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# Connolly, Nancy oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

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## **Interview with Nancy Connolly by Andrea L'Hommedieu**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

Connolly, Nancy

### **Interviewer**

L'Hommedieu, Andrea

### **Date**

February 13, 2002

### **Place**

Portland, Maine

### **ID Number**

MOH 328

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### **Biographical Note**

Nancy Connolly was born on February 8, 1948 in Marstown, New Jersey. She attended the University of Maine at Orono for two years and the University of Southern Maine for two years. She was active with Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and worked for Model Cities in Portland on the Crime and Juvenile Delinquency Task Force. After college graduation, she worked for St. Elizabeth's Child Care Program, then with Head Start. She married Larry Connolly in the early 1970s, who worked for Model Cities and later was a state legislator for 16 years, beginning in 1972. After her husband's death in 1988, she was granted a fellowship from the Muskie School of Public Service. After earning her master's degree, she did consulting work, and in 1995 became the executive director for the Y.W.C.A. At the time of this interview she was working for the public service research arm of the Muskie School.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: Model Cities, Portland; environmental protection in Maine; public works; urban planning and development; Vietnam War; and the Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service.

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## **Transcript**

**Andrea L'Hommedieu:** This is an interview with Nancy Connolly on February the 13th, the year 2001

**Nancy Connolly:** Ah, 2002.

**AL:** Ah, 2002! My apologies. At her office at the Muskie School of Public Service.

**NC:** Muskie School of Public Service, Institute for Public Sector Innovation, IPSI.

**AL:** ISPI. And if you could start by telling me your full name and spelling it?

**NC:** Okay, my full name is Nancy J. Connolly, and Connolly is C-O-N-N-O-L-L-Y.

**AL:** And where and when were you born?

**NC:** I was born in Marstown, New Jersey on February 8th, 1948.

**AL:** And where did you grow up?

**NC:** I grew up primarily in New Jersey, with strong ties to Maine in the summer.

**AL:** And what brought you to Maine in the summer?

**NC:** Well, actually I have a really, my grandmother came over from Ireland and wound-landed in Portland and she became a cleaning woman out on Great Diamond Island. And my grandfather was stationed in the fort out there, Fort McKinley, in the early 1900s. So there they met, he brought her back to New Jersey, she still had family, brothers and sisters in Portland that she continued to stay connected with. And in 1956 my family bought a cottage on Great Diamond Island and so I've been here ever since.

**AL:** Oh, wonderful. So tell me, your parent's names?

**NC:** My dad was, he had a very unique, everyone called him Bud Davenport, but his real name Alvernus Davenport.

**AL:** How do you spell Alvernus?

**NC:** A-L-V-E-R-N-U-S.

**AL:** Interesting.

**NC:** So he went by Bud. And my mother, her name was Josephine Chillingworth, so the Irish came from the maternal side, my father's mother.

**AL:** And how does your mother spell her maiden name?

**NC:** Chillingworth, C-H-I-L-L-I-N-G-W-O-R-T-H, and of course very English.

**AL:** And where did your parents come from, did they both come from?

**NC:** My mother was born and brought up in New York, in Bronx and Brooklyn, and my father was born and brought up in a little town in New Jersey called Mt. Hope.

**AL:** And what did they do for occupations?

**NC:** Well, my dad was a sheet metal worker for the government in an arsenal, and he worked there for thirty-two years and retired from that job. And my mom only worked occasionally at the telephone company part-time, and she was mostly a full-time mother.

**AL:** How many siblings are there in the family?

**NC:** I've got three sisters.

**AL:** A house full of girls.

**NC:** Yes.

**AL:** And your family background in terms of religion and social activity, or political activity,

what sort of?

**NC:** Well, we were all brought up Roman Catholic, attended Catholic schools. Social activity was very family orientated, primarily, my father's family, there were seven children and in my mother's family there were thirteen, so everything was family orientated. And absolutely no political involvement or activity other than my father just having running commentary on the state of the world or the state of the organization that he worked in, the military arsenal, that was it, absolutely no politics.

**AL:** When, well, looking back on it, did you ever have an interest in politics, or in current world events?

**NC:** Oh, very much so. I was a child of the sixties and I was actually the first child in my family, and pretty much in that very large extended twenty family, member to go to college. And I went up to the University of Maine in 1966 and got involved in Students for a Democratic Society, and that was the, during the years of, well the year that I had to protest my graduation was 1970. And it was just on the heels of Kent State and the Cambodian invasion. And I had lost my mom to cancer by that time and had turned very political and had to protest my graduation, and my poor dad just couldn't believe it, he just, he thought to this day that I never really did graduate. He did come to my master's graduation at least. But I did.

