UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Interview with: Jane Laping

Interviewed by: Carla Curtis

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Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola

CC: This is Carla Curtis conducting an interview with Jane Laping, executive director of Mothers for Clean Air, July 20, 2006, at 1 p.m. I am interviewing at her office located at 3100 Richmond Avenue, Suite 309, in Houston, Texas. How long has Mothers for Clean Air been in existence?

JL: I have to do the math. We have been around for about 9 years. We received 501(c)(3) in 1997.

CC: And what is the mission statement for the organization?

JL: It is rather lengthy. I mean, I really prefer to read it so I get it correct. It is to educate ourselves and the public about air quality and its effects on health, to encourage participation in learning about air quality, to do what we can as a community to prevent air pollution and reduce exposure, particularly to children.

CC: And how does Mothers for Clean Air enact its mission statement?

JL: We do that through a variety of ways and we do it on both a regional and a local level or a regional and a community level. Regionally, we do outreach through fairs and festivals, through guest speaking. We have a newsletter we publish quarterly. We have email notices that we send out about once a week. We have a web site. We also do some advocacy work, working

with the legislators. Then, on the community level, we have 5 chapters in the Houston area where we work with the residents to identify, prioritize and help to solve their environmental problems. We have one big project going on right now in southeast Houston which is just south of the Houston Ship Channel. We are working with a community there and we have the regulatory agencies and stakeholders. We are about to ask industry to join us in . . . I am trying to think what our goal is. It is to improve environmental health for residents exposed to air toxics. And we are conducting an air monitoring project, a citizen air monitoring project, in that community right now.

CC: How do you hope the companies will help?

JL: Well, we need them to reduce their emissions and they are already starting to do that. We would like to believe that it is because we have been in that community raising the issue since 2000. We also know it has a lot to do with a strong mayor that we have right now.

CC: Are you targeting any specific environmental problems? Are you targeting carcinogens or just toxins or are there any specific chemicals that you were targeting or you . . .

JL: Well generally, when we look at Houston's air pollution, we divide it into three major pollutants and those are ozone, particulate matter and air toxics. Ozone is pretty pervasive. It is all over the Houston area. So, that is probably our main focus. Also, it tends to be the main focus of the Houston region because that is the only pollutant that we are out of attainment for and that means that if we don't get back into attainment some time soon, that we can lose funding for highways and have restrictions placed on new industry coming in to the area.

CC: Are those standards set by the EPA federally?

JL: Yes, and we do know a fair amount about ozone, especially in terms of its health effects. We also have a very extensive monitoring system in the Houston area for ozone. We have about 50 monitors in the 8 county area, although 2 of those counties have no monitors so we have 50 in 6 counties. And we also have an ozone warning system that is somewhat unique. We get warnings of high levels of ozone at a particular monitor, either on the TCEQ, the state website, or you can also get that information through email. So, it is something that we can warn people about and tell them that they need to reduce their exposure at certain times because the concentrations are too high.

CC: That would be where schools get warnings that children shouldn't be outside for recess?

JL: Exactly, but it really needs to go beyond that. It needs to apply to children who are in after school activities, children who are at home, and it needs to apply to more than just children as well and not so much the elderly. They are not an at risk group for ozone. They are for other pollutants but not for ozone. But one of the primary examples of sensitive groups are those people who are healthy athletes who exercise outdoors. They need to be very cautious because when they are exercising, they are taking in more air, therefore, more pollutants and they are also breathing very deeply which brings those pollutants deeper down into their lungs and it can cause more damage. And then, we also have the people who work outdoors. They are another at risk group. So, those are the people that we . . . then, we also have the people with existing respiratory disease and they are another at risk group. So, those are the groups that we try to target.

CC: And the ozone also consists of air toxins?

