



2007 Sesquicentennial Oral Interview

Marilyn Laws-Porter

CH: This is Cindy Higgins. Today is April 30th. This is one of the Eudora oral history interviews. I am here with Marilyn Laws Porters. Marilyn, would you tell me what year you moved to Eudora and why you moved here?

MP: 1971. My husband came here as a teacher and coach. We had four children. They were devastated that they'd left their little town. I remember sitting on the floor one Sunday morning after we had moved here on a Friday, and the church bells were ringing, and nobody wanted to go to church. We sat in a circle, held hands, said the "our Father" and they all cried.

CH: Did it get any better?

MP: After that it was uphill.

CH: How old were your children when you moved here?

MP: Mark was the oldest. He was a junior in high school, he would have been about, oh, I'm really bad about that.

CH: He was a junior.

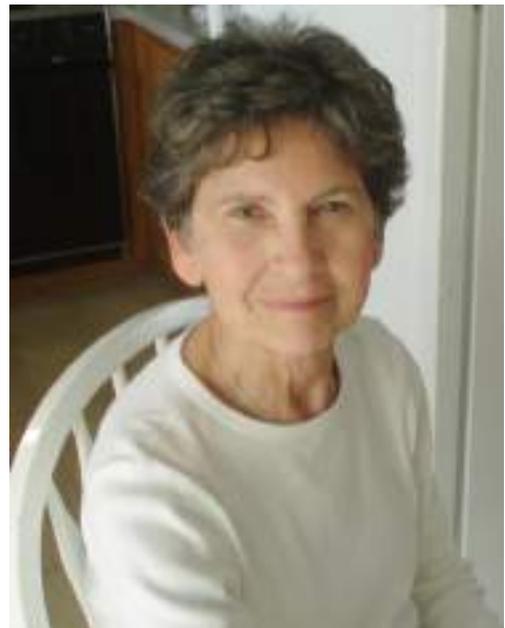
MP: He was a junior. Cord was five years younger. Where would that make him?

CH: Middle school.

MP: Julie was two years behind him. And Karla was two years behind her.

CH: How was coming here and going to school different than the city you come from?

MP: It was much bigger. I think the proximity to Kansas City made a big difference because we were in Pomona, which was the other side of Ottawa, which is really in the boonies. I think the kids felt they had really moved uptown. The facilities were nicer. We had a big home. We were living in a very small house and had for many years. So, at one point, we moved into the old Lothholz house. There was one room that we didn't



have any furniture in. I loved it. People would say, "what are you going to put in there?" "Nothing. I am just going to walk around in it." That was really special, moving to that old home. I think there was a lot of history there. I had always loved old homes. It was downtown, which I really enjoyed. Basically, those were the main differences, I would suppose.

CH: What was downtown at the time? What was your first impression?

MP: Of course, Pyles' meat market, the bank, the Market Basket, oh, and down on the corner was the other grocery store. What is their name? I can't think right now. You know the family. There were finally sort of had to leave because the Basket took over, it got bigger. They left eventually, which I thought was sad. Of course, the little five and dime store, which was manned occasionally by the Trefz brothers who lived right next door to us. One was in his 90s and one was in his 80s when we moved there.

CH: Who else lived on your block that you can remember?

MP: Of course, Mrs. Miner and Herb. The Richardsons right across the street and their youngest daughter kind of lived in our house. And Sandy Beeman on the corner. Across the street were the, of course, they were much older than my children, I can't think of their names right now □ The nice little home where Jimmy Hoover is putting in his office, which I am so glad. That's kind of all I remember. I don't know who was up on the corner.

CH: You were only about a block from the high school at that time. What was that like living so close to school?

MP: It was wonderful. You didn't have to worry about getting kids to school. It was a big transition when Karla went to school and we had to get her to Nottingham, get her across town. When we first came here, I had not worked the previous years. The first year I was hired on with the Lawrence school systems as a sub, as a secretary for awhile. After that, about eight weeks, I was hired with a brokerage firm where I subsequently worked 26 years in Lawrence.

CH: During that time period, a lot of the other women worked or were people more stay at home?

MP: Some of both, really. It seemed to me most of the women had jobs here. I would really rather have done that but this opportunity came up. It was a friend of ours from Pomona. He was a broker and he invited me to come in and go to work there. It was wonderful to have the kids so close to school. With only one bathroom and three teenagers, I can remember Earl Kueser said: "Did you know your son is late for school everyday?" And I said, "I am not surprised. He's the last one to get in the bathroom." Those were good years. It was nice, too, being in Lawrence, Don was here in town. I felt he was on close on the scene. If anything happened, he was here. As Mark was older, he worked for the city during the summer. It was the same for the summer when I was working. He was around close. I only had a full time sitter two years. That was Kathy Abel, who subsequently married my oldest son.