**AL:** So you were a member of SDS at the University of Maine. I'm curious about that, what was the focus?

**NC:** I wouldn't say I was really a member, I was more on the fringes, you know, watching and involved. The focus was, there was initially focus just about student involvement in the university, and student concerns about the university. And my, because my mom was sick, she had cancer, I went for two years to Orono and left somewhat in the second semester, went home to New Jersey, stayed with my mom for a semester, and then came up and finished up in Portland. So, you know, I was really more on the outside, if you will, but the activities were definitely organizing protest against the Vietnam War. Student involvement, or student organizations, student participation in the education and in the university. And just the beginning of, you know, trying to talk about having, feeling I guess as the baby boomers, that we should be empowered to change the world, and we really thought we were going to do that.

**AL:** Were there others that you were close to at the University of Maine who held your political interests?

**NC:** Well it's funny, now that, you know, I step back, a woman named Chris Hasted, who is very active in the Maine Equal Justice Program I think at this point, she's been a lobbyist for Pine Tree Legal for years and years, is someone that, we were there at the same time and involved, but we really got to be friends afterwards. Apparently Stephen King was there when I was, but somehow I missed that notoriety, he was involved during those periods as well.

**AL:** So you would say once you got in college, or was it even earlier that you felt that political interest?

**NC:** Well, you know what, as everyone I remember being I guess a sophomore in high school, in a Catholic high school in New Jersey, and my Spanish class learning of President Kennedy's assassination. And that was really I think the beginning jolt, if you will, that kind of jolted me into an awareness of politics or the world. You know, I was sixteen, I guess I was sixteen at that time, or fifteen, fourteen, fifteen, and prior to that you're kind of in a childlike little la-la land, if you will. But that was like, "Oh, my God," and of course all of my family, you know, were in total admiration of the Kennedys and my aunt to this day has, you know, a framed picture of Jackie, of Jack and Bobby, in her living room. So that was really kind of the reawakening and awareness. And then the assassination was really the event that I think was like a huge wake-up call, maybe to my generation, or definitely to me and began to get my interest. And then of course, I didn't know what Vietnam was and where it was, and then went to college and this whole other world opened up to me. I was very interested and intrigued and then became more active once I got to Portland.

**AL:** That was right after, you finished school in Portland and then you were there.

**NC:** Yes, I did. My mom died in 1969 so I took some time back and went back to Portland and that was really during the heat, I was a social welfare major, had the privilege to sit in many classes taught by John Romanyshyn and Richard Steinman. But John Romanyshyn was really just someone who had a profound impact on me in terms of just appreciating my privilege, which my family would never have thought that we were privileged, and, you know, the plight of others. And I did a lot, I did some community work at the university and then I became like a peer organizer or advisor for other students to go out and bring in some community experience to their work. And that was really the beginning of people moving outside of the walls of their classrooms way back then, you know.

**AL:** Yes, which I think is still, seems sort of new on campuses today in some respects.

**NC:** Yes, it really is amazing but, you know, in 1969 and 1970 we were organizing that kind of outreach. And, let's see what else, I got, one other piece that I connected with when I was at the university was the Model Cities program had just come to Portland, and so they were looking for members and participants on that. And I joined the crime and juvenile delinquency task force, where I actually met my husband, and he's very political, and you know, went on to be a legislator for sixteen years, and very active in the community. So that kind of sealed my fate, being in Model Cities, if you will.

**AL:** So tell me about your experiences at Model Cities. We've been trying to hopefully get a lot of information about people's recollections.

**NC:** Well, you know, it was a heady, wonderful fun from my point of view at the time, and truly it transformed our community I think in terms of building the service network that exists now, that truly would never have existed without that kind of involvement or approach. And, you know, to the credit, everyone talks about the failure of the war on poverty and whatever, but, mm-mm, I would heartily disagree that, you know, we have input and a very comprehensive service system that got its roots really in Model Cities.

And I was fascinated with the notion of citizen participation, kind of just from that early wakening in Orono with student involvement or, you know, student participation. And it was really fascinating to watch the empowerment of very low income people in the community, and be able to speak for their needs and, you know, share their stories. And kind of waken the community to the inequities that existed as well as waken the community to compassion, I think, for one another. It generated a very I thought wonderful set of values that brought people together from all walks of life in a process where they were supposed to create solutions to their community problems. Previously it was mostly all the white educated lawyers or wealthy men who made all the decisions, and this just opened that door wide open to that. And it was fun, and I just remembered so many things being, you know, just kind of pushing the envelope at, I was twenty years old, or twenty one or two years old, and it was just fun to kind of see where and how we could go.

