

An Interview with

Lori Curtis

at *The Historical Society of Missouri* St. Louis
Research Center, St. Louis, Missouri

31 January 2017

interviewed by Dr. Malaika Horne
transcribed by Valerie Leri and edited by
Josephine Sporleder



Oral History Program

The State Historical Society of Missouri
Collection S1207 Women as Change Agents DVD 140

NOTICE

1) This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17, U.S. Code). It may not be cited without acknowledgment to the Western Historical Manuscript Collection, a Joint Collection of the University of Missouri and the State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts, Columbia, Missouri. Citations should include: [Name of collection] Project, Collection Number C4020, [name of interviewee], [date of interview], Western Historical Manuscript Collection, Columbia, Missouri.

2) Reproductions of this transcript are available for reference use only and cannot be reproduced or published in any form (including digital formats) without written permission from the Western Historical Manuscript Collection.

3) Use of information or quotations from any [Name of collection] Collection transcript indicates agreement to indemnify and hold harmless the University of Missouri, the State Historical Society of Missouri, their officers, employees, and agents, and the interviewee from and against all claims and actions arising out of the use of this material.

For further information, contact: The State Historical Society of Missouri, St. Louis Research Center, 222 Thomas Jefferson Library, One University Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63121 (314) 516-5119

PREFACE

The interview was taped on a placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets []. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [""] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Josephine Sporleder.

Lori Curtis: [0:10:56] Yes.

Malaika Horne: This program, Women as Change Agents, is a project that seeks to interview women who are change agents.

Josephine Sporleder: I'm sorry, I forgot to...okay.

Malaika Horne: [0:11:06] Please say your name.

Lori Curtis: Lori Curtis.

Malaika Horne: And I'm Malaika Horne. This is a project that seeks to interview women who are change agents, and we want to have a conversation about your life, your career, and anything else you'd like to contribute. So first, talk about your early years, your youth.

Lori Curtis: Well, I was born in upstate New York, and my mom was in her third year of college when she got pregnant with me, and so, as was the custom at the time, she dropped out of school, got married, and so she's never completed her Bachelor's Degree. And so I'm the oldest child; I have one younger brother, and my mom was a stay-at-home mom until my parents got divorced, which was when I was—I think they separated when I was nine, and then she went into the workforce full-time at that point.

Malaika Horne: And your mother's name, your father's name, and your brother's name?

Lori Curtis: Sure. My mother's name is Roberta Winchell, that's her maiden name which she has gone back to now. My father is Larry Curtis, and my brother is Tim Curtis.

Malaika Horne: And did you say what your father did?

Lori Curtis: My father was a computer programmer. He had an Associate's Degree, and that was back in the day when an Associate's Degree in computers got you a pretty darned good job, so yeah.

Malaika Horne: So, your elementary and secondary schools you attended?

Lori Curtis: Elementary school I started in schools in Canastota, New York, and then we moved to St. Louis when I was 11, so the summer between 5th and 6th grade, so I did 6th grade here in St. Louis at Lemasters Elementary School in Riverview Gardens School District and then went to Central

Junior High in the Riverview District and then graduated from Riverview High School.

Malaika Horne: So what made your family decide to move from New York to St. Louis?

Lori Curtis: My stepfather—so my mom hadn't gotten remarried yet, but they were engaged, and my stepfather got a job out here at what's now Boeing but was McDonnell Douglas, and so we relocated.

Malaika Horne: And his name?

Lori Curtis: Fred Taylor.

Malaika Horne: So when you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

Lori Curtis: I think initially I wanted to be a veterinarian because I love animals, and then I was kind of interested in—*Quincy* was one of my favorite TV shows, so I thought I wanted to be a...

Malaika Horne: Was she a doctor?

Lori Curtis: Yeah, medical examiner, so forensic person, so I thought that would be kind of interesting. An then, as I got more into high school and thinking about, for real, what I wanted to do then, I figured I wanted to help people, whatever that means, and so started school in psychology, because at that point in time that was all I knew about in terms of what kind of degree you would get if you wanted to help people.

Malaika Horne: So what made you decide, do you think, in high school, that you figured out that you wanted to help people? How did that occur, do you think, [if you] remember?