JL: Well, actually, smog consists of ozone and air toxics but ozone is a molecule of 3 atoms of oxygen. So, it is its own entity. But if you talk about the term "smog," then that tends to include all the pollutants and ozone would be one of those, air toxics probably and especially particulate matter which is the second group of pollutants that I wanted to talk about that is also regulated by the EPA. There are federal standards. We are right at the threshold. We are so close that EPA now needs to make a decision whether or not we are in attainment. That is how close we are. So, it is possible that we could be out of attainment for two pollutants.

CC: Which ones?

JL: Ozone and particulate matter. Particulate matter is a class. It is really a class of pollutants because it can be a lot of different chemicals but these chemicals are either liquid or solid aerosols. They are very tiny pieces of dirt and soot that are suspended in the air. And those are hazardous because since they are so small, they, too, can be inhaled deeply into the lungs but the problem is that once they get into the alveoli, there is no way to expel them. And the alveoli is where the oxygen is exchanged with the blood. And so, now since these particles are in that location, they can get into the blood and once they are in the blood, they can get anywhere in any organ of the body and a lot of these particles carry toxins with them, heavy metals that can cause a myriad of health problems that range from reproductive to neurological to, well, respiratory and cardiovascular . . .

CC: Would cancer be among those, too?

JL: Yes. And then, we have the third class which are air toxics and that is a real laundry basket because there are 188 hazardous air pollutants which are also called air toxics but these are only 188 chemicals out of the tens of thousands of chemicals that have been studied well

enough to know that they cause health effects. So, we are talking about a big class of pollutants here. And those can cause cancer as well. Yes, they, too, cause a myriad of diseases but cancer is one of them.

CC: I noticed in your newsletter, you talk about the grandfathering of the loophole in the Sunset Review. Can you explain that?

JL: Wow, that was written a long time ago.

CC: So, that is not new legislation?

JL: No. The grandfather loophole has changed. There has been legislation that actually phased that out. When George Bush was governor, he tried to make it a voluntary program and let industry decide on their own whether or not they wanted to get permits, modern day permits. Well, of course, that didn't go over very well and I can't even remember how many years ago it was. It was 3 to 5 years ago that there was legislation that made it mandatory with a timeline for industries to get permits and not be under this grandfather clause any longer. So, actually, GHASP was going to undertake a research study to determine whether or not all companies had gotten permits but I don't believe that project is finished yet. So, I don't know the answer to that.

CC: Are there are some companies out there that do not have permits?

JL: That is what the grandfather clause said, that if a plant was built before 1970, before the . . . I think it was 1974 . . . Texas Clean Air Act . . . they were not required to have a permit because the law went into place in 1970 or 1974. You asked me about the Sunset Law. The Sunset Law is a review of state agencies, I believe every 10 years. And so, when that article was written it had been in effect for ten years, for, at that time it was called the Texas Natural

Resource Conservation Commission. And one of the changes that came out of that Sunset law is that they changed their name to appear more consumer friendly. So, they are now a Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

CC: And the permits set the standards?

JL: Well, the permits don't set the standards. The government sets the standards. What the permit does is sets a limit as to how much pollution an industry can release. So, they actually have permits to pollute but what the permits do is they set a threshold of how much they can release and if they go over that, then they can be fined.

CC: As I understand it, the standards that they have in Texas are different than other states in the country. Is this correct?

JL: Well, I don't know about the air toxics now, effects screening level, ESL. There is not like a federal effects screening level which is like the level at which you can see health effects. And so, each state sets those. And there are differences in what Texas has compared to some other states. And some of them are more stringent and some are less stringent. But the state, the TCEQ, is now reviewing those effects screening levels for the state of Texas. But again, you know, there are many and they are doing like 10 a year or something like that. I mean, this is hard work reviewing all this literature and maybe even conducting the research. So, it will take them on the order of 10 year or so, 10 to 20 years, to go through them all.

CC: By which time, everything is still polluted?

JL: Yes, because we don't have any standards, essentially.

CC: And is there a new emission standard, a reduction thing for new emissions?