**AL:** Did you have a lot of leeway with the way you approached things?

**NC:** Oh sure, because everything was brand new, everything was brand new. So there wasn't a track record of where you could go or where to do and, you know, it was very interesting to just think back. And, I, when I left, when I graduated, which I did graduate, my poor dad, I first got a job, I got a job in, my very first job was at St. Elizabeth's Child Care Program which had just been created, and then some of the other child care programs were just forming in the city of Portland. So I worked in a program called Research into Action which was trying to develop and do research on early childhood education, and then offer technical assistance and training to the child care providers. So I worked there for I think around nine months or so, and then I was hired away at Head Start.

So I was very, I worked in the Head Start program I think for about six or seven years after that, which was just getting formed, again, in the community. The funding had just come together and we were working, I worked for PROP which was the People's Regional Opportunity Program, the community action program of the community at that point in time. And we developed Head Start programs not only in Portland but in all, many of the surrounding areas, out in the country in Buxton and Cumberland and Gorham, Bridgton. So I really got a tremendous education in terms of, you know, rural poverty and inner city poverty and was just forever captivated by the parent involvement piece that was a requirement of all Head Start programs. And that really just began to empower mostly women, but sometimes the dads would be involved, to give people who had been powerless this tiny little bit of opportunity, if you will, to be a part, make decisions on hiring staff and setting policies and overseeing, or being a part of the care of their children. Which then, I believe, and it did many times, translate into helping them become better parents to their children. So, oh, that was really wonderful work and exciting.

**AL:** You mentioned a little while ago the Vietnam War. Did you have, did you know who Senator Muskie was at that time, and what were your feelings about his stance, do you have recollections of that?

**NC:** Well I certainly, you know, of course the most memorable recollection unfortunately, but

for me the recollection that, I shouldn't say unfortunately, because for me it was something that really endeared me to him, was the confrontation on the steps of the, was it the New Hampshire State House, with the editor?

**AL:** Oh, the *Manchester Union*, yeah.

**NC:** The *Manchester Union Leader*, and when his wife was attacked and when he stood up and defended his wife, I loved that man. And then, but you know, I'm trying to remember, I believe that he was, he was against the war in principle, is that correct?

**AL:** Well.

**NC:** You're not supposed to tell me. I'm trying to remember where his stand was, I think he was kind of in the middle for a while. That's why I was trying to think that it was kind of a middle of the road approach and whatever. He was not, I think that when he was in, that people in Maine, you know, thought that he was approachable. And, but there is definitely, you know, you didn't trust anyone over thirty in those days, and so there was definitely a mistrust of authority at that point in time.

**AL:** Did you have a sense that Senator Muskie was sort of behind the scenes in Model Cities coming to Portland?

**NC:** Yes, very much so, very much so. You know, that he was part of that, really just thinking of that whole era and the group, Hubert Humphrey, and Lyndon Johnson who, I think got such a bad rap. He really was a wonderful, I mean, he was not, personally not a kind and gentle man, but he was wonderful. I mean, his policies and his politics were just in the right place I felt in terms of the environment and in terms of, you know, caring about the less fortunate.

For Senator Muskie the memory that I have of him, not as much, I mean I know that he was part of the group and was able to get Portland, and Lewiston-Auburn I believe, too, designated as model cities because of his stature in the Senate, if you will. But what I remember him most for was really his work in the environment and the Clean Water Act, you know. And at that point, you know, we were pretty consumed with civil rights and welfare rights and all the others. But, you know, your heart was in the environment because you can't live in Maine and not, you know, just be thankful every minute that people worked to keep this state as beautiful as it is, and clean as it was.

And, you know, I remember going to school in Orono and the stench of the paper mills, and up here, here even in Westbrook watching the Presumpscot River just be, you know, almost to ruination. And all of a sudden, you know, this leader from Maine, from our state, was able to make such a difference. So my memory of, you know, if I were to make an association with Senator Muskie, it would be more around the environment than social issues. Although I do know that because of his stature Maine was able to be part of the program, which was primarily designated or developed for inner cities I think, more than a rural community.

**AL:** Are there people that you worked with on Model Cities that you could talk about, that you



have recollections of?

**NC:** Oh my goodness, geez, it's just, well many of the people are still involved today in, you know, in some of the community endeavors that exist here. I guess maybe I'll just kind of talk more about my husband and I and the work that we got involved with.