Lori Curtis: I don't know exactly. I know I liked connecting with people, I liked having relationships with people, and actually, I was really good at math. I was in a program starting in 7th grade, they—so in 6th grade throughout the entire St. Louis area, they had a program where children who were identified as having a strong math aptitude were actually given the math SAT in 6th grade, and if you scored high enough on it, then you were invited to join this program, and it was called CEMREL but I don't remember what that stood for—C-E-M-R-E-L—and basically we started taking college-level math courses in 7th grade, and had I stayed with the program by the time I completed high school, I would have had a degree

in math. But I dropped out of that program halfway through 8th grade just because I decided that I really wanted to have a social life, be involved in other activities: drama, band, things like that, and the CEMREL program was after school starting in 7th grade, was two days a week, and then there were summer classes. 8th grade—I think 8th grade was when it bumped up to three days a week, and it would just kind of keep increasing so that by senior year it would be every single day after school, and so we weren't getting home until six or seven in the evening because it was an entire St. Louis region program. So I lived in North County, and there was a bus that picked up all the kids from the North County school districts and where the classes were held was—I don't even know what school district it was or the name of the actual school, but I just remember it was on Manchester near Lindbergh. And so it was a pretty long, late day for a kid. But at any rate, so my stepfather in particular I know was pretty upset with me that I did not want to go into a career in computers or engineering or something that would use that, but I just—that was fun for me, it was like a hobby. It wasn't something that I wanted to have a career doing, so I minored in math in college, which, as a psychology major, I don't think they had ever had a math minor *[laughter]*, and so they didn't really know what to do with me, but my math class—I had one math class a semester, and that was kind of what kept me grounded, because it's very logical, and there's a right and there's a wrong answer, whereas everything else I was taking in the social sciences and humanities was much more subjective, and I enjoyed that, but just having that grounding with the math was something that was very helpful to me.

Malaika Horne: [0:17:56] Now, was your stepfather an engineer?

Lori Curtis: Yeah.

Malaika Horne: Okay. That probably explains it.

Lori Curtis: Yeah, yeah, so he just couldn't understand why I was wasting my talent and wanting to help people, so *[laughter]*.

Malaika Horne: So growing up, elementary school and high school, were you recognized as a leader?

Lori Curtis: Yeah, in some ways, more, I guess, informally, like when I was involved in different clubs and things, and I had some leadership positions. I honestly

don't even remember. It was a long time ago. One of the main things I did in high school was marching band, and I was kind of an informal leader and a section leader in that.

Malaika Horne: What was your instrument?

Lori Curtis: I started out with clarinet and then switched to alto sax, probably because there were a lot of clarinets and not as many saxophones, and also, I wanted to be in jazz band, and they had more availability for multiple saxophone players in jazz as opposed to maybe one clarinet player, so I switched over to that, and also just marching ended up being easier. There was just a lot of things that I just decided that I...

Malaika Horne: It sounds like you had a lot of interests.

Lori Curtis: I did, yeah. Music and theater were kind of my main extracurricular areas when I was in junior high and high school.

Malaika Horne: So who encouraged you inside the home and outside the home?

Lori Curtis: Inside the home, definitely my mom and, I guess, less directly, my dad and my stepfather, but as a very young child, like pre-school age, my mom's best friend was a huge influence, and, looking back—and actually, my mom and I were just having a conversation about this this past weekend—that her best friend had so much more of an influence on me than I ever realized until I was an adult. So, my mom's friend and her family moved away from the town we were in in upstate New York the year before we moved to St. Louis, and they moved to Columbus, Ohio, and so we didn't see them as often then, maybe every couple of years they would come to St. Louis, or we would go to Columbus, but then, as a young adult, I had the opportunity to visit her, Jane, and just visiting her and having conversations with her, all of a sudden all these things clicked in my head, like, "Okay, that's how I turned out the way that I did," that she had just really had such an influence on my thinking and all that from a young age.

Malaika Horne: So tell me about her.

Lori Curtis: She was just this really—no bones about it, just this strong woman who said what she thought, meant what she said. You were never in doubt about where you stood with her, because she was just always tell-it-like-

it-was, and she was a really strong feminist and just really had very strong ideas about women and about equality and all those kinds of things that after—So those seeds were all planted in my head, pre-school, and then—so growing up then, through my teen years, I just kind of thought I was weird and I had these strange ideas that I didn't know why I thought the way that I did, because at that point I'd never heard the term "feminism" or anything like that, and so it wasn't until I was in college and an adult and started, "Oh, there's a name for those ideas that I have. It's called feminism." But I still was like, I don't know where this came from, and then, like I said, reconnecting with Jane later [was] like, "Aha, that's where all of that came from."

Malaika Horne: Her full name?

Lori Curtis: Jane Faber is the maiden name that she went back to. At the time was Jane Stearns, was her married name.

Malaika Horne: And her occupation?

Lori Curtis: At the time, she was a stay-at-home mom and then after—I don't remember if it was after she got divorced or just after he kids got older, she went to seminary, and she became a minister in the Methodist church, yeah. So that's the career that she had and that she retired from.

Malaika Horne: So in college, who influenced you, and where did you go?

