LEXINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS, INC.

Interview
Mary Shunney
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Interview conducted by Eva Gordon
Videotape length 67 minutes

MS: I am a town resident of Lexington. I live at 24 Revere Street, [am] married to Frank Shunney, and we've got three children who have gone through the Lexington school system, Michael and Peter and Christine.

INT: Tell us more about…start with your grandparents. As you said, even they lived in Lexington.

MS: My grandfather, my mother's father, Grandfather Moakley, was born in Lexington, and my mother was born in Lexington, and I was born in Lexington, and my children were fourth generation to go through the Lexington school system.

INT: What was the town like that you recall?

MS: It was a very small town; we knew everybody. The policeman at the school crossing was our friend, as long as you behaved yourself. If you got into trouble, your mother and father probably knew about it before you got home from school. We knew everybody, and you know, you went through Lexington Center and you just knew everybody, and it was a wonderful place to grow up. I grew up on a dairy farm on Pleasant Street. I have friends now—as a matter of fact, we just had our high school reunion—and I have four close friends whom I've known since the first grade in Adams School, and we're still friends today. I grew up in East Lexington, which was kind of the other side of the tracks—it just was a wonderful town to grow up in. We went to what is now mostly condominiums, one side of it was junior high and the other side was high

school.[1] And we had something between a hundred fifty and a hundred sixty-five people in our high school class in 1947. Our high school graduation was in Cary Memorial Hall and all of the graduating class sat on the stage. That's how big we were. A little different from the graduations of my kids [that was] held on the football field with seven hundred-plus kids.

INT: And Lexington at that time, was it pretty homogeneous, population-wise?

MS: I think so, yes. You knew everybody; you didn't think about anybody's background or who they were or, you know. I mean, we were just all friends. There was no distinction between anybody. I can remember there were a couple of black people in Adams School. I don't even know who they were or where they went, but there was never any problem. I do remember as a Catholic that there were some restrictions. We couldn't go into the Follen [Unitarian] Church because Catholics weren't supposed to do that in those days, and it was difficult for a Catholic to be elected to a town board, because it was much more of a Yankee, type community, but that wasn't a problem. It wasn't a problem. I don't remember any hard feelings or any difficulties about it. I think we grew up in a time when we accepted things.

INT: Can I back up to the grandparents for a moment?

MS: Sure.

INT: Before we move forward in time, was it the family farm that you grew up on?

MS: My grandfather—my father's father—had a dairy farm. They had moved from Brighton, and we had a dairy farm. You know where Wilson's farm is now?

INT: Um-hmm.

[1] She is referring to Muzzey School, which was converted in the late 1970's from a junior high school into a Senior Center and condominiums.

MS: At the end of Wilson's Farm there's a kind of a Dutch Colonial house. As a matter of fact, I think it's for sale now—and we owned all the land up to Route 2. The cows used to pasture up there, and we used to take the cows across Route 2 to pasture. We had a dairy there, and the raw milk was pasteurized and bottled, and we delivered the milk out of that barn—the barn's up there. It was a wonderful growing up, because we grew up on a farm. And it was just great. We used to go up to Concord and my grandfather would buy the corn, the cow corn, and cut it down and bring it back in the trucks and put it in the silo, and in the fall all these people would come and cut all the corn and grind it up, and put it up in the silo. It was an exciting day.

INT: Did you go with them?

MS: Oh, yes. We'd go up Route 2, or 2A probably. But we had dairy farms around here where they would go early in the morning and pick up the raw milk from the cows, smaller farms, and then bring it back to our place and pasteurize it. It was a wonderful time, it really was. There are always problems, but it was a simpler way of life, and we just had a wonderful growing up, and we knew everybody. We knew everybody. That was the nice thing; you knew everybody, and everyone I think more or less had the same sense of values. If you got into trouble at school, then…

INT: Do you recall what kind of things were taught in your civics classes when you were in junior high about living in Lexington, which was a historical place. Do you recall anything that you kids learned about Lexington or felt about living in Lexington historically?

MS: No, I don't think so. I think that we probably had history class and develop the Revolutionary War and all this kind of stuff.

INT: Yes.

MS: But I don't think there was any great emphasis on it. As a matter of fact, I can remember that we never even…well, I do remember in the sixth grade we had one of those—what do they call them, trips?

INT: A field trip.

MS: A field trip, and we went up to Concord and visited some of the places up there. But, no, I don't remember any more emphasis on…

INT: So they didn't fill you with civic pride?

MS: Oh, I think the 19th of April was a big thing. We all marched in the parade with the Girl Scouts and we used to march from East Lexington all the way up. Now they only march halfway. And the parade was—I think it was larger. There were more Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and it was better organized. I can remember—I see the kids now and we were proud of the fact that we used to practice marching, so that we looked pulled together, which they don't now.

INT: Were you a Girl Scout?

MS: Oh, yes. I was in the Girl Scouts Drum Corps, which was wonderful. I played the bugle and I was the leader of the Corps, and we had a lot of…Mrs. Litchfield—remember Eleanor Litchfield? She was very involved in the Girl Scouts.

INT: Was everybody a Girl Scout, almost?