JL: Well, I guess there is a revision. You know, we have been working on this plan since the 1970s and we still haven't achieved it. There is just one delay after another, one change after another. Maybe what you are talking about is we now have a different standard for ozone. We were under the one hour standard for ozone which we were not achieving, we were not anywhere near close and the deadline was 2007. But what the EPA did is they came up with a more strict standard which they call the 8 hour standard. So now, we have ozone averaged over 8 hours. This is a running 8 hour average. So, every hour, the 8 hour average changes. So, for example, let's say that the first 8 hour average is from midnight to 8 a.m. and the second 8 hour average would be from 1 a.m. to 9 a.m. The third would be from 2 a.m. to 10 a.m. So, it is a running or a rolling average that changes every hour but it is averaged over 8 hours. Now, Houston intends to do better under the 8 hour standard than under the 1 hour which is totally the opposite from most cities and that is why the EPA instituted the 8 hour because it is more protective of public health in most cities but in Houston, because of our industrial base, we have a lot of what we call spikes where we can have a dramatic increase in ozone in one hour. In fact, just the other day, I was noticing it went like from 80 to 130 in 1 hour. You know, this is a pretty big jump and that is very typical of our industrial emissions. So, what happens now is that the EPA has again changed their rules and said that, no, you don't have to meet the 1 hour standard before you meet the 8 - you can just go ahead and start instituting the 8 without ever meeting the 1. So, we are still exceeding the 1 hour, we will never make attainment of the 1 hour by 2007 but now, we only need to achieve this 8 hour which, in Houston, is not as stringent as the 1 hour. So, essentially, we have dumbed down the standard for health in Houston. We have essentially

lowered the standard. We are just saying that instead of making it stricter or more stringent, we have actually weakened it and made it less protective of public health.

CC: You mentioned the mayor's study. Are you familiar with his study that was completed?

JL: The task force study?

CC: Correct.

JL: Yes, I did read it. What they did was they looked at air toxics in the Houston area and they prioritized them based on the severity of the health effects. And then what they did is they looked at census tracks - I believe it was census tracks they looked at - or super neighborhoods. What did they look at? Anyway, they looked at some geographical area in the Houston area and determined which neighborhoods had the greatest number of these air toxics being emitted into their community. For example, they looked at the 12 that caused the most serious health effects, air toxics, and found that 7 of those 12 were emitted in Manchester . . . maybe it was the Manchester/Harrisburg area - I can't remember exactly . . . and 6 of those were emitted like in Clinton Park, Galena Park, Jacinto City, or somewhere. I actually have the study right here. But the problem is you can't read these. These graphics are so poor, you can't read them. Here is the map but I can't read it, even with my glasses.

CC: Do you all concur with this study?

JL: These are the neighborhoods, right south of the Ship Channel. That is Manchester and may include some of Harrisburg, I am not sure. And then, this area up here was the second. This is not new information to us. It is just a different way of presenting it. The real significance of this study is that it has a lot of big names behind it. It is not just Mothers for Clean Air or GHASP saying there is a problem in this community and people are affected and we need to

clean it up. We now have Ph.D.'s and MD's saying that. So, to me, that is the significance of this study - that it really has some clout now.

CC: Do you think it has more clout than the TexAQS 2000 study that was concluded?

JL: Well, the TexAQS 2000 study was not a health effects study. It was just an air pollutant study. It looked at air pollutants on the ground and in the air extensively over a period of I think 1 month or something like that, 1 or 2 months. Collected a lot of data. So, that was a very significant study but we can't compare them because they are different types of studies. What the TexAQS 2000 was it identified the highly reactive VOCs which are . . . I am trying to think about what we talked about . . . some air toxics are volatile organic compounds but volatile organic compounds combined with nitrogen oxides to make ozone. Some volatile organic compounds are highly reactive. Those are the ones that make those ozone spikes. And so, what the TexAQS 2000 study did was it identified which of the VOCs were highly reactive and also pinpointed their sources so that now, the TCEQ could go in and really regulate those pollutants which were causing most of the ozone formation. So, to me, that was the significance. That was a really significant thing that came out of that study. There was an awful lot of good information that came out of that study.