**AL:** Sure.

**NC:** He, my husband was born and brought up in Maine, in Portland, in the West End, and went away, he went to Chevrus. Then he went for a little while to the seminary, decided that, no, he really, I guess he didn't have the vocation, thank goodness. And went to Bentley College for a while, and then wound up in VISTA where he was involved working with some, in Oklahoma, on an Indian reservation, but then significantly in Houston with the black community. And he, I think that his transformation really came during that period, too, being a part of VISTA. And he in particular led a caravan of black community members from Houston to Atlanta for Martin Luther King's funeral, driving this caravan of black people through the south which was, you know, a very profound moment for him.

He came back to Portland, trying to kind of find a place, he came back really to care for his grandparents who were at his mother's, his family's house, or to help out with them, and was looking for a place to connect. And he was very interested in the Model Cities program, and he was then hired by a group that had gotten some funding from Model Cities to form a low income advocacy organization, and it was called LIP, Low Income People, Incorporated. So he was the first director, if you will, of that group, he was the first director of that group [*unintelligible phrase*] and that's when we had just begun dating.

So there was just a tremendous eye opener to me in the sense of trying, of watching, you know, low income people from primarily the West End of Portland get together and really try to work on their social problems and to identify them, and to try to create solutions to them. And often those solutions in the seventies might have involved protests or whatever. I know that, I remember in particular one of the first places to work on was surplus food. That, you know, people were given surplus food and so you would go into these poor families where they'd have a vat of peanut butter and, you know, a hunk of cheese, and cans and cans of beans. And, you know, we were just trying to kind of say that people needed more than beans to live on, and look at developing some other supports for food.

And also just the way the welfare system was, the city welfare system, was treating people. It was very patriarchal, it was very judgmental. There may have been policies or rules, but they were certainly not out for people to see, and people often had a very arbitrary, you know, decision making process, if you will, welfare workers would. So that was really one of the first areas that we tackled through LIP was to really try to, you know, bring attention to the welfare office and the welfare programs. And, you know, it started out with, you know, picketing the welfare office and then sitting down with, you know, bringing people to the table with the officials. The first time that it ever happened, to try to -

**AL:** Advocate for them.

**NC:** Advocate for them, and let them advocate for themselves, which had never happened before. Then that led to trying to develop programs for the kids in that community, so through Model Cities there got to be summer playgrounds, or playgrounds were created, and summer programs for inner city kids, and some camping opportunities. And then that led to kind of working, letting, the mothers wanted to be empowered and trying to help them with education and job training. And then, then that kind of led to the Portland West Neighborhood Planning Council, which LIP actually became or merged into, it was called Portland West. We always called it The People's Building, and that's when they were able to get that building from the city and really create a community base of alternative services, if you will.

You know, I know that, I don't think they learned a lot, they knew a lot about building capacity in those days. Because, you know, people would just come in and have these problems, and my husband would be taking someone to the welfare office and, you know, the secretary would be taking someone else, you know, to a medical appointment or trying to advocate. It was a lot of advocacy for people in that time.

So then in 1972 I guess it was, the, my husband, Gerald Talbot who was the first black legislator, and a man named Maurice Beasley who has since died and was a low income person, they ran as a coalition, because coalition was a big word in those days, for the state legislature. So my husband, Larry, was kind of the youth, if you will, in his twenties, Gerald was the first black person, and Maurice was a low income person. And in those days the Portland legislative delegation was really chosen by kind of popular vote, if you will. Their own districts so that, you know, if twenty people ran for the legislature the top ten vote getters then were part of the Portland delegation.

So, unfortunately Maurice didn't get elected but Larry and Gerald did, and they drove to Augusta every day and that really began a whole nother [*sic*] level, if you will, of advocacy and empowerment and, you know, organizing. Oh my God, everything from, you know, vans to drive women to Thomaston to visit their husbands or family members who were in prison to, you know, people going up to testify at the legislature for AFDC increases, or for child protective, changes in the child protective system. Or just to really again kind of create and solidify, if you will, the programs that had been initiated through Model Cities in many ways, yeah.

**AL:** Now coming to your time here.

**NC:** Yeah, that's thirty, we have a thirty year job to -.

**AL:** Well, are there things, more things we should talk about in between (*unintelligible phrase*)?

**NC:** Well maybe I could talk, why don't I talk a little bit about being at Muskie and how I got to Muskie, okay?

**AL:** Oh, sure, yeah.

**NC:** My husband was in the legislature for sixteen years, that was before term limits, and he was very, very active in the issue around the working waterfront in the late eighties. There was a lot of development going on, and condos were being built on the waterfront, and lots of heady, heady plans to really change the waterfront to a commercial, shopping, hotel, tourist area, if you will. So people, my husband's area included the waterfront, and many people, his father and many other people in the community had made their living as longshoremen or fishermen working on the waterfront, and so he really led that effort and was very instrumental in the working waterfront referendum.