MS: I think Girl Scouts, yes. I think that Girl Scouts were much more popular than Campfire Girls. Campfire Girls, I think kind of…my daughter was a Campfire Girl, but you know, Girl Scouts seems to have faded out for whatever reason. But we were all Girl Scouts, and we used to go over to Cedar Hill.

INT: When did things begin to change in the town? When did the town begin to not be like that any more?

MS: I don't really know, Eva, because I can't say I've given it a lot of thought, but I do think as the population increased the town grew, and naturally you're going to have newer people coming in with new ideas, and want to change everything. So I think that's what happened. Naturally, you have more people, you're going to have more ideas, and things are going to change, but I don't really know when it changed.

INT: Did it begin to create a different atmosphere or different…?

MS: See, I don't really know, because when I was…certainly when I was first married and had my children I was busy taking care of them. Then at some point in time—and I can't even remember what year—I got involved in town government because I felt that if I was going to bring my children up in Lexington, that I should participate. I've often thought that every taxpayer should be required somehow to be involved, even if they just go to town meetings. They can get some sort of a discount on their taxes or something, but I just think that people really don't understand how the system works until they get involved.

INT: And so you…?

MS: Frank and I were both Town Meeting members for fifteen years, and then I've served on a lot of committees. I was on the Housing Authority for six years; then I was Chairman of the Housing Authority for three years. That was a very interesting learning experience. You just come in contact with situations and people that—and government red tape, that you wouldn't otherwise get involved in, and… But I also feel that it's time to leave, too. I think that fifteen years was enough, and I do have a problem with people staying on forever. I'm very much in favor of limited terms [laughter] on any level, because what I've found is you stop listening. You've been doing it so long, and even unconsciously feel that you know what's best. I don't are whether that's on the Housing Authority, as a Town Meeting member, on the Board of Selectmen, or whether you're down in Washington. I think whether you realize it or not that happens, and you do stop listening.

INT: Let's move on to our focus here: When did you first become aware—as Town Meeting members—that the veterans wanted to come to Lexington and march through and [inaudible phrase]?

MS: I really didn't know any more about it than what I read in the papers, because I wasn't—I was a Town Meeting member. But I think that

until it really came to a head with the Selectmen and that night that they had the meeting…I read in the papers about the people on the Common {Green] and the whole thing, but I'm not really sure I remember the sequence of events, when they were on the Common and got arrested, and then had the meeting, or they had the meeting…

INT: There were several meetings.

MS: Yes. I'm not really sure, but I really didn't get involved in it until the meeting was called.

INT: This was subsequent to the…

MS: And I went down to speak in favor of the Selectmen.

INT: What do you recall about the feeling about the Selectmen, and the feelings that you had, and what was that like?

MS: I remember going down to Cary Memorial Hall that night. I remember the great numbers of people. I remember black armbands, which I thought were very scary—you know, people were walking around with black armbands. I remember the Chief of Police was in that room upstairs in Cary Hall with two policemen guarding the door. I don't know why that was, but I do remember I found it very frightening, and it was… You know, there just were so many people there.

INT: What do you think—what did people anticipate? What was it that frightened them?

MS: I don't know. I think it was just the mobs of people. I don't really know. I am very much law and order person. I admit that I don't agree with all laws, but I don't condone breaking the law. I think that we just can't do that. We can't take things into our own hands, and when you pick up the papers every day now you can see how people do this. There's no respect for the law, and I went down to support the Selectmen and say that they were the body to make the decision, and I felt that that's as it should be, and that's why I was there. I can remember they called us up; they had chairs up in the front, and I think what they did was they called so many

people to speak in favor of the Selectmen, and so many people to speak in opposition. We sat up and—they'd call you up and you would sit up in front. I can remember sitting up there looking up into the group at Cary Memorial Hall, waiting for my time to speak, and I thought I don't believe this is the town I grew up in. I mean, this is something I never, ever—and I'm sitting there wondering why I'm there. What am I doing here? But I don't really have a very vivid recollection of it. I remember the numbers of people, I remember the noise, I remember being nervous.

INT: Do you remember what you wore?

MS: I remember I wore a green pants suit. Isn't that funny? I said that to Edie Heffern. The pants suit was longer. It was a very warm night as I recall, and…but it was very strange to have this happening.

INT: Were you scared?

MS: No. I was not scared. I didn't like it. I wasn't comfortable, but I was not scared. You mean, for myself?

INT: Just, you know, having to speak in front of these people?

MS: No. I was a little nervous about getting up in front of the group, because there was a hostility there, and you didn't know what to expect, but I wasn't really scared. I didn't like it. I was sad. I felt I had to do it, because of the way I believe.

INT: The picture that I have in the paper of you [is captioned]: "Mary Shunney giving list of names to the Selectmen."

MS: Oh, yes.

INT: What was that?

MS: I'd forgotten about that. I think what it was, was there were a number of people who had signed some sort of—whether it was a petition or what, in favor of the Selectmen. Obviously, everybody couldn't speak, and I think it was simply a petition in favor of the Selectmen's decision. I was asked if after I spoke, would I present it to the Selectmen? Which I

did. I mean, I didn't gather the signatures, and I don't even remember who did, but I was asked by someone to do that, and I forget who it was.

INT: Yes. What happens to things like that?

MS: I don't know. I would assume they must be on record somewhere with the Selectmen's Office. There must be minutes of this meeting. I mean, this was an official Selectmen's meeting, I would think.