CC: Are you familiar with the study that is being done at the University of Houston?

JL: No. I think you mentioned it to me and I knew it was going to happen but I don't have any details on it. The neat thing about the TexAQS 2000 was they did a lot of public information on it. They held a lot of public meetings were people could go, find out what was happening, what was intended to happen, what the preliminary results were, talked to the researchers. I don't see any of that happening with the current study, and I am sure it is funding.

CC: It is not up and running yet, that is why. It starts in late August, the first of September at which point, when they collect the data, it will be . . .

JL: Yes, but what I am saying is with the Tex X 2000, they had preliminary meetings. They told us what they intended to do before they did it. And there was a web site you could go and . . . I don't know when the web site went up. That may not have gone up until they started doing the analysis.

CC: And so, Houston has a unique air pollution . . .

JL: Right. And that is because, in most cities, the major source of air pollutants are from vehicles, mobile sources. In Houston, the majority of the air pollutants come from industry. And so, we have a different mix of chemicals here and they just tend to be a lot more hazardous than what you get simply from vehicle emissions.

CC: Has industry lowered their emissions at all?

JL: Well, we are seeing some decline in certain pollutants, yes. In fact, there was a report that came out just last week saying that 1-3 butadiene levels had decreased in this community that we are working in, in southeast Houston. And hopefully that was a result of some changes that were made at these plants that were regulated by the state. But then, there were also some increases in pollutants in other areas. So, you know, it is a tradeoff. And, you know, overall, in the past 30 years, we have seen a decrease - quite a tremendous decrease in pollutants. But we are still far above where we should be. We are not at safe levels yet.

CC: What would you propose to lower those levels to safe levels?

JL: Well, I think there are a lot of things that need to be done. What industry seems to prefer to do is to put controls on their emission sources and what we would prefer to see them do is use

less toxic substances in their manufacturing processes. And this is not like science fiction. I mean, these things are available and some companies are already using them. And so, it really needs to be that kind of a transition to make the whole industry safer. I mean, the Houston ship channel is a perfect terrorist target. We have so many hazardous chemicals there, so many explosives, and that is not going to go away as long as we are using them and transporting them. But we can use less hazardous chemicals.

CC: And you say some have already changed from using those here in Houston?

JL: I cannot give you the name of the company that has done that and I doubt that they are in Houston, but it is not like something that can't be done. It is just like the chlorofluorocarbons that were destroying the ozone layer. They switched over to hydro- chlorofluorocarbons which were less destructive. But then, you know, that allowed them time to develop other propellants that didn't react with the ozone layer. So, the science is there. It is possible to do.

CC: It is a matter of cost?

JL: Yes, but then again, I mean, that is industry's excuse. But when you really look at the numbers, you see that they can actually save money by doing this stuff.

CC: Over the long run?

JL: And the other thing is . . . and this is something that actually Texas Petrochemicals, one of the plants in the southeast community has done. A lot of product is released into the air just because it is not a very large quantity so it is really not worth capturing it, they think. But yet, when they do find out how to recycle it back into the stream, they do find that they are saving money that way over the long run.

CC: What specific plans does Mothers for Clean Air have to reduce the pollution? Have you all been able to get legislation passed?

JL: It is very difficult. We work very closely with GHASP - the Galveston/Houston Association for Smog Prevention and they are effective at working with the regulatory agencies in changing the regulations -- making the regulations stricter, making them more enforceable, making them more effective. We don't do a lot of that. We do some of that. Our mission is primarily education -- to educate the community, get the community involved and help the community take action by working with their elected officials voting, speaking out to the regulatory agencies, and holding those agencies accountable for the pollution in their community.

CC: Is it a matter of lobbying the public?

JL: I guess that is a good way to put it.

CC: And you have found that effective in the last few years?