He had a heart attack, I guess it was about three or four days before the election, and he died during surgery the day after the election, which was successful. So here I was, with three kids, three, five, and eight, and being a public servant we had I think like four hundred dollars in the bank, and two junk cars that you had to have one jump the other, so. And I had just begun working part-time at Holy Innocence Homemaker Service because our youngest child was three and I was really lucky. We had made a decision just, you know, for me to be home with the kids. So we lived a pretty modest life, but it was a very child-centered family and lifestyle, if you will. So, you know, here I was just really, you know, totally catapulted out of my, you know, life and relationship and needing to find a way to support my kids. Larry had ten thousand dollars life insurance and that was it, and we had a mortgage and young kids and all of the 'what have you'.

So I tried to go back to work and they were very good to me, let me have a period, you know, well, I've been still grieving to this day but, I've grieved, but still I was just part time, terrified, I didn't know what I was going to do. And all of a sudden, I was just looking in the paper one day and the Muskie School had a fellowship for a low income woman who had a bachelor's degree and was looking for a master's degree. So it was really ironic, the day I saw it, or the day it was in the paper, I got like about half a dozen phone calls from friends and other people in the community saying, did you see that, did you see that, it's got your name on it, you, can you believe it? Go, get over there.

So, I didn't know for anything, you know, what or how, but I did know that I had to find a way to support three kids and that I really probably needed, you know, more education or to have more credentials to increase my earning opportunity. So I went over, applied, you know, I remember, and was, I was accepted. I just, it was just really incredible and it, it was such, you know, having worked all those years to empower other people, this was just an incredible opportunity for me, you know. It was definitely a distraction, if you will, from my grief, not that my, I mean my grief was totally interwoven into that process, but it was a new opportunity, a new direction. I was much older than any of my class, most of my classmates, so I was able to better relate to a lot of the professors than they were.

But still, they were very open and accepting, and people, the staff at the Muskie School were just really incredibly supportive to me and to others, you know. I remember one of the outcomes of my grief was that I had a very difficult time with public speaking and I just was where I was going to start crying every time I would get in public. And so one of the professors took me to the moot court classroom and just worked with me, and worked with me and worked with me on public speaking. And, you know, that was like, he didn't have to, I mean it was just, it, you

know, on his own, on his own time, you know, just working with me to try to get me past , you know, that one particular barrier. And, you know, I didn't know a thing about computers and, you know, they threw me into this quick learning computer class and, you know, I learned. And my co-students, my classmates were very supportive because they had really come from the computer age and they were, it's not going to blow up on you, it's okay, you can do that.

And so I was able to kind of get a consortium, if you will, I called it my child care consortium of my father-in-law and my aunt, because my husband's mother died two weeks after he did, so we just, she just was so overcome with grief that that was it for her. So my poor father-in-law and aunt came like on Mondays, and then another friend came on Tuesday, so I had this group of people, I had a baby sitter for one day, because my classes were four to seven or sometimes later. And then I would during the day or on the weekends drag my kids into the computer lab and set them up with crayons and cookies and snacks and try to do my work.

But it really was just an incredible opportunity for me to not only have a focus or direction, but to be so supported in my life, and just learn. I mean to be able, I love to learn and so to be able to be in that arena of learning and, you know, everything from budgeting to statistics, to personnel management, you know, I really was equipped. So I graduated with my dad to see, and my kids, in 1990. And then my challenge, I was saying, my kids were all at Reiche School in the West End, to say that I needed to be five minutes from whoever threw up at Reiche School, that was my job criteria.

So actually there was a new program at, was being funded by UNUM and started up in the Portland schools to create a program called the Portland Partnership. Which was to develop business partnerships with the schools, create a new culture of parent involvement that, you know, I was just really so passionate about and had a background about, and try to open the schools more to the community in terms of mentoring programs or whatever. So with my newfound master's degree I was hired for that position and created that program from scratch, which was really quite an accomplishment and something I'm really happy that that is sustained and working really well and is just growing. And now there's hardly, I was really a change agent at that point in time trying to convince teachers that community volunteers and mentors, and parents, hello, could really improve the education that they were delivering in their classroom and, you know, it was such a closed system.