CH: Your husband was a football coach.

MP: Actually, football, track, and part-time basketball.

CH: From your viewpoint now looking back, what was sports at the school level like then maybe compared to now?

MP: Oh, there is no comparison how it has grown. I think there was always that drive to be excellent, to win. But we just weren't competing the same way, you know, with the same teams. Some of them. The majority of the teams that we play now □ Blue Valley, some of those places now, we wouldn't have dreamed of competing with. I don't know how that will be in the future. They have grown so much. There are still some of the old, like Baldwin and Wellsville will always be big games. But it was on a smaller scale, I think. But much more upscale from where we'd come from. And, a lot more, I think, pressure in terms of winning.

CH: At that time, who were the main rivals?

MP: I would say Baldwin □ and Wellsville, Actually, the year we went to semifinals in football we had beaten Wellsville and they came back and beat us in the first game of the semifinals. That was a really big disappointment. I remember that year. We didn't always have winning teams with Don. But my boys were totally involved. This was their way of relating to their father. They were immersed in sports. The girls came along. They did sports, too, and enjoyed it. But I think they really enjoyed it. Because there wasn't the same kind of pressure. Their father didn't coach; I guess he did coach track. They had someone else for volleyball and basketball.

CH: A lot of times, sports in Eudora, they do have to sign papers saying they will act a certain moral way. Was there any kind of conduct required of the coach or coach's wife?

MP: Oh, yeah. I think it was absolutely unwritten law. I don't think anyone would have signed anything. Everyone assumed that was expected

CH: What would a coach and his wife be expected to do?

MP: For instance, there was never any alcohol in our home. My kids knew there wouldn't be alcohol in our home. Neither would their friends be permitted to have alcohol in our homes. We just assumed that they knew these rules were in place. They knew when they had to be in. We didn't have curfews. They knew they had to come in. As they got to be seniors, some of that went by the by a few times. For the most part, it was assumed that there was a certain kind of behavior that you had and you just didn't deviate from that. And I think most of their friends were like that.

CH: Were there any other extracurricular activities they did that come to mind that they enjoyed?

MP: As a coach, that really is your life. For me, that was kind of difficult because you enjoy your own child at sports. I think it was difficult because that was Don's role. That was his image of himself. As a result of that, I often felt, I can remember going to award banquets and sitting with the tennis coach and feeling like we really were sort of

outsiders. The individual sports were never stressed that much. I always thought lifelong sports were wonderful. My kids just didn't really get involved, it was mostly team sports. Oh, other extracurricular. Mark went to Boy's State. I think he enjoyed that; I think he was an officer in his class. Julie was an officer. Student Council. Cord wasn't, but Julie was involved, so was Karla. Karla was on the newspaper, which she really enjoyed.

CH: As a parent, you didn't have to necessarily get involved with any of those for fundraising or?

MP: No. I really didn't. I think it was about that time the Booster Club started. I think the Clevelands and the Hamlins started that. I really wasn't that involved. There was kind of separation, I felt, between the teachers and coaches and the towns people. For instance, when I went to ball games, I would usually sit with a friend of mine that was a teacher's wife or someone I knew. I seldom sat with towns people because a lot of time there was a lot of criticism coming from all around me. It was too hard; I mean, it wasn't hard. I knew I would be still and you don't respond to that. So, you sort of just did have your own group and that usually was composed of teachers and their wives.

CH: Well, another thing you did, didn't you go to church here in Eudora?

MP: Oh, yeah. I was very much involved in Holy Family. My husband was not a Catholic. As a result of that, I really took on that role. I don't know how important that is now. I think it still is important to families. Being raised cradle Catholic, you just raised your children Catholic. I really had that role. I took that on by myself. It was nice to be here because this was the first place we had a church in town. We didn't have to travel. I taught CCD, which is religious ed. Gosh, I think I taught 12 years actually, all through Mark's years and beyond that. And, then, I taught adult ed at Holy Family as well. That was a big part of our life as well. Probably more mine than even with the children. But they were all expected to go to class.

CH: What would you do in a typical CCD class?

MP: Well, you know we were going through a really difficult change in the church. I think everybody was grasping with all kinds of different curriculum. It was very different than how I grow up with rote memory of the old catechism, which I could still probably recite. That was when the changes really began. And, I think as a result of that, I think I changed, too, in my 30s, every much □ with Vatican 2 especially, became much less rigid. It was a really exciting time. For the kids, I think, it was difficult. There was a lot of change. As a result of that, my kids all went through confirmation class, and Mark to this day is still very involved in church. My two girls, I would say are spiritual people, but not necessarily church goers. My other son who left the church basically when he was 16 after he was confirmed said he was not going back any more, he's very involved in church with his family □ not with the Catholic Church, but within a nondenominational church. And, I am very happy for that.