INT: At the time there wasn't an open meeting requirement for people to…

MS: But even if it wasn't an open meeting, I would think that the Secretary of the Board must have been there. There must have been notes taken, I would think. Something, I don't know, as bizarre as this in the town of Lexington you would think that there must be some [record]—and I'm not sure whether there is or not.

INT: Because that would be an interesting source of people who had sentiments that were in favor of what you're saying.

MS: Yes. As I recall, there was quite a list of names.

INT: Did you present it actually to the Selectmen?

MS: Yes, I did. I presented the list of names to the Selectmen, and I had forgotten that. But someone asked me when I concluded my little speech, whatever I said.

INT: Do you remember what you said?

MS: The main thing I remember of what I said is, "Because it's the kind of person I am…" I remember I said that I just felt that we cannot take the war into our own hands, and it certainly wasn't a gift I wanted to give my kids. If this is the way—and this is our law making group in Lexington, the body that makes the decisions, and if we don't agree with them, then I think we should go through the proper channels to change them. And heaven knows they're not always right, but I just don't think this is the proper way to do it, and I obviously… There were a lot of people

there who disagreed with me, but that's the way I feel. I mean, I don't go through red lights and stop signs either.

INT: But you didn't discuss it with the Selectmen? So you would just…

MS: No. I went down and spoke in favor of them and I was not…

INT: You didn't arrive…

MS: I spoke for Mary Shunney, for what Mary Shunney felt.

INT: But did you know what their thinking was at the time?

MS: Well, I think their thinking obviously was that they made the decision and they felt that that was the right thing to do for the town of Lexington.

INT: Were any of them World War II veterans that you know of?

MS: I don't know.

INT: You don't know?

MS: I don't know. I wouldn't think so. None of them could have been. None of them are that old[2].

INT: Really?

MS: I don't think so, because my Frank was in the Korean War. World War II was—I mean, I was in high school when World War II was on, Eva.

INT: Were you a Town Meeting member at the time [1971]?

MS: Well, I don't know. I tell you, I can't remember. I was a Town Meeting member for fifteen years.

INT: And that was twenty-one years ago.

MS: I honestly can't remember if I was a Town Meeting member or not. I put things behind me.

INT: But you said before…

MS: I move on to what I'm doing now. But I'm trying to think of how long it's been since I've been a Town Meeting member. I may have been. I may well have been a Town Meeting member then. I honestly can't

remember. I can't remember, because I think it's been ten years, I think, since I've been on the Town Meeting.

INT: I was thinking maybe that's why you got this petition, because you were doing it not just for yourself, but for the people…

MS: I had nothing to do with the petition. I was simply asked to present it, since I was speaking. I was just the vehicle to present it to them, and I don't even recall who put the petition together, but it just made it easier because I was already on the agenda. Because you had to call the Selectmen's Office or write to it or something. You had to call them, I'm sure, and be put down on the list of speakers. You couldn't just walk in that night and speak. The Selectmen had to have your name, as I recall.

INT: That was true.

MS: Yes.

INT: Yes. With that many people, they would have had to organize it.

MS: Yes. So that's probably why I was asked to give it, because I was already going to speak and whoever put the petition together was not going to speak.

INT: What happened afterwards? Was there an aftermath? There must have been further…you know, people talked about it later and reminisced about it.

MS: I don't know. I left right away. I had no interest in hanging around. I do remember that Frank and I went with some friends of ours to—we only had black and white TV and they had color, [laughter.]—so we went to their house to watch it on the news. I do remember watching in on Channel 4, I guess, WBZ. Clark Booth was the reporter, and he was there at Cary Memorial Hall. He reported that the majority of the people at Cary Memorial Hall were opposed to the Selectmen's decision. That was not true. So I called Clark Booth at 11:30 at night and got him on the phone, because I called the news emergency number, because that's the only

[2] In fact, the Chairman, Robert Cataldo, told LOHP he served in the Armed Forces in 1944.

way you could get in there. I spoke to him, and I told him I was very upset about the way he reported it, because I said I was there, and you reported that the majority of the people were in opposition to the Selectmen, and that was not true.

INT: Did you rectify this?

MS: What is he going to do? It's all over with. He already reported it. Of course not. You think they're going to admit they're wrong? I said to him I think this is a typical case of why people get upset with the media.

INT: Ann Scigliano told us that she published every letter that came in.

MS: Oh, really?

INT: And she has said that most of them were in favor of the vets who were arrested.

MS: I'm saying that that night at Cary Memorial Hall he said that "the majority of the people" and that was not my observation, being there from beginning to end. It was not my observation that the majority of the people in that hall were in opposition to the Selectmen. I just felt that that was an unfair reporting, and I felt I had to call him and tell him. It didn't make any difference, but I tried. It made me feel better.

INT: What was your observation of…

MS: My observation that it was more even. I really think that it was more even. I don't think that the majority of people were in opposition.

INT: At the meeting, you were one of the people that was going to speak. Do you remember any of the other people that were around that were going to speak in favor of the Selectmen's actions?

MS: I don't. I really don't.

INT: You didn't all sit together?

