

Interviewee: Leanore F. Bona  
Interviewers: Franchesca McMenemy and Sarah Small  
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Overseen by: Profs. Leslie Choquette and Dona Kercher of Assumption College



**ABSTRACT:** Leanore F. Bona, known by most as Lee, was born on Long Island, New York in 1949. Lee is the President of the League of Women Voters in Worcester, Massachusetts. She defines herself as a nontraditional woman who has never married or had children, but rather has dedicated her life to helping those around her. In this interview, Lee discusses her family history, various educational pursuits, and several successful careers, especially within the Worcester League of Women Voters. Lee touches on the League's successes under her presidency and offers insight into the future of the League. Aside from her work with the League, Lee has worked as a lawyer for "non-traditional" clients, registrar at Columbia University, free clinic liaison for the Worcester Medical Society, and injury prevention coordinator for the UMass Memorial System. She has also served on the Boards of Seven Hills Foundation and Abby's House.

SS: So the first question is if you could state your full name, both maiden and married if you were married.

LB: My full name is Leanore F. Bona, but everyone calls me Lee.

SS: Is Bona your maiden name? Has it always been your name?

LB: That's my name.

SS: The next question is where were you born?

LB: I was born on Long Island in New York, just outside of Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan all that.

SS: Have you ever been married?

LB: I have not.

SS: Do you have any children?

LB: I don't.

SS: What cultures or ethnicities do you identify with? Family background?

LB: Family background, Italian, both of my parents were born here. My father left here when he was three with his family lived in Italy for about ten years then they came back

here again. My mother was born in Brooklyn and comes from a family of fourteen. My father had just himself and a sister.

SS: Where did your father go back to Italy?

LB: They went to the Piedmonte section of Italy, which is north, by Switzerland, and France around there.

SS: Tell me more about your parents. What did they do growing up?

LB: Well let's see, my father came from a small family. His father was a maître d' in a restaurant in Baltimore, Maryland, called the Kaiser Hotel, actually. When WWI started the name "Kaiser" wasn't really popular and the owners closed the hotel for a while. He and his wife and two kids went back to Italy and he was a hotelier there. So, my father did most of his elementary schooling in Italy; they have a different system there. But it's interesting because he was tri-lingual; they lived in sort of a very commercial area, a lot of banking, international banking, so the whole area spoke French, German, and Italian and so did my father. He lost most of it when he came back here as kid and my grandfather when he came back worked for another hotel. I believe they had changed the name of the Kaiser Hotel to the Commodore Hotel, something like that, at the time. So, he could go back to work there. As a teenager my father grew up working in the hotel kitchen, so he was always an excellent cook. My father's mother, paternal grandmother, was a lady's maid in Baltimore Maryland. She worked for a wealthy woman, and sort of like a Downton Abbey [TV show], she was like a maid-in-waiting, working for well over twenty years. They always stayed in Baltimore. My father went to college and then he moved to Long Island where there's a lot of defense plants and that's where he met my mother. My mother came from an Italian family in Brooklyn. Both her parents came over on the boat and had lots of kids, lots and lots of kids, you know.

SS: Fourteen, you said?

LB: Fourteen. Two siblings and two fostered cousins died in the Spanish influenza epidemic, my grandmother lost two of her own girls and then two of my mother's cousins, who had been sent to live with my grandparents because it was considered healthier where they were living. But apparently not much healthier because a lot of kids died during that time.

In my mother's family they had nine girls and then three boys. The last three were boys. We always said they were simply not giving up until my grandfather got his sons [laughs]. My poor grandmother—it wasn't even funny for her. She was a worn out lady and very sick from all those pregnancies. She died at the age of sixty-nine, mostly because her body had worn out from having so many children. It wasn't even possible, according to all my aunts, to be a good mother for the last group of them. She had to depend on the older girls. From my mother down, my mother was number eight, she had

one younger sister and then the three boys, the sister just before her was the first out of the whole group to finish high school. The others were taken out after eighth or ninth grade to go to work.

So, my mother was very close to her sisters and it was a very matriarchal family growing up. They all had at least five kids. I grew up in a small town in Long Island, with over fifty cousins. It was us against the world [laughs] somebody got into a fight, everyone got into the fight [laughs].

SS: So where else have you lived during your life aside from Long Island?

LB: I left Long Island early on and wanted to do more with my life. Long Island, when I was growing up, was still very much a guys' world. There were a couple of colleges out there that were private and expensive. If you were going to go to college, the parents were going to send the boys and not the girls. I was the first female in my high school to be president of senior class. Didn't quite know what to do with that actually since there were no models out there, so I am not sure I was the best president, but I certainly enjoyed myself. After that I took courses in community college. After that I joined the convent. So I was twenty-one when I joined the convent. Well, I lived in a couple of apartments with friends first. I spent about three years in apartments with friends and then from there I spent eleven years in the convent.