**AL:** Was it part, sort of territorial?

**NC:** Yes, very, very territorial, and very closed. And just with practices that made no sense at all but that's how it was always done. For example, out on Peak's Island at the little school house there, the parents had to pay to have their PTO meetings there, pay the janitor overtime to come and unlock the building. So I, you know, like went to the superintendent and said, you know, there's one little quick thing here you could fix. I mean, that's what I remember, just systems and practices that, well, they always had to pay overtime and the school wasn't going to pay it. So we created, you know, parent groups throughout the school system and got a grant, actually, from Senator Mitchell, God love him, to do a study on the impact of volunteer coordinators in each school, and that still exists and has been a very successful program. But let me roll back to

**AL:** Let me flip the tape.

*End of Side A*  
*Side B*

**AL:** We are now on Side B of the interview with Nancy Connolly.

**NC:** Okay, I do, I did forget to mention that the fellowship that I had at the Muskie School was named for Patricia Roberts Harris, who was the first black woman to ever have a position. She was the director of housing, or HUD, under the Jimmy Carter administration and had a very interesting background, which included at one point being the director of a YWCA I think either in New York City or Washington, I can't remember exactly where. But you know, I mean it was because of the fellowship that was set in her name that I was able to go to school and get my degree and move forward. So, I just want to make sure that I remember to recognize, you know, Patricia Roberts Harris, you know, a very early black woman crusader, if you will.

**AL:** Now you just had mentioned with the parents' groups, that you were saying you did an evaluation or a -?

**NC:** A demonstration project, right, that we got funding through Senator Mitchell for, where we were able to hire a position in each school that we called a volunteer coordinator, I think now they're called partnership developers. That one, was school based so that, you know, we could kind of break down those barriers of all the obstacles that teachers and busy administrators had to having people, you know, the community and parents part of the classroom. And so these were people who were like the conduit to the schools or liaisons to the schools, and we set up processes to make sure that, you know, people, volunteers, were checked for, you know, criminal background and all of that.

Made sure that it was really a, you know, set up new systems, if you will, and I think made a tremendous change in the school system for not only business partnerships but, and you know, kind of pushing the learning opportunities for not only students but teachers. I remember, you know, working with Idex Laboratories and National Semi Conductor and that, groups that were very interested in working with science teachers. And I remember one science teacher saying to me, I've been teaching the same curriculum for twenty five years and it works fine, you know, and thinking, what if your doctor said that to you, you know? So, you know, with a little nudging I was able to get her kind of out and working with other scientists, and then all of a sudden her students were out, and so it was very interesting to watch that change.

And then I guess it was 1995, '6, '96, '5, that the job at the YWCA opened up, the executive director, and I was really, I have always loved the YWCA and was very interested in the programs that they offered, particularly for homeless girls. And my husband was also very captured by that program and he worked with the sheriff actually who kind of created that program in the early seventies. It was the first adolescent shelter for homeless kids in the state and it, called Fair Harbor Shelter, and it -

**AL:** And it was at the YW?

**NC:** At the YWCA, for girls. So, you know, I'd known about that and really loved that program and knew that they had a number of women that-. The YWCA had really changed over the course of years from being a recreation kind of social gathering program to offering very, very compelling social services to homeless women, homeless girls, and young teen families in crisis, as well as child care and then the pool and gym and all of that. So I applied for the job, I just kind of was ready for a change, applied for the job and was hired, and that was truly the hardest job of my life.

**AL:** In what respects?

**NC:** Oh, everything. You know, it was, the needs were so overwhelming that it was nearly impossible to meet them. I also think that there was a level of sexism that still existed in the funding circles so that, you know, if I was up for funding for the girl's shelter and someone, you know, another program was for the boy's shelter that, you know, boys needed so much more that the boys would get it, or the other homeless programs would get it over the women.

And I think in particular that the community hated to see the face of the women who lived there, that they, you know, the community, I think society wants women to be strong and caretakers and nurturing and, you know, just healthy role models or what have you. But here were women who were seriously abused, were numbing their pain, the pain of their life trauma with drugs and alcohol, with serious mental health problems, who had been deinstitutionalized and put out in the community. And it was not, it was kind of like when Larry used to try to, you know, work for prison improvement, nobody cared a bit about prison, you know, the prisoners. And in some ways, people didn't want to see or think about I think the women that we were serving and, they were more compelling to the girls and to the little children of course.

But it was a, when I left it was a 3.2 million dollar budget, it had increased by like a million dollars over the course of my being there. When I got there, little did I know that these are the questions you need to learn to ask in an interview, that they had been in serious deficit for the past four or five years, so I had to work really hard and develop new funding streams, and I was able to do that. And there were a hundred and ten staff people, nine programs, and it was the kind of job that was not really a job, it was your life, you know. It was twenty, and it operated twenty four-seven with all of the housing and shelter programs, so I was really on call twenty four-seven, you know.

