speak up. And certainly, in this day of MeToo you have to be very careful, I think, what you do in life, [what] girls do anyway. I was taking my granddaughter back to Brandeis and I was astounded at the bulletin board, all the places to go if you need help, don't walk alone, report any assaults. I'm sure it's here too. I was absolutely floored by the warnings and I think girls today—women—have to be really careful of what they do and how they act too because sometimes you are in a very vulnerable position that's not your fault but it happens, things happen.

KS: For sure, for sure. Um, is there anything else you would like to include that relates to ...

JG: ...your experiences as a woman.

FL: No, I think you covered up just about everything.

[Kate and Fran laugh].

FL: I think you've done a great job. Did you have other interviews too? Other people too?

JG: Nope we just have you.

FL: Oh I see, good, good, good. Well, I hope it was what you were wanted and I found it very interesting.

KS: Thank you for your time, it really meant a lot.

FL: It's amazing because I never talk about myself.

[Kate laughs].

FL: I don't like to but

KS: I don't like to either but....

FL: No no no, I'd rather hear other people's stories, but it wasn't so bad.

JG: Thank you.

KS: Thank you so much.

FL: You're welcome, alright, now if I can find myself out of here.