SS: Where was the convent?

LB: In Brooklyn. All my houses—I lived in four or five convent houses—my mother house was in Brentwood, Long Island. I was a community organizer there, so I did housing work, which was very interesting in Brooklyn. After eleven years, I left the convent. I spent my first year out of the convent in a shelter for women because, of course, I didn't have any money or clothes except two black skirts, four white blouses [laughs] and a pair of jeans. So, I traded off skills for a room. I certainly was educated at that point. The order I belonged to educated every one of its members. I was starting my master's degree when I left. So, I lived at the shelter for a year and in exchange for a private room, which was literally a broom closet [laughs], I did work as a staff person. I did group therapy and supervised the house a couple nights a week, like everyone else who was on staff. I also supervised bus trips up to Bedford Hill's prison, a women's federal prison. We did bus trips for the children of inmates to visit their mothers. One of the sisters I had lived with started the program up in Bedford Hills, for mothers and their children to stay together the first year of the child's life and for the mothers to be taught and go to classes and things like that, very interesting a year of that. I also cleaned apartments on the side to earn some money. Educated as I was, I needed to earn money. I think it was a year, fourteen or fifteen months, I had finished my master's degree. So, I moved out of the shelter, and lived in an apartment in Brooklyn and had a couple of in between jobs. Finally, I was working as assistant bursar at Columbia University. I worked in that job about a year or so, then transferred over to the registrar's office,

started as assistant registrar, and when I left I was a registrar. Do you want me to keep going on and or do you want to ask me more questions?

SS: I guess when and how did you come to Worcester?

LB: That's a good question

FM: What age were you when you came to Worcester?

LB: I came to Worcester after I finished law school so I guess I was forty-seven? Around there. So I went to Columbia, I was there nine years. They restructured and I was reporting to someone let's just say I did not admire very much. He had a real problem, he had a real problem. He was a misogynist I guess you would say. He had a real problem working with women. I was the only woman executive on the downtown campus. And there was a woman who was a combination registrar/bursar on the medical school campus, he had a real problem with that. He would do things. [laughs]. Like at a meeting, he would [laugh] act real tough and say something. He would take his hand and shove his shirt down the front of his pants, like, "What do you think of that!" We would say, "Oh yeah, boy, grow up." [rolls eyes]. But anyway, I knew I wanted to either move around campus or move on with my life, so start over. I could have been assistant dean at some place, which would have been uninteresting. I wanted to do something different. I was enrolled in doctoral program there, but I wasn't really serious about it. I wasn't enjoying it. We could take up to fifteen points for free at the time, for free at Columbia! So I was like a hog in heaven because I loved taking classes all over the campus. I tend to get a degree, pay loans off, and get another one, something new always interesting me. So I figured, let me move on. And I thought about the fact that if I had to do it all over again, I probably would have gone on to law school. So, I applied and got accepted to four places and went to New England School of Law in downtown Boston. That was in 1993, maybe 1992, I don't know, can't remember dates anymore, anyway so I moved to Boston. I did not know anybody, my friends all packed me up and then moved me. We had a big party for a weekend then they left. I said to myself, "Here I am in my mid-forties in law school. I must be crazy!" But I had a terrific roommate. I advertised for a roommate and one of my classmates was my roommate. I was forty-three and she was twenty-three from California. She was of Korean descent. Her parents walked from North Korea to South Korea during the war. They were the first generation over but she was valley girl from tip to toe. We got along just great for the years that we were there. It was really terrific. So, after graduation, I could proudly say that there were eleven men and women in my class who were over 40 and we all passed the bar the first time. We knew how to make presentations and write papers and things like that.

So I started work after I passed the bar. I had already opened a mediation practice in Newburyport, MA. I was happily making my way doing that when a friend of mine, who had moved to Worcester and worked for the Worcester District Medical Society, approached me about a job there. I decided to move and was never sorry I did. I enjoyed

every minute of the job, which was Director of a Worcester District Medical Society Program called Worcester Healthcare Outreach. I was liaison between the seven free medical clinics in Worcester and the outside world. I thoroughly enjoyed that for five years. I was able, through some sleight of hand, to get a real pharmacy program for them, to centralize a lot of their services, to get them a centralized database between clinics so that somebody who came in Tuesday at St. Anne's, but had an episode or something Thursday and had to go to Wesleyan Methodist church, could see their record and how they had been treated the week before and things like that.