**AL:** And your kids were still pretty young.

**NC:** And my kids were, at that point they were in their teens. So, yeah, it, you know, I loved the work but it was kind of like an abusive relationship, personally for me, that I loved the work and I love the organization, but the demands of the work were just really catching up with me physically and emotionally and personally. You know, it was the kind of job where, one night I remember we had just put in a brand new heating system and the gas company didn't have the capacity to meet our needs on some cold night. So, which they never 'fessed up to until this happened, and so, you know, they had to have this emergency digging, you know, some bigger

pipe from the street into the organization after that. But, you know, I had, it was really cold, and so I'm out that night like at, I get a call and I'm at my friend's house and my house taking the blankets off of my kids' beds, and my friend's, bringing them in to, you know, that was the kind of job that it was, it never stopped.

So, last April I made an incredibly bold, brave, and some people think ill thought through decision, to leave, that I really was at a place of burnout and had some physical problems that were cropping up, so I really made the decision to leave, not knowing where I was going or what I was going to do, or how things were going to work out. But it just was time, I knew it in my soul, if you will. So I had a wonderful summer and will admit that I wasn't that, you know, wasn't working really hard on a job search at that point in time.

But then, you know, my vacation money and all the rest of my money began to run out, and of course then came September 11th and the whole hiring, you know, the economy changed and job opportunities really shriveled up. And I had been kind of circling around, and so I went back, even during my job search, to Muskie, to the Muskie School, you know, anybody have any ideas, any thoughts and, because that was such a place of support and encouragement for me in the community, it really felt like a place I could go back to and say, Help, and people were really wonderful in, you know, trying to make calls for me or write letters or whatever.

But then just before, and I had done some other work, I did a little community organizing in Freeport for a group that wanted a community center, and I helped kind of organize the referendum and I did a little consulting work with a couple other groups just to really kind of pay the bills. But then this job opened up and was advertised in the paper, and it was here at the Muskie School, but at the Public Service- the research arm. But again, it was, it's research into action and I'm going to be working on a three year program funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to work with three school districts in the state of Maine to look at strategies to improve the educational outcomes for kids in foster care.

And so that's going to be my primary responsibility, and then I'm also providing some management direction and support to our unit here which is called the Youth Development Unit. And we offer a mentoring program for children in foster care, an employment program for kids who are leaving foster care, educational support for kids leaving foster care, and some programming to train social workers in terms of children in foster care.

And then we have this wonderful program where youth are involved, foster care youth have, are in a program that really is very empowering to them. They have made changes and they advise the commissioner and the Department of Human Services on foster care issues. We're actually having a conference next week where they're all coming together from around the state, and the commissioner will be coming to the conference to hear their concerns. They've developed a book that they kind of wrote and put together about questions for kids who are in foster care.

And they now are working on that when a child is put in foster care that a youth hopefully will be with, meet with them within the first week, who has been in foster care to explain things to them and to kind of be a peer mentor towards them. And they're actually working, I think at this conference their plan is to work on kind of a lower level coloring kind of book for very young

children in foster care that, you know, just kind of clarifies to the child, it's not your fault, what might happen, who you can go to for help. And it's, and again it's empowering the clients who are, just like Model Cities empowered their community and Head Start empowered parents and the school department, that we tried to empower parents, you know. And here again, it's empowering foster care youth.

So I feel like I've kind of won the job lottery at this point. I'm really happy to be here and, you know, and so grateful for the educational opportunity that I have and now to be doing this work. And it all really kind of is under the umbrella of Senator Muskie and the Muskie Foundation and, you know, the work of Senator Muskie too. That is giving back to not only the state of Maine but there are groups here that do child abuse and neglect work around the country, and groups here that have a specialty in domestic violence that are national experts here, and around health policy. And just, and it's just really a very wonderful supportive, positive environment, and I'm not in charge. That's kind of the best. So there's the story kind of in a nutshell.

**AL:** You've, now you've been in Portland for a lot, a lot of years.

**NC:** Yes, I have.

**AL:** And you've talked a little bit about sort of the programs that developed from Model Cities sort of forming a foundation for these services and the network. In what ways, and we're talking child care and we're talking social services, are there specific examples that (*unintelligible phrase*)?