Lori Curtis: I went to State University of New York, College at Geneseo. After being in St. Louis, all of my extended family, including my father, was still in upstate New York and spent six, eight weeks every summer in New York. That was when my father had visitation rather than trying to go cross country more often than that. So when I was in high school and thinking about colleges, I wanted to go back to New York, and thinking that I wanted to move back there and then, while I was in college, I realized that, no, I like St. Louis. I liked a medium to largish city and being in a more urban/suburban kind of environment. In upstate New York, all of the cities are pretty small compared to St. Louis, and then New York City is just huge, and at that point in time, I was like, there's no way that I could live in New York. So that's why I ended up there, and—In terms of who influenced me: so my favorite math professor, I got really lucky my first semester because when you're a first semester freshman you have no idea anything about instructors. This was long before you could go

online and read the rate-my-professor reviews or anything like that. There was no online. So I just got lucky and happened to get this math professor my first semester that—he was the chair of the math department. His teaching style was really similar to my high school math teacher’s style, and so just flowed really well, and so he kind of took me under his wing in terms of all of the math stuff, because like I said, my psych department had no idea how to advise me for math classes or anything like that. And then one of my psychology [professors] was also really instrumental in helping to develop the interests that I ended up having. I obviously ended up in social work, and part of that was because I had never heard of social work as a younger person. The school that I went to didn’t have a social work degree, so if you want to help people, like I said, you go into psychology. But that particular psychology professor, his areas were more of community psychology and social psychology and humanistic and the things that were less of the clinical kinds of things, and so that really resonated with me, and eventually I found my way to social work.

Malaika Horne: Okay. Did you have any leadership positions in college?

Lori Curtis: Not really. So the school that I went to had a program where you could basically test out of your gen eds and complete your degree in three years instead of four years, but it was still a pretty rigorous three years, so I wasn’t very involved in—I mean, I was in Psi Chi, the honor society for psychology and kind of loosely did a couple other things, but I wasn’t really involved in any, beyond that, any student organizations or anything like that, so just kind of studied and partied, and [laughter]. But didn’t really do much of the other extracurricular kinds of things in college like I had done more so in high school.

Malaika Horne: So this is a question we ask all our interviewees, and you’ve probably seen it: Fifty years earlier, what do you think you would have been doing, for example, your grandmother, what [inaudible 0:27:17] could relate to that?

Lori Curtis: Yeah, yeah. I’m not really sure. I know my life would be completely different because I have not been married, and I have chosen not to have children, and I think had I grown up fifty years earlier, those kinds of things would not have really been options just in terms of personal life, and so I’m relatively certain that I would have ended up married and with

kids and may or may not have had any kind of a career. My grandmothers both worked some outside of the home. My paternal grandmother, I think she only worked for a few years during the time when she was a widow and then before she got remarried. And then my maternal grandmother, she actually had a degree in teaching. She was an elementary school teacher, but she didn't teach full-time until my mom, who was the youngest, until she was six or seven, like until she was in school full-time, and then she started her full-time teaching career at that point, and stayed until she retired. So I think that was somewhat different for her generation, to even be—to have elementary-age children and be working, but she was also a young widow. My grandmother became widowed while she was pregnant with my mom. So...

Malaika Horne: What happened?

Lori Curtis: It was one of those things where he died of appendicitis, again, back seventy-plus years ago. He had had abdominal pain. He went to the hospital or the doctor, and they just said, "Oh, it's indigestion. Take milk of magnesia," and so he did. He went home, and then he ended up dying. He was mid-thirties maybe. And so my grandmother did remarry at some point, I think when my mom was maybe 10 or 12, but then that husband died really young as well, or I guess he was significantly older than my grandmother, but he died within a few years after they had gotten married. So she was mostly single her adult life, maybe married a total of 10 or 12 years between two husbands, so.

Malaika Horne: [0:30:07] So what do you think changed between your mother and your grandmothers and Jane, who were primarily housewives and mothers, and now you aren't any of that.

Lori Curtis: Yeah.

Malaika Horne: What do you think changed during that period?

Lori Curtis: Just a lot of social change. I mean, obviously the women's movement in the '60s and '70s just created more options for women, kind of put out there that women could have careers and be mothers if they wanted to. It wasn't a, "Oh, well, if you want a career, you have to be single, and if you want to have a family, then you're going to stay at home." And then I think then part of that over time, I think, just the economy in our society

has also created a place where for the majority of families, even if there are two parents, that everybody's working, and so I've never felt like there was any block to my wanting to have a career. It's just always been, like, this is what you do. And I have friends that are my age have mostly all worked even if they have had children. So that was just sort of the generation that I grew up in, was that was the norm, was that for everybody, you work. Coming from a middle-class background where there's some degree of a college education. Among women, that was kind of the expectation. It was never—I don't ever even remember questioning will I go to college or not. It's "What college are you going to go to, and what are you going to major in?" So that was just this, the norm or the expectation in my family.

Malaika Horne: So do you think women, most women who are working and, like you said, who are also married and having children or not, do you think they're better off in this particular era?