It worked out very well. In fact the program grew so fast, and so big, we became a RWJ, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, grantee—a multimillion dollar grant. The program kept growing and the medical society finally, after about five years, had to decide whether they really wanted to focus their efforts that way or that was not the business that they were in. I think, I mean I had to agree with them, it is not the business they were in. They are member organization, they do education and social things for doctors. So they stopped the program which really broke my heart, but such is life in the big city. One moves on. You know you will have twenty careers in your life, girls, so don't worry about starting the first one or moving on!

SS: Great! So you just said when you arrived in Worcester. What part of the city do you live in now and have you lived in multiple different areas in Worcester?

LB: I sure have! After I left the medical society, I opened up a law practice. I started having clients, always nontraditional client based, so single people, not married people, LGBT, anybody who did not fit in—the 'shadow communities.' Not your generally heterosexual married people with 2.3 children. I don't know how, but it sort of happened. They gravitated towards me. But since I set up that kind of practice, I really needed to travel and I had clients in just about every county, which was fun. I've lived in about half dozen sections of Worcester. I have always tended to stay in Worcester because I am single. So, I liked the idea of at least a small city. You know to be able to drop my laundry off and meet friends for drinks and things like that. So, I lived in the West End which I truly enjoyed and the Burncoat section and Lincoln Square section and a couple of hopscotch places in between, but always lived in two or three-deckers. Always liked apartments, always lived in apartments my whole adult life. Don't want to worry about what happens in the basement or attic, but I like to know my neighbors. I don't like to feel isolated like in many big buildings. So I always tended toward the two or three decker apartments.

Sometimes I just wonder at the fact that when I left the convent I had three outfits that I could carry on couple of hangers and I lived in one room. And then you move from a shelter to a small apartment and you fill it, then to a large apartment and then you fill it. By the time I was in a three-bedroom apartment by myself I could fill it! [laughs] Unbelievably bad. But I like it! I like having a backyard and grass. I tend to stay in

places seven, ten years. If the landlord dies or sells the building then I move, but I like to stay in the same place.

SS: Cool. Another question is what challenges do you think this city still faces and what would you change about the city.

LB: Good question. I think Worcester had a number of challenges, not bad things. I like Worcester. I like the fact that it's a small city. I think that it is developing slowly. It's the first city I lived in where I couldn't live downtown. Usually right downtown is where I like to live. However, the building stock that they have on Main Street is commercial real estate and, right now, they are probably half full. But the people who own the buildings are old time people who have had them forever and they're not in the position to invest the money necessary to change them into mixed use buildings. So, until that happens we are not going to have a vibrant downtown. You know, I would move downtown in a minute and go downstairs drop my laundry over here, get take out over here, meet some friends here, you know take a bus or a subway somewhere instead of owning a car. I did not own a car until I came up here. But that is not happening yet, other things are happening and I think it will happen and I hope to live see day. We have a wonderful arts community. It is getting itself really grounded in terms of mixed culture. It has a wealth—and I know from practicing law with a non-traditional client base, there is a wealth of cultural diversity.

I think we were a bit more integrated in the past, as far as diversity goes. As politicians attempt to upgrade the image of the city, they can sort of lose touch with that. You can zone out diversity. My personal feeling is that you either write inclusion into commercial contracts or you have, in effect, written it out of commercial contracts. So as president of the League of Women Voters [LWV Worcester] for instance, I spoke to the deal with the new developer of the old courthouse on North Main St. I spoke at public meetings saying, A) congratulations on getting somebody in there, it had to happen, it was vacant for too long, but, B) they were not requiring writing into the contract the necessity to provide some mixed use, diversity. You know, some subsidized apartments. You have most apartments at their projected high-end rents. I am not sure how many people are clamoring to get in for 3,000 dollars or more, but it could not have hurt them with a hundred apartments to say, "Jeez fifteen of them we will make subsidized," or something. Something to create and to assure continuing diversity of the north end because it could become a lily-white gated north end. Right now, the developer builds good buildings, but they're always gated communities. I am not sure we need a gated community on Main Street in Worcester. So, I was very disappointed that they did not build that in. I was very happy that the labor people stood up for what they wanted, and got a very good deal written into their contract because of that. In the newspapers, I was noted to be the only white woman to demand diversity in the north end. There's a problem with that. I, for the LWV, also objected to the whole slots parlor idea in downtown Worcester. First of all, merely blocks away from the city hall and the public library, but also the fact that they would have been creating a ghetto again. We need to be very mindful as citizens that