CH: If the Catholic Church has gone through changes, what changes did you notice at Holy Family from when you first came here and through the years.

MP: Well, actually Holly Family is different from the standpoint that, I believe that they have changed but they haven't. You know, small towns have a way of taking

ownership of their churches. Priests come and go. But that church is theirs, and I think there is a real historical background of that here: the German founding of the church and all that and there are still families here that have those roots so deep. In a way that is the sameness. But, no matter what the changes that they threw at them, they just adjusted. And, maybe they changed, maybe they didn't. We've had different kinds of priests here that have been more liberal than others. But, I think there will always be a strong core of people there who will always have ownership of that church. I think it is growing now. I see more young people coming with families. Of course, Catholics usually have several children. But, for me, I don't know. I have always enjoyed the Franciscan philosophy, which is what I grew up with. It is very different from a church that is run by the Diocese. It is much more geared toward social justice. That is what I find in Lawrence. I think that's why it is attractive to me. But I love my people at Holy Family. I miss them. I very much love being involved with St. Theresa's. St. Theresa's has been there forever. It will be there forever. Those women, they do it all. They are fabulous people.

CH: In terms of people that St. Theresa is, a volunteer society, one of the projects you have been involved with, I don't know if you started it or you took it over, was Relay for Life. Not even arguably, it was one of Eudora's most successfully fundraising volunteer efforts, can you give me some background about when that started and why and your involvement?

MP: I am trying to think of the year. I think this last year that we were involved in Baldwin was eight years. Actually, it began in Baldwin when two teams went down. Angie Sommers and I had a team that went down to Baldwin to support Rose House, who was going through treatment. It was such a new thing. We became very excited about this. We went down there for two years, and then someone said "not me" a whole group of people, said why are we doing this. Let's do it in Eudora. At the first meeting, there was so many people there. There was so much excitement. Our first year, we did really well. We had probably 15 teams. That is 150 people, at least. We had several people that year, too "I am trying to think who we were supporting that year. It seemed that every year someone in the community was going through treatment. In small towns, you know, everyone knows what is going on. That makes for a real passion for a cause. My family has six family members that have died of cancer. My first husband, Don Laws, died of lymphoma in 1992 and that became my family's passion, too, after that.

CH: When did you usually start organizing the Relay for Life?

MP: We usually began in September and the event didn't happen until next June.

CH: How many core people in your organizing group?

MP: At least 12 to 15. And these people were real movers and they also had family oftentimes that had cancer. The second year, we were much more organized, and every year we became more organized. Then it became a community event. It passed on from being a fundraiser for a cause to a community event. When that happened, I think, any idea that we could dream up, we did. It just kept evolving. In some ways, I think we worked our selves out of it. I can remember one of the American Cancer reps saying to me, "You even want blue paper for things. I go to relays, where they say, 'there's the track, go walk. Give me your money.'"

CH: Can you walk through when the event started? What happened? The schedule?

MP: The day of the event was the big deal, and we really had it down to a science by the time it came to our last relay. We never had rain except that last relay, which was a shame for the organizers who had just done it that year. There is such a feel for it outside. It's totally different. It would start at 7 in the morning and that's when people could mark off their sites for tents to spend the night. Whatever we had to move in, big things like that, happened early in the morning. The school got involved. We had people that would come out and help us set up. Mainly because we use the field and there is certainly a protocol on how to use the field. They were very present whenever we did anything, which was good. As it turned out, we usually didn't have to ask them. They would just show up. And then we always had a big logistic group for set up. By 10 o'clock, if you want a timeline, all the little 4-H kids and Scouts would show up, and we would fill luminary bags, which were placed all around the track. I can't remember how many thousands we set out there. For every luminary bag, represented a \$10 donation in memory of someone or support for a survivor. That was really evolved finally into really an easy way of doing it. We did it the hard way for several years before we got a good way. That was one of my favorite things because all the kids showed up. We had wheelbarrows full of sand. We would dig in the sand. And one of my very good friends, Nancy Gabriel, was a teacher over in Olathe and she had a little girl in her class who had cancer. And she came to help her. Nancy came every year to help. Until finally she got cancer, and she died. She died. She died about a week after one of our relays.

CH: Okay.

MP: I am so sorry but you do get very involved with the people who help.

CH: What time did the teams start showing up?