Lori Curtis: I think so, just from the standpoint of that we do have more options. I truly can't imagine being told that you can't do what you want to do. And I know that there are barriers, and there's the glass ceiling that's still there and all of that, but just to even start out, back 50 years prior, women going to college to get a degree to start a career was not—that just wasn't the norm, and so I can't imagine what that would be like, and I know—it's just—it's so hard to say, because it's like, I don't know if I would feel like something was missing or unfulfilled or frustrated or whatever, or if I would have just been, "This is just the way life is, and you get married, and you have your family and you do all of that." So I don't know, but I think—I know my maternal grandmother, my mom's mom who was ahead of her times a lot in the way that she thought and lived her life—I know that she was very glad all—so there's three granddaughters on that side of the family. She's got three grandsons, three granddaughters, and all of us women have Master's Degrees and have had careers, and I know that she was always incredibly proud of all of us, and I know that she was really glad that we all had those opportunities to do what we wanted to do and sort of stand out in our professions and do all of that, so.

Malaika Horne: So what do you do now? What is your occupation?

- Lori Curtis: I teach here at UMSL. I'm in the School of Social Work. My rank within the university is Associate Teaching Professor, so I do not have a Ph.D. I'm not on tenure track, research, all of that. And then I currently am the BSW program director of the Bachelor's Social Work Program director, just got appointed to that towards the end of last semester.
- Malaika Horne: Congratulations.
- Lori Curtis: Thank you, yeah. So I've been here at UMSL with the School since '99, so I've been here for quite a while.
- Malaika Horne: *[Inaudible 0:35:04]*.
- Lori Curtis: Yeah *[laughter]*.
- Malaika Horne: *[Inaudible 0:35:07]* that long.
- Lori Curtis: Yeah, I know, time flies. So, yeah, so I've been here for a long time and have always primarily worked with the undergraduate program, so I was really happy to have that title and that recognition to be the program director after all the work that I've done, because a lot of the things that I was already doing before I officially had the title were things that were pretty much under the umbrella of what a program director would be doing, so.
- Malaika Horne: So what is your focus in social work?
- Lori Curtis: Primarily areas of diversity. That's one of the classes that I teach every semester, the Diversity and Social Justice within the social work program, and so kind of the intersectionality of all of the different "isms": racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, all of that. So prior to teaching, my social work career was focused primarily in issues of violence against women, so mostly sexual assault, working with sexual assault and domestic violence survivors. And so that is kind of carried over now into my work in the classroom, is really emphasizing those areas.
- Malaika Horne: So who influenced you throughout your career?
- Lori Curtis: I've been really lucky that I've had some really amazing supervisors, starting from my very first professional job out of college where I was working at a rape crisis center that was with SIU-Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville. It's no longer in existence. So just my very

first supervisor there, Shelly, and I don't remember what her last name was, but she just nurtured me but also pushed me. And then my next supervisor there and then my next job, just having really amazing supervisors and mentors. My advisor in graduate school and many of the people that I work with in the School of Social Work here have also been really supportive and good mentors and all of that.

Malaika Horne: So your first job out of college was at SIUE?

Lori Curtis: Mm-hmm, yes. Well, my first professional job. I had some other kinds of...

Malaika Horne: What else did you do? [*inaudible* 0:37:53]

Lori Curtis: Let's see, for about, probably a year-and-a-half or two years—almost two years from the time I graduated until I got the job with the rape crisis center—so in that time I was doing data entry kinds of stuff, and I kind of fell into being a pharmacy tech without any training in that area, but just was doing other barely above minimum wage kinds of things until I could find a job doing what I really wanted to do.

Malaika Horne: How did you find that job?

Lori Curtis: From the time I graduated, I was pretty much every week looking in the paper, because, again, that was what you did in the time was, look in the *Sunday Post-Dispatch* at the classified ads. So the job was posted, and I had discovered that that was my primary area of interest my last semester in college, because when I was in college, as a psychology major, almost every semester I had at least one class that would offer extra credit if you volunteered in the community doing something, and so I was always volunteering and using that to try to figure out what exactly I wanted to do, because, like I said, I knew I wanted to help people, but I didn't know what that meant. So I had volunteered for a while with—I think the first thing I did was at a mental health hospital, just sort of socializing with the patients there. And I had worked tutoring at a juvenile delinquency facility. I had worked at [an] out-patient drug and alcohol treatment program, and I liked all those things, but nothing was like, "Yeah, this is what I want to do." And then my very last semester—because they had, like, a volunteer fair in the student center at the beginning of every semester where the agencies would come and sit at their tables and try to recruit student volunteers, and there was a brand new rape crisis center that had opened in our college town. And at that

point, again, I still didn't—that's when I realized that I was a feminist, but I had no idea; I hadn't taken any women's studies classes; I had not even taken Psychology of Women in my major. I was like, "Pfft, why do I need that?"