we do or do not want that to happen in this community, or it will happen! It happens in every city. I come from Brooklyn. I can't afford to live in Brooklyn any more. Nobody who is middle class or under can afford to live in Brooklyn any more, it's ridiculous! My little tiny apartment I paid five hundred and fifty dollars for in 1993 goes now for twenty-five hundred dollars a month. It is ridiculous. So where do all normal, regular, people go? Try to find them anymore. And it was the cultural diversity in Brooklyn and Worcester that was so attractive to so many people. I used to love getting off the subway and my biggest decision was, "What kind of food do I want to have for dinner on the way home." Can't do that anymore. Everything comes in croissants now! [laughs] Which I like, but you know....anyway I think if Worcester guards against that lack of diversity, I would be happy.

SS: Right, so you talked about all this action within the League of Women Voters, but how did you get involved in the League of Women Voters?

LB: Well, I had to move to Worcester because the three-decker apartment I was living in in Dorchester, the landlord was selling the house and I had just opened my practice so nobody was going to give me a mortgage at that point. So I moved to Worcester because I had family here and also a couple friends from law school. I thought it was nice, it was a small city, a city I could identify with. I did not want to go to suburbia as a single woman. And boy, the housing stock! You rent a little tiny apartment in Dorchester for nine hundred dollars month, but nine hundred dollars in Worcester, you get an entire floor! So I moved there and when I did I wanted to start meeting people and the like. A friend of mine said Worcester was very much a volunteer city. People get involved either in their neighborhoods or other organizations, and I should too. So I called United Way, which even today they will send you a list of advocacy and non-profit groups and their volunteer opportunities. It's really a great list to have. So I got that list and started by getting involved with Seven Hills Foundation. I just really started volunteering at their bingo. I was doing professional work during the day, so I was working in their café during bingo, slinging hamburgers a couple nights a week and really enjoying myself. There's no thinking involved. You're just flipping burgers and saying, "How do you want that?" Lots of fun. But then of course, they find out you are an attorney and everyone wants you to do more, so I wind up being the attorney on their human rights committee. So we oversaw and investigated every single incident of discipline or of physical altercation, either between or with clients. It was good committee, it was independent of the board and administration so we were free to act with anybody or on anybody to maintain justice for their clients. They still have that committee, I was on it for five years. So, kudos to them for drawing something like that up and giving it independence so you don't have to worry about the justice decisions made. So I did that for five years, and I met a woman there who was involved in the League. She said because I was a community organizer in Brooklyn, you need to get involved in the community work or you'll be bored [laughs]. And I said, "I am really not bored. I am working for the medical society and doing this." But I went to a meeting and that was almost twenty years ago. I

have been on the board of the League of Women Voters ever since. Once they get you, they've got you. Right, Franchesca?

FM: Oh yeah.

LB: [laughs]

LB: So yup, started out just being on the board—as people usually are—as a member at large, so I didn't have any duties but in the League there's sort of a progression, what we call developing a portfolio, so you begin to take on positions like voter services or legislative liaison or treasurer, secretary or something. And you add to your portfolio of skills. It is supposed to be a developmental process for women as well. I think you've come a long way within the system, Franchesca.

FM: Yeah! So how did you get involved in the League? How did you move up? What level are you now?

LB: Oh well I am president now. I think this might be my sixth year as president. Thank god there is a nominating committee out there working as we speak to come up with a new governing group. A few years before that I was just on the board and then another three years before that where I was president again, and I have held just about every position: treasurer, secretary, voter services chair for many years, legislative advocacy coordinator. I am on the state nominating committee now. Just about everything they have out there I've done for at least a year or, two, or three, or four, or whatever. But I've enjoyed it. It was really good for me in terms of connecting and getting involved and learning about Worcester and what makes it tick and who makes it tick. And having an agenda and pushing it forward and getting it done. And I've loved belonging. I love history, the history of any organization. I feel there's a connection always.

The League started in 1869 as the Worcester Women's Equal Franchise Club and it was a combination of other suffrage organizations in Worcester coming together and creating one out of many. And they worked for many years—sixty years before women got the vote. I don't think any woman was alive—well, I think there was one woman from the original group and she was too far gone to vote in 1920 when women finally got the vote, which is a shame. Lots of women fought for that. But in 1920, the last president of the Worcester Women's Equal Franchise Club, Margaret Pearly Woodward, became the first president of the League of Women Voters in Worcester County and with 600 members at that time! They had boards and they had community meetings. The first year after women got the vote, they registered almost six thousand women in the county to vote through the schools and through downtown. It has a proud history. It's 95 years old this year. It has at times pirouetted and changed direction.