MS: What we did was we sat down on the floor, but then when our names were called, what they did was they called us in groups as I recall, and so when you were called up there were probably four or five people and they had some chairs up at the front of the hall, and you'd go up next to

the podium, and you'd go up and sit in the chair and then you would speak, and then that group would go back and sit down. So we sat together when we called in a group, and I think they called us—and I could be wrong. I can't even remember who was there. But they did call us up in groups and then we just went back and sat with whomever we were sitting with. We didn't sit in a group in the hall all night. I remember being very upset about that.

INT: About?

MS: About the fact, the way he reported it.

INT: Yes.

MS: Because I just don't think that was…my recollection is that was not true.

INT2: Were there any of your friends from the Adams School there?

MS: Oh, I don't think—I don't even know.

INT2: You don't remember whether there were people you knew all your life?

MS: I'm sure there were, but I don't remember that at all. I really don't. I can't say I've given this whole thing a thought for a long, long time. And I do remember that it was an interesting thing to participate in, and it took a lot of courage to do it. It took a lot of courage to do it, especially when you felt that…when you went down there and saw all these people milling around outside and you go in there and stand up for the Selectmen who made the unpopular decision.

INT: You knew you were on the unpopular side?

MS: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. But it had to be said. It had to be said. And I feel strongly about things. And I speak for myself. I don't have to have anyone tell me what to say or how to say it. I feel very strongly about that. I really feel that it's important that we work within the system, and that we cannot take these matters into our own hands. I was in total

disagreement with the people who got arrested. [Laughter.] Present company included.

INT: On the Saturday…the meeting that we're talking about happened a few days after the Memorial Day or the Saturday arrest day and the demonstration day. Were you in town at all—in the center of town during that day—you didn't see any of that action?

MS: No. I chose not to go down.

INT: You chose not to, deliberately?

MS: I chose not to go down.

INT: Some of the things that have come to my mind: In the general sense of the different opinions that were expressed at the meeting, you've explained yours. On the side of the people who felt that the Selectmen had acted appropriately and they were supporting the decision, was it a similar kind of thinking, that people were expressing a similar view to yours, or were there other issues that other people might have also included that you…?

MS: Quite honestly I don't remember.

INT: You don't remember that?

MS: I really don't remember.

INT: Well, how about the people who were on the other side of the viewpoint? You don't recall?

MS: There's an awful lot I don't remember. They just felt that they had a right to do this. I mean, I think that's the bottom line.

INT: Did the subject of the war that was being protested, the Vietnam War—did that play a part in these discussions? Or did that become like a totally side issue that was not really discussed, because what was being discussed was the way that the…

MS: The right of the people to gather in that…

INT: To be there on the Green and then to honor the Selectmen's decision. Did that seem to be the main focus, or did the war become an

issue to be discussed or talked about at that time? Did it get mixed up in any way?

MS: I don't really remember. I think that night the focus was really on the Selectmen's decision. That's what the meeting was all about. Certainly there was a lot of feelings about the war, but I think that that whole thing came about because of the decision the Selectmen made.

INT: And this became a local…?

MS: Oh, I think it really boiled down to a matter of a Selectman made a decision and this decision was being protested. I think that that's what it came down to.

INT: That's interesting. What happened subsequently? Did this affect town politics later on?

MS: I don't think so. I don't recall that it did. That doesn't mean it didn't, but I don't recall that it did.

INT: Did your children realize how brave you were that night, and…

MS: I don't think so.

INT: How old were they at the time?

MS: What was the year?

INT: 1971.

MS: 1971?

NT: You can do your arithmetic there.

MS: Yes, 1971, so my kids were probably junior high age, and I don't even remember that part of it. I don't remember that part of it. I run a tight ship around here. [Laughter.] You know they tell you you're not supposed to say because I said so? [Laughter.] There are times when that's the answer, believe me.

INT: It sounds like you probably were involved in town politics.

MS: I think I was.

INT: And going to meetings already.

MS: So, 1971, right?

INT: Evenings, sometimes you'd be going to meetings sometimes, anyway?

MS: I went to a lot of meetings.

INT: A lot of service.

MS: A lot of meetings, yes, and served on a lot of committees, and it was, as I said in the beginning, I think I enjoyed every bit of it, but I also came to a point in my life where I don't want to do that anymore. I think that everybody should share the responsibility, and I think that people would understand better what the system is all about and how it works. You get a lot of phone calls and a lot of criticisms when you serve in town government, and from people who are irate about something because it hits them personally, and they don't understand the full scope of what's going on, especially on the Housing Authority. You get a lot of nasty phone calls from people.

INT: Any other debates about low income housing and all of that?

MS: I was Chair of the Board when all those scattered-site houses were built. I was very involved in that. We did a very good job. We interviewed everybody. It just wasn't numbers, and that's really what HUD and OCD want you to do. You fill out an application and you're number twenty-eight, and when twenty-eight comes up you get a house. Not good. I think that the Housing Authority had a great deal to be proud of. They put a lot of hours into it.

INT: Was the Housing Authority like an institution that was created during…what time period was that? Because it didn't exist when you were little.

MS: Oh, no, no. The Housing Authority was—well, Greeley Village has got to be thirty years old. When I think about it, my aunt is ninety-four, and she went in there. Maybe it's not. Maybe it's twenty-five, but it's been there a long time.

INT: And that's about the time that the Housing Authority…

MS: I think so. I got on the Housing Authority because Al Hruby died, and I was appointed by the Selectmen to fill his term, and then I ran for election. That's how I got on the Housing Authority. I was recruited.