JL: Well, I think it is very interesting what has happened in southeast Houston. It seems like the main culprit in that community is Texas Petrochemicals and they have actually started making some changes and we haven't gotten the public support that we were hoping to get but Texas Petrochemicals knows that we are there.

CC: Why do you think that you haven't been getting the public support?

JL: Because we have been trying to recruit residents in that community to be part of our project.

CC: I would think that residents would want cleaner air around them or is it a job issue?

JL: Actually, in that community, it is not a job issue because most of those people do not work in the industries, but it is a priority issue. This is a low income minority community and they don't see air as a threat. What they see as a threat is hunger and illness, shelter, clothing. It is not a big issue for them and that is, I believe, why we are having trouble getting them involved.

CC: They have not related health issues to the air?

JL: Not yet. I mean, that is our job. We are trying to get there.

CC: So, you are targeting a lot of neighborhoods in the southeast area like Manchester?

JL: Well, no, actually, we are not working in Manchester. We just have to limit ourselves. We are south of Manchester. We are south of the ship channel. Park Place, Allendale, Meadow, Meadow Creek - that community. So, it is east of 45, south of 225, right next to Pasadena.

CC: Do you know of any studies that have been done that show higher levels of cancer clusters or other health hazards that affect people from the toxins and the air pollutants?

JL: Well, there had been a couple of cancer cluster studies done in that community and there are some cancers that are elevated but the question is why are they elevated? Is it because of the air pollution or is it because of occupational exposures? And those are very difficult answers to tease out of that data.

CC: So, no rare forms that would directly be linked?

JL: Right.

CC: But other health hazards are higher in that area?

JL: Well, I mean, what we can measure is the risk based on the concentration of the pollutants. And, you know, we may not see the health effects in the community and there could

be several reasons for that. One is it may be a very transient community. People don't stay there very long so, you know, if they contract a disease, they may be gone or they may not be there long enough to contract the disease. So, measuring the health effects has to bring on a lot of different factors. And it could also be, you know, that they have the health effect but it is caused by something else like smoking or an exposure that they had somewhere else where they lived or worked. But what we can measure is we can measure the pollutants and there are studies that have been done on a lot of these pollutants - like I said, 188 of them - that would indicate where the person's risk would be from breathing that pollutant at a certain concentration. And those were things that can be measured. That is how they determined in the mayor's task force, that is how they determined what the most serious chemicals were in those communities. That is how they identified their top 12.

CC: Years ago, people would work for refineries or chemicals, petrochemical plants; generations. So, do you see less correlation of that today because people are more transient? There aren't clusters of company homes that live and work there like the ones in Port Arthur?

JL: We haven't really looked at that. We just know from the census that, people are commuting, they are not employed in those industries that are located in the community. And then again, like I said, those areas tend to have a very high minority population, not only are there Hispanics there but there are a lot of Vietnamese. And so, we know they haven't been around very long because this is a more recent phenomenon.

CC: What future plans does Mothers for Clean Air have to help alleviate the air pollution?

JL: Well, we would really like to expand our target area. In fact, I just got another grant rejection today. I think this is the last one. I won't be getting anymore. But I am ready to write

another grant. This particular rejection was to expand our community into Manchester and Harrisburg to go north of the ship channel and inside the loop. But now, we are thinking about maybe expanding east to Pasadena. I have gotten lots of requests from people in Pasadena to do some work there, and there is a request for proposals out that I think that project might fit so I need to look at it more carefully.

CC: And what specifically do residents want you to do?

JL: Well, I think they want us to clean up the air. Yesterday, I was speaking with several school nurses from Pasadena and they are telling me about all these kids with asthma, how they have their inhalers all lined up. They are telling me about kids with cancer. They are telling me about kids having nosebleeds all the time. They are telling me about parents having seizures. And they are telling me, "We're right on 225. We are right across from Lyondell Citgo. Shell is just right down the road. We smell this stuff all the time." They are concerned that what they are breathing is affecting the kids' health and their health, too. And so, if we can somehow find an elevated level of particular ailment and get the community organized and get industry to the table, you know, we've got a shot.