**NC:** Yeah, I think that, you know, you could definitely talk about the child care programs being a, you know, a foundation here. And we have very quality child care programs and lots of options for low income families in the community, and that is a direct result of Model Cities. I would think that the advocacy programs that exist now for the homeless, and Preble Street Resource Center is really too young to have come through the Model Cities program, but it was really modeled after Portland West. Or Low Income People, Incorporated, and so, you know, through PROP and what have you, that that's there. There's a dental program that exists here that came through the Model Cities program because dental care was so much of a community need. Health stations, and really the public health program got its early foundations in the Model Cities program.

The group homes, or the respite homes, Fair Harbor and, Fair Harbor was created actually kind of after Model Cities, or during that time of Model Cities. I don't know if they got Model Cities funding or not, but other programs have since come up through that. The Boys and Girls Club was really augmented through the Model Cities program, camping programs for kids throughout the community, and counseling services, community counseling, you know, got its early foundation in the Model Cities program.

So, and community schools, that concept of a community school like the Reiche School and the Riverton Community School where there was health station and pools and libraries and really forming a community service center was definitely, that, all of that was kind of initiated or had its foundation in the Model Cities program. Neighborhood groups were formed in the Model



Cities program, Munjoy Hill. And, you know, and again, having neighborhoods feel like they had, could control some of their destiny and what would happen has definitely been part of the Model Cities program.

So it really has a wide reaching sustainable impact on the community at this point in time. You know, Portland is kind of blessed and at other times really challenged by that legacy, if you will.

When I worked at Head Start, truly we would be, the one place that, we worked at the (*unintelligible word*) School and in those days the bus station was right on Spring Street, is that from other communities low income or mostly single moms were given a bus ticket to Portland, and that was the welfare program. And so, you know, Portland as a service city or as a central city for years has really supported the entire state of Maine and many others. But I did personally work with families who were sent with a suitcase and a bus ticket to Portland, a mom and two or three kids. And, you know, they'd wind up at the Head Start program as a referral and then we'd have to find housing. And the public housing program really came through the Model Cities program as well and was informed and directed through that.

**AL:** Are we coming to a crisis in that area now, with the zero percent vacancies?

**NC:** Yes, unbelievable, unbelievable, yup. And just, you know, the affordability. So I think we need like a Model Cities housing revolution in some area, you know. I just know that the women who lived at the Y, and would have no place to be, the shelters overflowing down here on Oxford Street, the deinstitutionalization of people with mental illness and with not enough community supports, particularly housing built into that.

You know, the most poignant for me I think was when we were at the YWCA working with the young families who, you know, eighteen year old women and two children with no place to live, you know, those were the kind of situations that you couldn't sleep at night knowing that that exists, and that it does exist. You know, you watch people pushing the baby carriages up and down and living from place to place, and oftentimes that's at the degradation and expense of the mother having to find some man who will take her in. And it's just, it's just profoundly sad.

**AL:** Is there anything I haven't asked you that you think we should add that I haven't gotten to or sort of asked the right way that's important to talk about?

**NC:** I don't know. You know, I just think in terms of, you know, trying to make the loop or the circle to Senator Muskie. You know, one of the, I think that, I love living in Maine and just, you know, am so grateful that I live here and I've been able to bring my kids up here and kind of retraced my grandmother's roots and got back here again. That, you know, in Maine, because of our population base being relatively small, your elected officials are accessible. You know, they're not somebody who is far out, you know, like you would assume Hillary Clinton in New York, you know. She seems a little untouchable. But that's absolutely not the case where our senators or our congressmen or, definitely not, you know, I can pick up the phone and get through to the governor or to his wife or to other people. Not because, just because I'm a citizen and accessibility is, to our elected officials is a real privilege I guess, or opportunity that we have.

So, you know, you think of Senator Muskie and, you know, even though he's gone he's still accessible through the Muskie School, through that, you know, the public service work that's coming out of the Muskie Institute, through the kind of changes that are occurring through people who get their training in the Muskie School and can go out and impact the community. So, you know what, he still is accessible in a way because there are people like myself who are able to go out and do really good work for the community because of the opportunities that were left, you know, through his work and his foundation.

And every time I, you know, have a chance to go to Baxter State Park or swim in a Maine river or, you know, leave the, just not too far out of the city of Portland, you know, there's just that, our state is unspoiled really in so many ways because of his leadership and because of his work. And so, you know, in the areas that are very important to me, kind of education, social service or community service, and environment, you know, he's got his hand print on all of that so it's really a wonderful legacy to have left, and a real tribute to the work that, you know, he started out to do, and to the value system and belief system that he brought here. So, that's all.

**AL:** Thank you very much.

**NC:** Thank you.

*End of Interview*