INT: But the farms were gone by then. Right?

MS: Yes.

INT: When did your farm go?

MS: I think I probably was in junior high. Yes, I can remember the auction. It was a sad day. I can remember coming home from, I think it was junior high school, and the auctioneers were there auctioning off the cows and the property, and it was a sad day. But circumstances were changing and the pasture was gone, and it was just very difficult to operate the farm.

INT: The pasture land was land that was used by but not owned by your…

MS: We owned some, and some we used to cross Route 2, but then things change.

INT: I've seen farm auctions and it was very…

MS: It's sad.

INT: Traumatic.

MS: Especially when it's yours.

INT: Yes.

MS: You know, especially when it's yours. It's very…

INT: What did your family do then?

MS: I think what they did was after the cows were gone and the barns, then they bought milk, and still maintained the dairy, but then my father died. My father died when he was fifty-seven of a heart attack, and then after we sold everything off, because there was no one, my brother tried to run it for a while, but it was a very difficult situation.

INT: How old was your brother then at that time, trying to do it? He was young then?

MS: Yes. My brother was probably in his late twenties..

INT: And you stayed in Lexington?

MS: I'm the only one still there.

INT: Oh, really?

MS: My older sister lives in Texas. My brother lives in the Cape, and my other sister lives in Framingham. So, I'm the "last of the Mohicans," and with the help of God I hope I'll be in this house as long as I have a leg under me. I'm very happy here. I enjoy it.

INT: And so how long has the farmland been gone?

MS: Life changes. You know? I think the important thing is that you enjoy what you're doing at the time you're doing it. We've been very blessed. We've brought up three super kids and we have two lovely daughters-in-law and a super son-in-law, and grandchildren, and I'm—we're very proud of the kids. They're all doing very well, and we've been very blessed. And I think we've instilled a sense of responsibility and caring into our kids, too. Hopefully when the opportunity presents itself they'll give back to their communities wherever it is, what has been given to them. That's what's important. We used to have some fun times down in Town Meeting. I don't know if it's much fun anymore, but I used to love to kid people like Frank Sandy, and because we didn't have too identical thoughts about anything. I think the wonderful thing was that we had a lot of fun, and we were able to get along together. And I enjoyed that.

INT: You went to Town Meeting at the period of time in Lexington where the town was expanding?

MS: Yes.

INT: And so there were a lot of important decisions and changes, and it was a positive experience for you?

MS: Oh, yes. It was. I was always right and they were wrong. [Laughter.] I always knew that, but it was a wonderful experience. As I say, I enjoyed it.

INT: What were the conflicts? What were the new ideas, or were these loopholes? What were they?

MS: Well, you know, I think I'm more conservative. The new people in Lexington, and people that come to Lexington, they want it all. They want it all. And they want the government to pay for it all. I can remember one night I was out for a walk last spring, and I met two people who were Town Meeting members, walking down to Town Meeting, and I made some comment about, "Oh, better you than me," and I think it was just before an override vote. This gentleman explained to me that the reason why people want to come to Lexington is because we have all these wonderful things and all these services, and by having the override and continuing to have all these wonderful services, then the price of our houses is going to go up so that our property is going to be more valuable, and that's why we should go for the override. I walked home with that. Why didn't I think of that? I still voted against the override. [Laughter.] I mean, I just don't think we can have it all. And I think that Lexington is the town that has a reputation of being very affluent, but I think there are an awful lot of people who live very modestly, and I just don't think we have to have it all.

INT2: I'm curious, from being really outside of the town. Did people find ways to work out compromises for those differences? Did people find ways to find solutions that were somehow a mixture of viewpoints?

MS: Without thinking of a specific situation, I don't really know. I remember when my kids were growing up, the kids were very involved in [sports]. We did a lot of things. The mothers put on the football banquets and I can remember having the football team out here and the coach with his guitar or whatever. And this is where we had the banquet. We did it all. And we contributed to it, and it was wonderful being part of it, because you got to know the parents of the kids on the team, and you see them now and we reminisce about what good times we had, but we did a lot of it. We

were very involved. Of course, I suppose now the problem is that you have working parents, which makes a difference.

INT2: This happens.

MS: That makes a difference. But we were very involved, and even though there were seven hundred kids in the class, we knew a lot of the people because we participated.

INT2: Those would be the classes that my kids are in.

MS: Yes. I think Michael graduated in 1976, and I think '76, '77 were about the biggest classes, which is over seven hundred.

INT: Did you see the connection between after World War II and the increased population coming into the town? Did that ring a bell for you at all?

MS: I don't understand what you mean.

INT: After World War II, the GI's coming back and the families looking for places to live—did that seem to be a timing period that rings a bell in terms of increase of population in your town?

MS: I don't think it was. No, no, I think it was later than that.

INT: Later?

MS: Yes. I think people were drawn to Lexington because of the school system. I never quite understood that.

INT: I was going to ask you, when you went through the schools, did you sense that you were in a school system that had a strong—was giving you something special?