Always advocacy, always education: those are our two goals, always. Advocacy and education. Since the very beginning. This year, we had some very interesting meetings,

because it's time to change direction again. The League is changing: we don't have 15 people sitting on the board anymore. It's not the world where your husband went out to work and you were sitting at home bored stiff and the League was a way to get out and use your mind and do something constructive. Women are working now. Everybody works. Everybody works. A lot of the women—we have about 49 members and they want to support us. We have maybe six members who can really be involved, you know? The others are working, they're a little fearful for their jobs or they're working very high-level jobs, travelling around the country and the world, and things like that. So they can't be involved. We now have electronic connections all the time for our meetings. People either Skype in or we put a phone down. I can get five people in on my phone. That just had to become normal, and it is normal now. It has to be the way it is. We can do less because we have fewer people, but we can do more in the sense of collaborating with other organizations. Focusing our attention on two or three projects instead of a half a dozen at a time. We are sort of feeling our way in and trying new things and experimenting. But it will happen, it will change face, it will be different in the next five years or so, but it'll still be here. There will always be women who want to be involved. The League is a trusted nonpartisan organization. Just in the past few election—is it all right that I am babbling like this?!

SS: No, it's perfect! [laughs]

LB: For example, we got a call before the 2012 election by the city clerk in Worcester who we had a problem with a couple of the polls during the primary season. We had those voter ID people show up at a couple polls and literally stop people in the Hispanic sections from voting and making demands. They had no right to be there making demands to see people's ID. And they wanted that to stop and people were in a clamor, so what do they do? They called in the League because they knew the League is totally neutral in these situations and they said, "We need observers, we need the League to do it." So we organized and we got 23 members from around the state. We held three training sessions and we had observers at five of the polls and we actually stopped the ID people at two of them twice. And two years after that during a municipal election I got a call from the city clerk who said, "Somebody is complaining about the count, the absentee ballot count, so we need a neutral organization in here to recount with us." I said I couldn't do it because I was working, but I sent three people in, other members, and they conducted a recount. There was not a thing wrong with what the city did, you know, they were fine. But somebody complained and it had to be done. So we get calls like that all the time. I just got a call from the Lincoln Plaza I think it's called? It's the Worcester housing authority complex, massive complex, and they have a very important election coming up with regard to the people on their board so we went in—a couple of people went in to observe them for that. Just to be observers, that kind of thing. So I think we are appreciated, you know. Franchesca has certainly done a lot with the colleges and we've had some good presentations. And you and Carissa—the ideas the young people have. An app! That joins all the leagues from across the state! Great idea! Franchesca threw that out during our convention this year and they said, "Whoa! Never

thought of that! Everybody else has an app!” [laughs] But you know, that’s it, you want new people, you want young people, and sometimes they move on. We’ve had wonderful, really wonderful college students, seniors and up and all, who can stay two or three years after and then they have to move on for their jobs. I went through it, you’ll go through it, everybody has to go through it and that’s fine.

This is the kind of league we have now, and we have to embrace that and move it most creatively. So let’s hope we will continue to grow. It’s time for me to have others move in as leaders. It’s not healthy for one person to be at the top for so long. Even at a corporation. It is my feeling that most good CEOs, they’re moving on in five years. They know that you need new blood up there and stuff. At this point, hey, it’s been a huge success as far as I’m concerned, under my presidency [laughs]. But it is time for me to move on and for a whole new group of people to come and take over. And I am happy to help, but I don’t have to be in charge anymore. [laughs]

SS: That’s awesome. So you touched a lot on yourself being politically active and the League being politically active, but what do you consider the group’s major accomplishments and your major accomplishments within the League? As president or just involved in any capacity?

LB: Historically we have always been involved in legislative activities. The League had a slate at the 1920 democratic convention in October of 1920. And it was against child labor and for women’s health and stuff like that. Environmental issues have always been huge. Environmental issues are still huge, now more on a regionally level; county wide, you know? So we cooperate with say, for instance, Northern Leagues on more issues that arise there environmentally, because Worcester itself has a wonderful parks program and a wonderful relationship with Audubon and other environmental organizations. We have collaborated more recently with other organizations in terms of the issue of racism in the city, in terms of having people show up and support other groups’ work. We have collaborated in terms of presenting programs on various issues. So instead of five people or ten people showing up for a league presentation on an issue we’ll collaborate with three other organizations and have one hundred and twenty people show up, that kind of thing. So education is very important.