MP: Oh, gosh. See, a lot of people of worked. Anyone who didn't work could come out anytime. We had it so all the team sites, all the way around the track were marked off with chalk, with numbers and everything. We even had all the luminaries were organized by the team sites, so it was easy to light all that stuff. They could come at seven in the morning. Most people showed up about four to five for registration. At six o'clock, the last couple of years, we had dinner for the survivors at Nottingham. That was wonderful. I had a lot of great people volunteer, time, in kind, food, anything we needed, you just asked. And by 7 o'clock we started, we had the mayor would open the event, the Boy Scouts. We had some really great programs. Survivors spoke often times. Donny Abel, I remember the year he died, his twin brother spoke. That was really special. We had lots of really good entertainment. One of the girls involved on the entertainment committee, she said, "I think we should have people have try out." I said wait a minute. This is a community event. Anyone who wants to sing or do anything; we will find a spot for them. And we did. Usually about dusk, we lit all the luminaries. We had the survivor walk where they took the first walk. Let's see after that, what happened? That usually took an hour. And we always read the names of all the people who donated a \$10 donation. But we had people who gave large amounts of money. Half the survivors came from out of town. We had the campers that came every year. They were involved here with the Crawshaws who lived here and they had a camping

group that traveled all over in the winter. They'd bring them up. They parked; they would spend the day and do whatever we needed.

CH: The average dollar amount you raised every year?

MP: I think the first year we raised 30. At the peak, we raised \$65,000.

CH: Did that surprise you?

MP: Every year, it blew us away. One of the little girls that had cancer here, Brooke O'Grady, became kind of the poster child of the Relay for several years there. Her goal was that we reach \$50,000, which we did the same year she was told she wouldn't survive. I think that was really the motivation for a lot of people to support her. And, we did reach \$55,000, and that blew us away. The next year when we raised 65; we never had any idea we would ever raise that money. A lot of the money came from out of town but from families here, writing letters, because some teams would do small events, \$200 or \$300. They would bring in. We had a team that came from Johnson County one year. The girl's father had died and they brought in over \$7,000, their one team alone. They never wanted to go to a large relay. They just fell in love with our relay. A team from Lawrence came, did the same thing. Two teams from Lawrence, actually. They didn't want to be involved in a big relay.

CH: Did it usually end in the early morning?

MP: Oh, yeah. The whole goal of the Relay was to duplicate in a small way what people do when they go through treatment. Twenty four hours was sort like "we walk in their steps for 24 hours." Someone on your team walked all night. And, I can remember walking with people at three in the morning. They would tell me stories about their families. What I loved about the Relay was that it was a family time. People would come set up their tents; little kids loved to sleep in the tents. It was a safe environment. They had time alone without television, without any other distractions. The kids would play ball. They would play games. We had activities through the night. They'd tell stories. I loved that part of it. I felt it was a real family time. The little kids, I think when we finally did come to a close, they were sad. They really missed that. Sleeping in the tent, spending time with their parents. So, we would walk all night. We had a DJ all night. Eddie Pyle came for many years. We would walk usually till about six, seven in the morning. Then we would have a closing ceremony. Everybody was exhausted. We would break up. People were so good. Usually by 10 o'clock that morning, you couldn't even tell we had been there. There wouldn't be a scrap of paper, nothing. Nothing it would be gone. People were so good about that. Lots of help, lots of people. To start naming names would take forever because, if we had 25 teams, that's 250 people. Let alone the towns people that came out, all the entertainment people that came, all the dignitaries from the town would show up. I loved it when the Eudora residents from Pinecrest came, because we'd have a country band, and they loved it. They would sit out there in the evening.

CH: The Relay for Life is no longer right now in Eudora, but you are on the 150th celebration committee, why did you choose to join that committee?

MP: I know it's being preserved, the history of Eudora, and I have only been here since '71. But I think there is so much of a strong heritage in this town, roots go deep. My fear is that the old and the new will be separated by [Hiway]10. That is why I would really love to see the downtown maintained. I would love to see that part of town revitalized in terms of the homes. And not to say that we can't grow. We need to grow. Growth is inevitable; you don't stop growth. But done in away in which we are united. Everything go south and be a whole village unto itself. Being a part of something that is 150 years old; that is a relatively short time, in terms of things. But in my lifetime that is a long time. I love this town. I moved back here, just simply because I lived in Lawrence for a short time and I really missed it. This really became my home even more than where I grew up, I think. So, that is one of the reasons I wanted to be involved.

CH: Thank you very much. That concludes our interview. It's been great talking to you.

MP: Thank you.

CH: Anything else?

MP: That's plenty.