CC: How would you go about tracking the levels?

JL: The levels of the pollutants?

CC: Yes.

JL: We wouldn't do that. That would be done by the monitoring that the state and the county and the city do and also the industries. A lot of industries have been required to have their own monitors now.

CC: And do they share that information?

JL: No.

CC: What about the city and county with their monitors?

JL: Right, and I am pretty sure the regulatory agency, since we are partners with the regulatory agencies, I am pretty sure they can get that information from the plants.

CC: Do you think they are doing a good job of monitoring the air quality in those areas?

JL: They are doing a good job but a better job could be done. And the city actually has money to purchase and equip a mobile monitoring lab. And so, they will be able to have a mobile lab now where they can just go out to hot spots where there is something suspected, they can park their van and take measurements.

CC: Are you familiar with Dina Cappiello's series "In Harm's Way?"

JL: Yes.

CC: I understand from reading that that there are a number of people who won't even work in the van monitoring areas because of illness.

JL: Oh, yes, I did read that. Yes, that they are getting sick. There are also people getting sick in helicopters from breathing the stuff, yes.

CC: And they have monitoring equipment on board the helicopters?

JL: Yes. They have to have the doors open.

CC: Well, how is the monitoring for the Bucket Brigade?

JL: I don't think the Bucket Brigade is happening anymore.

CC: I realize that it has stopped but in past times, was it effective?

JL: I think it has been more effective in other cities than in Houston. The problem with using the Bucket Brigade in Houston is that there are so many industries so close together that it is

really hard to pinpoint if you get anything in your bucket, where it came from. In a lot of other communities where there is just an isolated plant, it is real easy to collect a sample and say, "you did it," because there is nobody else around. We can't do that in Houston. I mean, it is not just a problem for the Bucket Brigade, it is a problem for the state. They've got these monitors and they are doing these complicated calculations with wind direction and wind speed and trying to figure out exactly where these pollutants are coming from. And they are having a difficult time.

CC: Because they are all bunched together?

JL: Yes.

CC: So, it would be difficult to pinpoint which company is the culprit?

JL: Yes.

CC: What about helicopters flying over? Does that help? In other words, the emissions coming out from the specific companies.

JL: I don't think so. I mean, you've still got the same problem with the wind. It is still really difficult to tell. I suppose if you could find a high concentration over a plant several times, you know, you might be able to say this is where it is coming from.

CC: So, lawsuits have been very difficult to prove?

JL: Especially when you are trying to prove health effects, yes. And, you know, the really sad thing is a lot of these emissions are permitted. A lot of these emissions are legal. They are allowed to emit at those levels.

CC: Because of the permits?

JL: Because of the permits, and what the permits do not look at is they don't look at cumulative emissions. A permit is given for each facility and a facility is like a stack, so you

can have 20, 30 facilities in a plant and they are permitted independently of one another. They don't look at them collectively to see how much pollution we are going to have if all 30 of these sources emit their permitted level at the same time. They don't look at that. They don't look at it that way.

CC: Is there any chance of changing their standards?

JL: Very remote because once a permit is issued, it is very rare that it is ever reviewed.

CC: What agency would go about changing that?

JL: It would be the state, the TCEQ.

CC: Per legislation?

JL: More than likely, yes.

CC: Or public outcry? Or both?

JL: Well, I think you'd need both. And, you know, getting the legislature to even look at any of that stuff is so difficult. I spoke with Gallegos . . . I hope I am right on that, and he wants to reintroduce the bill that was introduced in the last legislative session on air toxics. I spoke with him about one week ago. You know, this session starts in January. He is already pessimistic. He really doesn't think it is going to go through.

CC: And what does the state provide for?

JL: It would make the ESLs (effects screening level) enforceable. Right now, they are guidelines but it would make them standards so they could be enforced.

CC: And he is already having trouble getting people on board for that?