We have been very vocal and I believe one of our primary purposes is to be very vocal. The League has positions and if something is happening like the slots parlor or the whole racism issue in the city, then we have not only a right but a duty to be standing up and saying something to those issues based on the stand that the state and national league has. I should say that the League of Women Voters is a bottom-up organization. So our position on economic justice, for instance, doesn’t come from the national to the state to the local. It comes from the local to the state to the national. Any issue like that that arises becomes well defined on the national level at convention. And then those questions become studies that go back to the local leagues. Local leagues have six months or a year, whatever it sets as a goal at national, to come up with a consensus on

the small local level and then on the state level in terms of how we want to define an issue, and where we should stand on it, and then that just goes to national convention the next year and gets voted on by everybody else. It's wonderful, you should try a national convention sometime, it's like 800 women all extremely intelligent, well involved, and very vocal [slams table] discussing an issue. I mean really, most of the fun maybe happens over drinks at the bars, that's where the lobbying gets done [laughs]. But it is very professionally done, using Robert's Rules, all that stuff. It's a wonderful experience. And then we use those, we have those positions now. And anybody can see what they are on the state website, national website, that kind of thing. And state and national are changing too.

One of the problems we have on the local level is that we're tithed by both state and national because they don't get a lot of grants because they're advocacy groups. Right now they're dependent on local leagues for support. That is a real problem when I am trying to run a local league in terms of finances. So we have been complaining about it for so long now, local leagues across the country, that they're finally doing something about it. They're reorganizing themselves so they can apply for more grants, work with us regionally, in terms of getting grants and things like that. In our state of Massachusetts, in the Commonwealth, two years ago they hired a very professional woman who has a wealth of experience with fundraising, as their executive director and it has just been excellent for us. And she is very interested in working with Worcester because we have lots of creative ideas. So, again, it's evolving. If it's going to live like every other living thing you have got to change as you grow or you're dead! Only dead things don't change, and I would argue maybe dead things change too, only when you're dead you have no control over the change, right? [laughs] And I want control over the change. So if you're a healthy organism, to keep the organization alive, it is going to change and evolve.

SS: Franny what do you think we should go to?

FM: I mean, I guess something that really interested me—I don't know if you're interested in this, but you said you haven't got married, you don't have kids, you don't want to go to a suburban area because of the mom and dad with 2.3 kids, I mean, is that your choice that you didn't want to get married and have kids or is it that you didn't have time for that?

LB: Well I was very busy, but certainly I worked with the kind of people who were doing the same thing so it's not like I was closed to the idea of getting married. It's not like I carried celibacy with me from the convent out, you know what I mean? [laughs] I did leave that behind. [laughs] Marriage just didn't happen, you know? It just didn't happen. At one point I did think about adopting a child or having my own child, but I decided that probably would not have been wise by myself. If I had a partner, I would have probably done that whether I were married or not, but I didn't. And working with women for so many years, I saw that it's a really difficult thing to do. It's not impossible, but it is very

difficult to do. And I did always tend toward community work and client work which meant when a client calls or when there is a community meeting, you have to go when it's called or when your client can meet with you. And that's all over the lot, it really is, so that does effect whether you're free to have children. As far as getting married, not yet! Listen, if I met the right person I'd be married tomorrow, no problem. [laugh]

SS: That's interesting. Do you have any more questions about her personal life?

FM: I mean, I think she does not follow the social standard.

LB: I don't follow your social standard?

FM: No, I said I think you don't follow the social standard of having kids, getting married, you know what I mean?

LB: Oh! Bummer. [laughs] You ran out of questions then? [laughs]

SS: I mean, I would like to hear more about what you do in your practice. You said you work with unconventional sorts of clients, but what do you usually work on?

LB: Well, when I was working for the medical society, a lot of the community outreach I did, over and above working with the clinics directly, was with what I called, 'shadow communities.' Those are people you wouldn't even know exist in this city, but there are thousands of them. You know, all the people who work in the kitchen of a restaurant, that kind of thing. And I'm sure—I never asked, I never asked—but some are illegal, most are not, just trying to seek out a living on the first generation level so the kids can do a little bit better later. So those are the people I worked with. One of the things I did when I worked for them was I created a reference guide and it was not for the *uninsured* but for the *underinsured* in Worcester County. So they maybe had a bare minimum but that was it, and where could they go besides the clinics? What doctors were offering services for nothing or low cost? What dentists didn't really want to advertise but you could get in touch with them and he would help your kids. You know, that kind of thing. I did a lot of education for these groups around that and sometimes we would just meet after hours at a restaurant with a group of four or five. Connected a lot of people to English as a Second Language, that kind of thing. In terms of non-traditional families they had to be protected in terms of their estate planning. In 2004 you could get married if you were a GLBT person but before that you could not so you didn't have the normal legal rights, it all had to be on paper. And that had to be very specifically drawn up so that was important to me. I've done over thirty adoptions in non-traditional families, which I am always thrilled about. When I started as an attorney I said, "Okay, you have to give back." You always have to give back. I don't know that every attorney says that, but I always felt it should be. So adoptions were something that I did and still do for next to nothing, really just for court fees. So there's no cash out of pocket, so that people could adopt. I would never not do an adoption because somebody couldn't pay. And