Malaika Horne: I'm a woman, and I know all about women.

Lori Curtis: Right. Exactly, what's the point of that? So literally I was walking around the volunteer fair going [*pointing gestures*], "Okay, I've done that; don't like that; don't think I want to do that; done that; done that; don't want to do that." And then there's this rape crisis center, and it was literally like, "Haven't done anything like that before. I guess I'll try." And they had a pretty extensive training program before they would have people actually doing volunteering, and the very first day of the training, that was like all the light bulbs were going off, and I was like, "Oh, my God, this is what I want to do with the rest of my life," and that was where I became exposed to feminism. I was like, "Oh, my God, I'm a feminist," and so when I graduated, that was primarily what I wanted to do, and I was applying for any and every kind of Bachelor's-level helping job, but that was what I really was hoping for, and so when I saw that ad for that, I was like, "That's what I want to do," and so...[*shrugs*]

Malaika Horne: If you had to talk about the number one problem in this area of rape crisis—I know that's hard because you're experienced and knowledgeable, and there's so many factors...

Lori Curtis: Yeah.

Malaika Horne: One or two maybe, or three. What would you say?

Lori Curtis: Just in terms of, like, the sexual assault and...

Malaika Horne: [Yeah?], anything, anything that comes to mind.

Lori Curtis: I mean, I think it boils down to the rape culture that we have where women are still seen by many people as, men can do what they want, and so just the fact that we still have such horrendous rates of sexual assault, and then just the whole statistics of, most sexual assaults are not reported to law enforcement, and if they are, they're not likely to result in an arrest, and if they do result in an arrest, they're not likely to get a conviction: all of those things, and there's some of the things that have

been, in the past few months, in the media, of men getting away with horrific sexual assault crimes, and that that's still just part of the norm. I think we just have so much more work to do to try to get that to change. I think that we've come a long way in terms of raising awareness so that more people are aware that this really is an issue and that we should do something to try to stop it, but I think that we still have a long way to go, and I think it boils down to, with rape culture, that we need our men to grow up with a different mentality, that they need to be raised in a different way so that they don't have the thoughts that, "Oh, well, she's drunk. I can do what I want," or whatever all of the thinking might be on the perpetrator's side.

Malaika Horne: I want to get in all these little parts of your career. I have so many other questions and so little time. But after you left SIUE, where did you go?

Lori Curtis: I went to an agency in St. Louis, at the time was called Women's Self Help Center, and during the time that I was there, the name changed to Women's Support and Community Services, and after I left there, it has now become Safe Connection. So the agency itself has been around for over 30 years at this point. So I went there and initially was the hotline counselor, and then over the—I was there for almost eight years, and so during that time, my job kind of morphed and increased and I went back to graduate school while I was working there. So once I got my Master's Degree, then I was able to take on doing a little bit more within my position there.

Malaika Horne: And then after that you came to UMSL?

Lori Curtis: Came here, yeah.

Malaika Horne: Okay. What can you say about work-life balance now? Normally the women, I would say most of them have families, but you're single. Any comments on that, how you or how women have to balance all of these things?

Lori Curtis: [0:45:07] And I think, honestly, I can't imagine how people with families do it, especially—because, like I said, I was working full-time while I was in graduate school, and just balancing those two things was a challenge enough, and so many of the students that I work with today are working and going to school and have children, and I don't even know how they do it. So I don't have human children, but I have many furry children. I do

cat rescue and have my own little cat family, plus I foster cats. And I do have a partner, it'll be 14 years on Saturday, is our anniversary.

Malaika Horne: Congratulations.

Lori Curtis: So we've been together for quite a while and have chosen not to get married even though we legally could have all along. Some people—it's just been recent that they've even had the legal option to be married, but we've just chosen not to, partly because neither one of us wanted to have children, so there wasn't that factor to kind of make life easier, if the parents are together and married, and neither of us currently has a religious perspective on value of marriage from that standpoint. So we both wear rings. People assume that we're married a lot, and we just kind of consider ourselves [*air quotes gesture*] permanently engaged. So balancing that, just having a relationship and then having the responsibilities for our little furry family: it's tough. There are times where my work as an instructor and then all the other things that I do is not a 9-to-5 kind of job, and so there's a lot of times where—like, last night: get home, eat dinner, okay, grade papers now and just sit there for the next two or three hours and grade papers, and it's like, "Okay, it's ten o'clock; let's watch the news together," and that's our exciting evening at home together. But, yeah, I really can't imagine because the animals take a certain amount of responsibility.

Malaika Horne: How many do you have?

Lori Curtis: Currently, between our own and the fosters, we have eight in our house right now [*laughter*]. So it's a handful, and a couple of them with various special needs and things, so they...

Malaika Horne: Special needs?