MS: No, I think we were in a school system that expected us to do the best job we were capable of, and you got in big trouble if you didn't. It was as simple as that. I was in the first group of the National Honor Society at Lexington High School. The first year that it was introduced was the year that I was in school, and I don't remember which year that was, whether it was—it might have been—because see we had seventh, eighth, and ninth grade, junior high, and then we had ten, eleven, twelve,

high school. So it may have been the tenth grade that we were—that was the first year that the National Honor Society was introduced into Lexington High School. And I went home and told my father, and he said to me, "It's all politics." So that was how much credit I got at home for being in the National Honor Society. That made me pretty humble. I sold real estate in Lexington for a year. I didn't really enjoy it, and I can remember people coming from out-of-town and I would ask them why they wanted to live in Lexington and they said because of the school system. I would say to them. "What is it about the school system that's so great?" and they didn't know. Nobody ever had an answer.

INT: It was that they heard it was.

MS: That's right. And I remember in the sixties bringing my kids up, and it was a difficult time. They were told to be free spirits and don't pay attention to your parents and do what you think you ought to do.

INT: It was the sixties generation that was quite a…

MS: And of course they came home and I told them, you know, "Let me tell you what the name of the game is, kids." [Laughter.]

INT: How did people in your parish react to somebody like Father Casey who…?

MS: There was a lot…the sixties were difficult times at Saint Brigid's also. I was very involved with Saint Brigid's teaching CCD, and going through religion books and so forth, and I battled there, too. Father Casey was very—I remember when he came to Lexington he painted the doors on the old Saint Brigid's Church bright red, and that set the scene. And so we went from there. He used to ride around in a Ford convertible with the top down. That was really very new.

INT: Was he young or old?

MS: Father Casey was probably in his—and I'm just guessing, I don't know, I'm not very good about years, but he was—of course he lived to be well up in his eighties, but of course he had Parkinson's Disease. He was a

very brilliant man, but he was very, very liberal, and to come into a conservative Catholic parish in Lexington, it was… But you know, these things are all good. It's all good. I think that the bottom line is, you really have to make a lot of decisions for yourself. A lot of these things are guidelines. Like, even though my Catholic religion is very important to me, you don't agree with everything that the Catholic Church says. I mean, I hear people talk about nuns. Right? Somebody says you must have gone to Catholic school. I never went to Catholic school, I went to Lexington schools. But I've always thought that the bottom line is that you have to exercise your common sense in doing your thinking on your own, and people go off the deep end.

INT: Do you think today people would try to get rid of someone like Father Casey because they wouldn't have the tolerance that you have?

MS: Oh, I think today they probably wouldn't. I think in my day they would try. But I think what goes around, comes around. Now I see that things come around. I think that people are more traditional. I couldn't help but think Sunday, when I was in church looking at the altar boys and so forth, like the haircuts. They're all back to those nice little short, clean cut looking haircuts. You see a guy with long hair and you say it just looks so strange, whereas, a ten years ago if you saw someone with short hair you'd think, what's his problem? Because everybody wants to be the same. But that's the kind of haircuts my kids had. They all had short cuts. And so, things go around, and I think now churches are more conservative. I think the kids, like my kids have children, and that makes such a difference. It makes such a difference by going to Mass and having them baptized, and having this as part of their life is very important to them now.

INT: What are the priests at Saint Brigid's like today?

MS: I don't know. I'm not really as involved as I was, but I think they're kind of middle-of-the-road where in the sixties it was pretty extreme. Of course that's when we went through all the changes at Vatican

II, which was hard, too. They turned the altar around. The priest used to say Mass with his back to us. Now having the priest face the congregation, that makes sense.

INT: In order to change?

MS: Sure. Of course, I grew up with the Mass in Latin. All those changes, so I think we've kind of come sort of center now. You also get older, and you also mellow, and you also don't get so upset about things. A priest steps up on the altar and says something that I disagree with, I think about what I'm going to have for dinner, and wait until he gets through talking, so I don't get upset. But that doesn't happen so much. In the sixties it was…but we had all these… Like,we had the two priests here who went down to Selma on Holy Thursday and got arrested. And of course then someone burned a cross on Saint Brigid's lawn.

INT: At that same time period, someone did that?

MS: That was when they went down to Selma and marched, but the idea was that the parishioners were very upset, because Holy Thursday, Easter week is a very important week in the church, and for them to go down and do what they were…the people were very upset.

INT: Are they still [upset] around here?

MS: It's interesting you should say that, because I went to a Mass for a dear friend of mine in Melrose a couple of Saturday mornings ago. She died in Florida. And we had a Mass for her, and Father—isn't that awful, now I'm not going to be able to tell you his name. I was going to say Father Fitzpatrick—I can't think of his name. But he was one of the priests. He's pastor over there in Melrose. Father Fitzpatrick left. He has worked with the deaf community and has done marvelous things. He's been up in Framingham, and he has done really marvelous things with the deaf. He's not a parish priest any longer. You know, it's not unique to Lexington. The sixties were very turbulent years.

INT: I was going to ask you for a word to describe the times, because you use the word mellow, and it's a good word for what happens as time passes—you mellow.

MS: Yes, you do.

INT: And that certainly is not the word you'd describe for the sixties or that...

MS: Yes. Because we really—if you were involved with things that were—it was a battle and it was very emotional. I can remember coming home from some meetings down at church and you were just—you wound up a high C. You couldn't go to sleep because—but I felt strongly about this. The instruction of my children in their Catholic religion is very important to me, and I taught religion, and I felt very strong about what I thought they should be taught.