sometimes that was very important at the international adoption level. Even fifteen years ago it was going to cost you thirty thousand dollars, most of it going in other people's pockets to adopt a child from overseas so they truly do have a lot of money to lay out on the domestic side to get the final things done. So I did a lot of that and I am really proud of that. I am happy I did that. There are a lot of families out there which exist because I could help them. I never did criminal work, it's probably the only thing I haven't done. Med-Mal I haven't done, but I worked for an attorney that did that once. I hated it. Although Massachusetts has an excellent system there. But what else can I tell you about that?

SS: I mean I think that sounds pretty good.

LB: Got enough?

SS: Yeah, want to ask a couple more questions? We have about ten minutes.

FM: Yeah! What are your current plans what are the plans for the future? And I guess in terms of working are you working, not working, have here and there clients?

LB: I am really retired. In 2005 actually, I spent a year on the Cape because I closed my office. My office was on the second floor of Mechanics Hall. There are only two commercial spaces there and one was the district medical society, they're good friend of mine, and my office. So I closed that office, I only had two clients left and they were both on the Cape. One was in Mashpee and one was in Woods Hole, so I moved down there for a year to wrap up those clients and it was really a lot of fun [laughs]. 2005 was actually the first time I became a gun owner, I have a license to carry, and that was the first time I bought a gun. [laughs] I am a very responsible gun owner! [laughs] So I was down there for a year then when I came back I said I don't want to open an office again. It is a tremendous expense and responsibility so I worked for UMass Memorial as their injury prevention coordinator. Obviously a lot of outreach, a lot of good programs, very well respected and recognized. But after a few years I got laid off. They did those massive layoffs including clinical staff. But anyway I got laid off and then I definitely did not want to open an office again so basically I registered as a retired attorney and now I just do pro bono work occasionally for an old client.

I know my clients like family, some of them. I celebrate holidays with them. And you know, they're going to have a question and they call and I always wind up talking to them on the phone. Occasionally I will do something for them. But basically I just do pro bono work now, which is really good. Not so good in that I don't have a massive pension or anything out there. Especially since I was laid off and I was too young to get social security so I had to live on my pension for a while. So that depleted that, which is not good. But with social security plus a pension, I live a very good if simple life. I am very involved in my church. Sort of back to the religious roots again. I had degrees actually in philosophy and theology. So I do many things now at my church which is the

First Unitarian Church on Main Street near the old courthouse, big white steeple with the clock. It's a church free of dogma or creeds. First U was founded in 1759 as a breakaway from the state supported churches. That's my kind of church, a free Church. So you know, I am busy with that. I am busy with the League. I did volunteer work at Abby's House and I was on their board for five years, besides the Seven Hills Foundation. And I work Wednesdays at the library just doing volunteer work.

I supervised forty people at Columbia and did plenty of professional work after; I don't need to do that anymore. That's for you young girls! I wish you all the luck. I will help you. I just want to do my volunteer work. Worcester luckily is a city full of things to do, a lot of them free. So it's a good place to live like that. Miracle of miracles, I am still taking courses all the time. Because in Massachusetts after the age of sixty, sixty and above, you can take classes at no charge in any state college or university. No charge, zero! Some schools will charge you fees, which as you know, can be as expensive as the tuition. But Worcester State charges you nothing so that's where I go. And I am a dilettante! Italian one year, furniture thing, gym the next year, Excel for whatever, an accounting course. Whatever I want to take now, I just take and enjoy. So, can't complain.

SS: Can you just walk me through? I know you said you would get a degree then get another degree; can you just walk me through your degrees and where you got them?

LB: Sure! I took some courses at Suffolk County Community College after high school. Then I worked full time at various jobs at a state hospital, Brentwood school system, key punch operator, and then I was a traffic coordinator for an electronics company on Long Island so I called all the trucks in the range for pickups and stuff, that was fun. Then I went into the convent and we were all expected to have at least a master's degree. Minimally you had to have a bachelor's degree, so they sent you to school right away after two years.

SS: And what school did you go to for that?