Lori Curtis: Yeah. Yeah. Not extreme special needs, so the program that I volunteer with and foster for, they focus on a lot of special needs cats so we have ones with minor special needs compared to some of the others, but human children take way more time and responsibility, and I don't know how people do it. I look at many of my friends that, like I said, that are parents and working, and many of them have at least had a period of time where they've been single parents, and it's just beyond me, because it's a lot. And I do think there's the whole "who does more work within the household," if there is a male/female couple, and I think a lot of times

there are certain things that do still fall more heavily on the woman, particularly around parenting, I think. So it's like, that's one of the things that I kind of say, is I'm really glad my partner and I have chosen not to have human children, because if the care of the cats is any indication of what care of human children would look like, that would not be a good balance, because he's like the stereotypical dad that gets to play, and mom is the one that takes care of all the feeding and the medicine and the scooping of the litter box and all of the day-to-day caretaking kinds of things, and...

Malaika Horne: So what does your partner do?

Lori Curtis: Right now he is not working. He was a police officer for about 12 years, and he got hurt on the job, and that's been about almost three-and-a-half years ago—a little over three years ago—and so, in the meantime, he's still dealing with worker's comp, trying to get everything taken care of because he's still not completely fixed with all of his injuries. So he has been working on a career change so that when he is able to work again—he does not want to be in law enforcement anymore—and so he's now working on learning computer programming, coding and all that fun stuff, and he's really loving it, which I'm so happy for, because he's got so many talents and abilities, and when he first got hurt and couldn't work, and he was trying [figure out?], he was like, "Okay, I don't think I want to be a cop anymore, but I don't know what I want to do. I don't know what I want to do when I grow up." And he just kind of stumbled into kind of finding out about computers through the program LaunchCode—I don't know if you're familiar with them—so he saw a program on PBS about LaunchCode, and he was just like, "Oh, that seems really interesting," and he started looking up stuff and getting involved with them and taking classes through them, and so it's made me very happy to have him find something else that he's passionate about that he really is good at and he enjoys and so he's not just sitting around feeling sorry for himself because he can't work...

Malaika Horne: Yeah, that's understandable. Sure.

Lori Curtis: ...that he's doing that, so yeah.

Malaika Horne: We're going to switch gears here and talk about leadership. What were some of your leadership lessons? Did anything impede your progress?

Lori Curtis: I don't know specifically, probably myself would be the main thing, of just sometimes maybe not being sure that I really could do something, or just I'm somebody that a lot of times I don't do change really well. Change has to come pretty slow steps for me to adjust, and so I think that I've probably held myself back sometimes just out of being comfortable with where I am and what I'm doing and not pushing myself to take another step to do something else. In terms of leadership, I don't know that I've been aware anyhow of being specifically held back by anyone or any system or anything like that. I do feel like, for the most part within my career, I've had a lot of support and encouragement.

Malaika Horne: Okay. What is your leadership style?

Lori Curtis: I would say it's definitely a collaborative kind of style. I know, for myself, I'm somebody I don't like being told what to do, so. And I've always been that way, especially if I don't understand, like, "because I said so" was never a good enough answer for me. And so my mom says basically one of my first words was "why," and so you can never just tell me something; [it'd be?] "Why?" And I'm still that way today, and that is actually something that frustrates my partner sometimes, because, like if he's trying to explain something, and he just, "Well, just go do this," "Well, why? Just tell me why." I don't have to agree with the answer. I don't even have to fully understand the answer, but don't just tell me "just because." And so just in terms of growing up and then relationship, that doesn't work for me. And so, as a subordinate, I have never taken well to that more authoritarian kind of "you will do this because I'm the boss and I told you." And so I definitely don't want to be that way with anybody that I might be leading. I really try to, again, be more collaborative, let people have options where that's appropriate, get their input and opinion, and kind of work together on that.

Malaika Horne: Do you think men and women have different leadership styles?

Lori Curtis: I think, overall, yes, and I think it stems back to just early socialization, that boys and girls are socialized to be in the world different, and boys are socialized more to take charge and just be who you are and people will let you be that, and girls are more socialized to be relational and all of that. So I think that that carries over, and that's not to say that men can't be relational, and women can't be authoritarian, but I think that, in

general, that early gender socialization carries through a lot through our adult lives.

Malaika Horne: Sure. Any big opportunities on the horizon?