INT: Was that the time period just prior to 1970 or around there?

MS: Yes, I think so, because it was the time that my kids were in grammar school and junior high, when I was involved. Sure it was, because Michael graduated in '76.

INT: So they weren't near draft age or anything?

MS: No, no.

INT: Did you have friends whose sons were drafted at the time?

MS: I'm sure I did. I have friends that I went to school with who have children who were older than my children.

INT: Did you know any draft resistors personally?

MS: No, no. I can't say that I did.

INT: You mentioned that your husband was in the Korean War?

MS: Yes.

INT: So, he's a veteran?

MS: Yes.

INT: Did he have any thoughts in terms of veterans and the activities that the Veterans Against the War were doing in terms of he was a veteran, they were veterans?

MS: He doesn't get involved in it. No. He doesn't really…he lived in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and he was drafted, and his father took him to the bus station, and with his little ditty bag, he got on the bus, and he went. That's what you did. He served his time and he came home. He believes that that's what you should do. So we just don't—he doesn't have a lot to say. He feels strongly about it, but he doesn't have a lot to say about what somebody else does. We really haven't had a lot of discussions about that.

INT: Did he get to Korea at the time?

MS: No, he never did. I didn't know Frank when he was in the service, though. I really don't know, and we haven't spent a lot of time talking about it.

INT: He's a Lexington boy too?

MS: No He came from Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

INT: Oh, from Pawtucket.

MS: Now, he's here in Lexington. He's been here for over thirty years.

INT: I'm interested in the four people you went to first grade with. Are their families still here, too?

MS: Actually not. One of my closest friends lives in Arlington, and her husband is a retired dentist. She's lived in Arlington all of her married life, which is not all that far away. My other friend now lives in Harvard, and she and her husband have retired. My third friend was Marjorie Reed who had the Reed Farm over on Lowell Street. Her brother, Haskell Reed, was a Selectman for a number of years, earlier than this timeframe, and Marjorie now lives up in New Hampshire. We're still very close and we all keep close contact for a lot of years, and we're very good friends. Old friends are—I say that to my kids, that there's a special bond among people that you grow up—you have new friends and they're wonderful. but

somehow there's a special bond among people that you grew up with, and it's pretty special that the four of us are still such close friends.

INT: It's also a blessing.

MS: Oh, yes, it really is. And fortunately our husbands are all compatible, so that helps.

INT: I'm just curious about early Lexington, I mean, Lexington in your early years.

MS: Right.

INT: That's makes me really want to talk to more people who have the experience of living in Lexington through many years, and you hear their descriptions, so that becomes preserved.

MS: Right. It was great. We walked to school. We used to go home for lunch, which was interesting. I see…when you go to work…and I don't think any kids walk to school any more. They drive them, and the traffic going in to this school in morning is unbelievable. What's the matter with these kids? Why can't they walk to school?

INT: It's too dangerous. There are too many cars.

MS: Oh, poor things! They're supposed to…they've got to learn to live in the real world, learn how to cross the street. But you know we used to walk to school, and we used to walk home from lunch and come again, and we used to walk home from junior high.

INT: But if their mother's working you can't walk home for lunch.

MS: Well then, of course they don't go home for lunch any more, but in those days they did. You didn't stay in school. In grammar school, anyway. We didn't stay for lunch. When you got to junior high you did, but that's a lot of years ago.

INT: I was just thinking, your children don't live here either?

MS: No, no. My oldest son is in Texas. And my daughter lives in Nashua, and my second son just moved back to North Chelmsford.

INT: Well, that's nearby.

MS: Yes. We're very close. When we all get together we have a nice time, but they have to go where… You know Michael had an opportunity to go to Texas about six years ago, and he's done very well. They have to go where the opportunity is, and it was hard, because being a… I grew up with my grandfather next door and my mother's mother lived down at the end of Pleasant Street, and aunts and uncles and cousins by the dozens. We had a lot of family around, and it's different because my kids are not around, but you have to accept that. They have to do what they have to do, and I don't think you can stand in their way or make it difficult for them. I'd love to have my little Kevin. I've loved to have them living a little closer, not next door, but a little closer. [Laughter.]

INT: Sometimes my friends and I think our children couldn't afford to live in Lexington anymore. Does that seem true for some of your kids too?

MS: See, I don't think about that. I think there's so much emphasis put on that. When Frank and I were married, we couldn't afford to live in Lexington, and we lived in Woburn. Because we couldn't afford it. We couldn't find a place that we could afford, and then we kept looking and looking, and we finally found an apartment down in East Lexington that we could afford, and then we stayed there for a long time, and eventually we bought—this is the only house we've ever owned, and we've been in this house since 1961, and we finally found a house we could afford. So, what's the big deal? If they can't live in Lexington then they've got to live where they can and make the best of that. But they make a lot more today than we did too. I mean, gee whiz, we paid $23,500 for this house in 1961, and I can remember making $22 in my first job going to Boston, and there's your carfare and your board and room, and a couple of bucks leftover. So when you think of the money that they kids make now, too, it's different. I think you're right to a point, but I just think that's kind of—I don't believe in this "poor you, you can't live in Lexington," you know?

INT: No, it's not the best place in the world.