LB: Saint Joseph's College in Brooklyn. And I got a bachelor's degree. My declared major was sociology and we had to do a thesis for that and mine was "Priesthood as a Bachelor Psychosis." How's that grab you? [laughs] "Priesthood as a Bachelor Psychosis." I got an A plus on it! But I also had really a triple major because I majored in theology—Old Testament Exegesis—and then philosophy. Then when I left I went to the shelter and the first year I would do the bus trips and all that stuff also finishing my master's degree in community psychology at NYU [New York University] which I got in October '83 or '84 and that was crisis intervention counseling and a lot of research. And my master's degree there was something like counselors ranking counselors. I can't remember, but it was looking at a counseling hierarchy. So for instance, I sent out questionnaires to psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers. I had like an 80% return rate which was phenomenal in terms of research, I'm sure you realize that. And

they ranked each other. So the hierarchy that they saw in their own minds and how they saw the skills that were developed on each level. Who did they use for therapists? So that was lots of fun. And then I went to Colombia and just started taking courses there. You know like a hog in heaven. Everything from Teacher's College to the Library School.

An interesting story there, when I was registrar there, I got a call one day. Colombia was a mainframe campus, and early on mainframe, because what's his name... Watson, he worked there and went to school there, so they all had IBM main frames. Those systems people were very weird people, they came in at odd hours, they didn't obey anybody, and they did their own thing. I got a call and they said, you better come down here, we just opened up a room and found something. So I went down to the basement, long hallways and stuff. And they had had a group of Dominicans, these little guys, couldn't have been more than 5'2 and all muscle, with sledge hammers knocking down these cement walls that they were going to use for more space. There was like a giant iron door on this space they couldn't get through so they had these guys come in and knock down the walls instead. And behind the walls from floor to ceiling were these massive, massive journals, ledgers, hand written at the time when Colombia had scribes on salary which were the earliest 1754 transcripts from all the students from Columbia that had been stacked there. It was incredible. So we called the library school. They came running over screaming, "Don't touch anything! Don't touch anything!" and took those books and did a lot of preservation work on them. One of the things we did was I had a committee find a place to store them and we stored them three stories below the World Trade Center. In a record storage facility that was naturally air conditioned and which completely collapsed when the World Trade Center was attacked in 2001. So luckily all those things had been digitized by the library school before it happened. But all the people down below there and all those records disappeared in that horrendous thing.

SS: What was the doctoral program?

LB: The doctoral program was educational administration. The master's degree was supposed to be on the way to the doctoral program but I was just loading up. And it was really a very new field, it was much more arty and fun. And finally the dean of the school said to me, "Are you going to get serious or not?" and I said "Probably not." [laughs] It's terrible when it's free: you pay no attention. I didn't care. I was just enjoying myself. It was great. It was wonderful.

SS: And after that you went to UNE? No.

LB: No, after Columbia I went to New England School of Law, NESL, which started actually as the Portia Law School. It was the first law school in the country for women. It was renamed the New England School of Law in the early seventies or something. It was a stand-alone school. I went to visit the schools where I was accepted and I went to UNC. I dragged a friend of mine down there and we sat in front of the law school and

everybody looked 22 and blonde and I said I am not going to this school. I was like 43 and starting out. And I got accepted in the University in Georgia. University of Georgia. I had a very close friend who came from Georgia and she said don't go there because you are *never* going to fit in in a *southern* state, never. And she was absolutely right. I was accepted at Loyola in New Orleans and I loved that but my neighbor for many years in Brooklyn came from New Orleans and she said "Lee, you go down there for one week in February and you think you know New Orleans? You can't breathe in that state for half the year, its so hot." She said you're going to hate it. So I didn't go there, which is good because they're an entirely different law. And what else, there was one other. Oh! Buffalo. I decided not to go to Buffalo because I was sick of snow. I should have, it would have been in-state school tuition. So I came to downtown Boston instead and we had a blizzard that year. That'll teach me. [laughs] So anyway I was glad I went to NESL, it was a good school and it trained me to be a solo practitioner, which at my age was really the only practical thing to train for. I enjoyed it. What else can I tell you? Did you get anything interesting out of this?

SS: Yeah! Just the last question, do you have anybody else you suggest we talk to who is a woman involved in the Worcester community?

LB: There are a couple of people! Can I think about that and send you an email? Because I thought about that the other day and it's like, geeze, I wonder if they ever thought of talking to so and so. Do me a favor and write down your email. Yeah there were a couple people and I thought I need to ask them about this. There's a couple of very interesting people you would enjoy talking to.

SS: Well thank you so much!

LB: Thank you. Sorry I babbled so much. [laughs]

SS: That's what we came here for!