Lori Curtis: I think just recently becoming the program director is super exciting to me. Like I said, I had already been doing a lot of the kinds of things, so to now actually have the title behind me that sort of gives me the credibility to carry out some of the things that I have wanted to do where I've always felt like I had to run by somebody else to get approval, and so—I mean, not that I can just kind of do whatever I want—I mean, just yesterday I was in a meeting with my dean, and it was like, “Okay, I’m thinking about doing this. You have any questions? You have any input?” Da da da da. And then the other thing is, as I said, I’m an associate teaching professor, and I know that I really need to be working towards promotion in that non-tenure track ranking, and so hopefully this spring, this semester, I’ll start really focusing on that because I meet all the criteria. It’s just a matter of doing all of the portfolio and all of the hoops that need to be done that can be really time-consuming, and so hopefully this semester I can work it in to do that. And there’s a small raise that goes along with that, but it’s just also the—just the status of—especially after having been here for so long and now being the program director, I think it’s kind of expected that, “Okay, go for promotion,” so those are probably the main things.

Malaika Horne: Yeah. Okay. So, regarding leadership potential in others, what do you look for?

Lori Curtis: I think anybody can be a leader, so I don’t think that there’s—yeah, anybody can be a leader, and so I think it’s partly somebody who believes in themselves, because I think if you don’t believe in yourself, then it’s hard to sort of step up and do that. So encouraging people to see that in themselves and want to sort of put themselves out there and believe in themselves and all that. So I think that self-confidence, again, to me, the relational style is important, so sort of cultivating that, just helping people to try to not limit themselves, again, that if you have an idea, put it out there. If you see something that you would like to change, if you’d like to do it, then tell people and get what support you need and go with it, so yeah.

Malaika Horne: Well, you may have answered my next question, but you might want to add to it. What is the best advice to others who are trying to make a difference?

Lori Curtis: Believe in yourself. Networking. I think that—and this partly is my social worker background, but I think nobody can do it by themselves, but we can, as collectively, we can accomplish a lot, and so just believe in yourself and make those connections with people who believe in the same things that you do, who are trying to achieve the same things. Don't try to reinvent the wheel on your own, but find a wheel that's already there and maybe improve it. So, yeah. [*unintelligible* 0:58:48] Making those connections.

Malaika Horne: Who is your heroine or hero or whatever?

Lori Curtis: Ooh, that's a good one.

Malaika Horne: Or mentor.

Lori Curtis: I would say, since I've been here at UMSL, a primary mentor to me has been within the School of Social Work, Patty Rosenthal. When I started here, she had been doing the job that I was hired to do, and then she had applied for and moved into a different position within the School of Social Work. So when I started here, I had absolutely no experience teaching. They just took a big gamble hiring me to teach full-time when I had no experience. But she really helped me get started a lot, and, again, it worked out that her teaching style and her approach to working with students was very similar to how I saw myself, and so it was really easy to just kind of go in her footsteps and model behind her and then just throughout—so within the School of Social Work, she is the only non-tenure track full professor, so she's been encouraging—there's four of us others that are full-time non-tenure track, and so she's been really trying to help each of us with, "Okay, here's what you need to do; here's..." because she's on, I guess, the NTT...

Malaika Horne: [1:00:33] Committee?

Lori Curtis: ...committee. So they've been revamping the standards for promotion with the NTT rankings, and so she's been giving us those documents, and like, "Okay, here's what you need to do," so I would say she's been a big mentor to me, definitely, within my position here for the entire time that

I've been here. Just in general, I would say my mom has been just a really key person—in a lot of ways more indirectly than directly—but she's just—it's like the old thing of, "Oh, you know, as women get older, you turn into your mother," and I'm always like, "I'm good with that. Not a problem." So my mom, my grandmothers, and then just historical figures and stuff. I know Jeanette Rankin was the first female US—and I can't remember if she was Representative or Senator, but she was the first elected national congressperson, and this was before women had the vote nationally, and she was a social worker, and she was very vocally anti-war and just kind of really a rogue for her time in terms of, "Women don't do these things," and then for her to become a politician and not just fall in line with a lot of what the men were saying, but she's like, "No, we don't need to be in this war; we don't need to be doing these things," and so she's somebody that always comes to mind, and then a lot of the other—Eleanor Roosevelt, Shirley Chisholm, just some women who were really, truly trailblazers.

Malaika Horne: Absolutely, yeah. Any awards or recognitions?

Lori Curtis: I'm trying to think. Not anything major that I can remember. I know I periodically get little awards of recognition for—and I don't know if they still do this—but the Disability Access Office on campus used to give out awards for faculty that were recognized by their students with disabilities and for advising and things like that. So, yeah!

Malaika Horne: Sure. What do you usually read, outside of your...

Lori Curtis: Right, outside of all the heavy stuff.

Malaika Horne: ...your textbook stuff?

Lori Curtis: Right. And I always say that being a professor in terms of reading for pleasure is just like when you were a student in that you really don't do much unless it's on breaks. So I read a variety of different kinds of fiction. One of the things that I definitely need to re-read is *The Handmaid's Tale*...

Malaika Horne: The what?