MS: I mean it's not the *only* place in the world to live.

INT: I think what you just explained was if you're determined to do something, you can find a way to do it.

MS: That's right! We worked hard to live here, and it wasn't easy. You went out and looked at houses, and you know how realtors are, they'll always show you a house you can't afford. [Laughter.] In those days you tell them you wanted to pay $20,000 for the house, and of course they show you one that's $40,000, which you would love to have. And you know you can't afford it and you go home and cry. We must have looked at two hundred houses before we bought this house. Everything was pretty much the same. The numbers were different, but everything was pretty much the same. We rented, and you gradually earned your way. We're very fortunate to be here. We live in a nice neighborhood in a good location, and we're very happy here, but our kids are happy too. I think happiness is something that's within you, and they're happy in their marriages, and happy together, then it doesn't really make a lot of difference where you are.

INT: Does your son in Texas see a lot of differences down there?

MS: Oh, yes. He moved down there at a time when things were very bad. And Texas is turning around now. I saw *Fortune* magazine said that Texas is one of the second best places—or Houston is one of the second best cities—now in the country to do business in. But it was a struggle, but everything is different. They paid $162,000 for a house down there six years ago that has five bedrooms, three and a half baths, central air, in-ground sprinkler system, two-car garage, security system. It's just…of course labor down there is very different ,too. They have a lot of cheap labor. But things are different. It's awful hot down there, I'll tell you.

INT: There's no Patriot's Day parade.

MS: No, no. But they have other things.

INT: The Alamo.

MS: Yes, they have other things. But because the thing is, Texas, most people are transplants, so that it isn't like…being a townie, my roots are so deep that I think I'll probably—if God is good to me—always be in Lexington. And that's kind of nice, because they learn to make new friends and get along and help one another out there but they don't have family like holidays and things. Whenever we've gone down for holidays, there's always two or three other couples that come from Wisconsin or California or someplace, and it's really nice because they all get together and make a family, which is nice.

INT: Do you know other people—townies like you—who would want to talk about that with us?

MS: I don't really, I don't really remember. Unfortunately, I really don't remember who was there. I'm thinking that Louis DiNapoli talked, too. I'm trying to think of…somehow I think he spoke, too.

INT: Now, the names of people who spoke we have.

MS: Oh, do you?

INT: Yes. They were listed.

MS: In the paper? Yes.

INT: Your name was listed.

MS: Yes.

INT: So DiNapoli is somebody that you know?

MS: I'm trying to think of whether it was. I wonder if Paul Plasse[3] spoke? Was his name involved in this, Paul Plasse?

INT: We can check that.

MS: Yes. I quite honestly don't remember, and I told Eva this when I met her. She just kind of triggered my thoughts about it. I said I really don't know that I'm really much help, because I don't know what I remember.

INT: I think you remember quite a bit.

MS: I just remember how strongly I felt. And that I felt that no matter how difficult it was, I should, you know...

INT: And you remember that other people felt that same way.

MS: Yes, yes. It was a difficult time. I think nobody really enjoyed it. I wanted to be part of it. It was something that you felt you had to do, if you felt strongly enough about it, and I did feel strongly enough to support the Selectmen.

INT: Why don't we go over *The Minuteman* in connection with this meeting. But I was thinking when you got that petition did you have a sense of how many people…?

MS: Were on it?

INT: Yes.

MS: I don't even remember.

INT: As we've been just conversing kind of informally for a little while here, you've talked about a time that there were a number of areas of life had some turbulence or changes going on.

MS: Right.

INT: At the time of the demonstration that occurred and the arrests and then following that meeting that was pretty intense, it sounds like, did you have a sense that this was just part of the times that was happening, at all? That the country had a lot of things like this going on?

MS: I think so. The Vietnam War was a very difficult time for people, a very difficult time for people. I wasn't personally involved in it, because my children were not old enough to be called, and obviously Frank was too old to be called. That's the age group that I was involved in. I certainly can sympathize with the way the people feel. I can't say someone is right or someone is wrong about the way that we feel because we all have to determine that for ourselves. My only reason for being involved in it was that I felt that it was the Selectmen's job to make a decision about this, and

[3] Paul Plasse, also active in the town, was interested by LOHP.

that since they were the governing body, that decision should be abided by. That's why I was there, and it really didn't go any deeper than that. I was really there because of the fact that I supported the Selectmen in their decision, and I wasn't making a statement about the Vietnam War, because I was not in a position to do that. I wasn't really involved in it. It's easy to say, I would think my son should go if he was called or whatever. I don't know. I wasn't in that position. So, therefore I can't make a judgment on that.

INT: Was there any debate at Saint Brigid's about…do as you do, or join the other…

MS: I had enough debates at Saint Brigid's without getting into the Vietnam War. That was not—my decision to do that was strictly something that I decided myself to do, and it had nothing to do with anybody else. I spoke as I felt, and that's what it was all about. It had nothing to do with Saint Brigid's, and I'm sure that the priests at Saint Brigid's probably had a much more liberal point of view about the whole thing than I. I don't even recall if they were part of it.

INT: We have it on record [and] that's why I was wondering about it.

MS: Yes. I don't even recall.

INT: Except that Father Casey was always very…they're both...

MS: Oh, yes he was. He was. He was extremely, extremely liberal.

END OF INTERVIEW