Lori Curtis: *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood. I read it probably 20 or 30 years ago, and it's being made into a mini-series, and then just with all of the

current political times, it's like, "Yeah, I need to re-read that and then watch the series when it comes out." Yeah, some of my other favorite authors—and of course I'm just totally blanking—Barbara Kingsolver, Julia Alvarez, E. Lynn Harris. So, yeah.

Malaika Horne: Any hobbies?

Lori Curtis: Not really; cat rescue [*laughter*].

Malaika Horne: That's a hobby!

Lori Curtis: Cat rescue, yeah. I still really enjoy and appreciate music and theater, even though I'm not a performer anymore, but I do still—I volunteer with one of the local theater companies in town, Stray Dog Theatre, and go to a lot of shows. Yeah, okay.

Malaika Horne: So, what is one message you'd like to leave about women as change agents?

Lori Curtis: I think just believe in yourself. Believe in yourself and don't limit yourself. Do what you want to do, as long as it's not hurting anybody else, then you have a right to do anything that you want to do. So, yeah.

Malaika Horne: Great message.

Lori Curtis: Yes.

Malaika Horne: Something that you recently participated in, the Women's March on Washington. Tell us about that.

Lori Curtis: Yeah. Oh, it was amazing. So after the election and within a few days, there was this—on social media, just people talking about, "Oh, we're going to do this women's march," and one of my best friends lives in Washington, D.C., so I immediately was on the phone with her, and "They're talking about this women's march, and I'm thinking about coming, and if I do, can I stay with you?" And she was like, "Yeah, of course." And so I immediately booked my plane ticket because I knew, with it being the day after inauguration, that there were going to be just so many people traveling for the inauguration as well as if this women's march thing really took off, and I figured if the women's march doesn't take off, then that's great. I have a weekend with my friend, Shaina, and so...

- Malaika Horne: Did you have one of those little pink...?
- Lori Curtis: I did! I did. A friend of a friend who is a knitter, when I was posting things on Facebook about going, she had asked, she's like, "I'm making pussy hats if you need one," and I was like, "Yes, I do, and my friend does, too," so I got them from her and just being there with—and I still am seeing a range of different figures in terms of how many people were there, but anywhere from 600,000 to like 1.2 million.
- Malaika Horne: And it was all over the country, all over the world.
- Lori Curtis: All over the world.
- Malaika Horne: Every continent.
- Lori Curtis: I know.
- Malaika Horne: Even Antarctica!
- Lori Curtis: It was amazing. So being there and in the middle of it—like, I really had no—I knew it was huge; I knew there were—because we were so far away from the stage where the speakers and the performers were that we had no idea what was happening. So we were just standing in a huge mass of people for literally, like, five hours. We were just kind of talking to the people around us, and so at one point somebody had speakers, I guess, for their phone or something, and so they were playing music, so people were dancing and singing, and we're just kind of doing our own thing, and then apparently there were so many more people than they had expected that they didn't do the official march route that they had planned, and so at some point where I was standing, the people just started walking. So basically we just took over the streets of downtown D.C.
- Malaika Horne: So two things: What was the purpose, and what jumped out? Anything really memorable? What was the purpose?
- Lori Curtis: The purpose was to bring a message of the new administration's approach is not okay. That it's not okay to spread messages of hate. It's not okay to fill your cabinet and your advisors with people who are anti-LGBT, who are anti-immigrant, who are anti-people of color, racists and KKK, all that stuff, that those things are not okay; that's not what our country is supposed to be. And so within that, just seeing the signs of the

people there, there was not one specific thing. It was the whole range of all of those social justice issues. And so the thing that stood out the most to me was: out of a million people, I did not see one instance of anybody even being crabby, much less violent.

Malaika Horne: It was very peaceful.

Lori Curtis: It was just amazing. And so, like I said, we were standing there for five hours. I'm not a good just-stand-still person. I'm also not good if I don't eat, and we had a couple of little snacks with us, but we basically didn't eat from 7:30 in the morning when we left her house until five o'clock when we left and were able to find someplace close that we could get some food. So normally I would not be my best self in those circumstances, but I didn't even feel stressed or pressured or uncomfortable or crabby myself. That was just sort of the feeling, is just that, that positive energy and that excitement and just so many people coming together to express our desire for a better kind of future.

Malaika Horne: It's keeping the energy going.

Lori Curtis: Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Malaika Horne: Finally, what is the theme for your life?

Lori Curtis: I think a big theme has been "connection." My life has always been built on relationships, and so just connection, relationship, being supportive of each other, that there's no—we can all reach the top. There's no need to have to push anybody down for any one of us to rise, and we can all get there easier if we all do it together.

Malaika Horne: Wonderful words to end on a very great note.

Lori Curtis: Thank you, Malaika.

Malaika Horne: Thank you so much. It's been really an exciting and interesting, informative interview.

Lori Curtis: Thank you for having me.

Malaika Horne: You're [welcome].