JL: Well, I mean, he hasn't even started as far as I know but in his mind, he can't think of how he can get enough support for it to get it out of Committee, which is where it ended up last time. It never made it out of Committee. That is discouraging, isn't it?

CC: It is. Do you think it is due to the high lobbying efforts of the petrochemical companies and the oil companies?

JL: Oh, I don't think it even goes that far for this. I think it is just who is in the legislature right now.

CC: They are not environmentally conscious?

JL: Yes. They are economically conscious and they see any pollution control as being bad for the economy.

CC: Because it would cost the refineries too much to . . .

JL: Yes.

CC: And their constituency isn't pressuring enough?

JL: And I think the other thing you have to realize is this is a state legislature and there are a lot of rural counties that are represented. They don't have issues with air pollution like Houston and Dallas and El Paso have. And so, you really have to have strong legislators supporting those issues in those cities in order to get them to carry statewide.

CC: So, it is the tax base basically?

JL: Yes. Because the industries do provide . . . I guess that is what you are saying . . . industries provide . . . although they get tax relief or tax credit or tax exemptions or whatever.

CC: But they still bring a big base of tax to that area for school districts.

JL: Yes.

CC: Are you finding that more and more people are wanting to move out of industrial areas and neighborhoods?

JL: No, and this is the situation. A lot of those companies are buying out homes because they don't want people complaining about what they are emitting, but the problem is they give them $50,000 for their house. Where are they going to find a place to live in Houston for $50,000? These people don't want to move. It is their community, they have lived there all their lives, their friends are there, their relatives are there, it is their home, a lot of these people are elderly, and where are they going to move? So, I don't see people wanting to move. I mean, I do hear occasionally about people who say, yes, I would like to get out of here but I don't have anywhere to go. I can't afford to leave. That is usually what it is. Even if industry doesn't buy out their home.

CC: So it is a no-win situation?

JL: Yes.

CC: What does Mothers for Clean Air hope to accomplish, say, in the next 5 years besides the standards?

JL: Well, we really want to raise the awareness of the issue. I mean, I think that is one of the things that we have been working on since our inception…. to get more public outcry. We really need to make this a big issue for everyone - not just the people who live in those communities but for . . . everyone in Houston needs to see this as their problem, and I think that is what we see as our mission, is to educate and get people involved and active.

CC: Do you see any successes since some of these stories have come out in the Chronicle?

JL: Yes, very much so. You just see it more as a public concern -- people talking about it, people writing about it. For example, and I don't know if this is a good example or not but Mothers for Clean Air had our first fundraiser last year. We held a 5K race on Earth Day. And we put this together very quickly for a major event like that. We essentially started in January and the race was on April 22. We had sponsors jumping at us wanting to support our race. We had 300 participants. I don't know how many prizes that we got. We ended up profiting $8,500 in our first year just because there was so much support for a race that was for clean air. So, this is an issue that people are concerned about now.

CC: Will this become an annual event?

JL: Yes, we hope so. We are starting to plan next year's already. And if we can get other actions that people can take like that and get them as excited about doing it like, you know, voting, for example, or writing your legislator or going to Austin or filing a complaint with the city or the state, you know, then we are going to be able to make a lot more progress. It is really up to the public to demand cleaner air, better enforcement, and better regulations.

CC: Do you find that we have a mayor who is environmentally aware?

JL: Yes, this is also a very good time for us to do it because there is a high chance of success with the mayor.

CC: So, our mayor is environmentally conscious?

JL: Oh, he is more than environmentally conscious. I mean, he is very concerned about the city and he knows the affect air pollution has had on the image of the city. And he is also aware of the pollution in the city and has worked out an enforceable agreement with Texas Petrochemicals for them to reduce their emissions over a period of - I can't remember - 3 to 5

years or something like that. And he is holding their feet to the fire. It is written in the agreement that if they don't, he can sue them.

CC: Aren't a lot of those companies outside of the city jurisdiction?

JL: Exactly, yes.

CC: How is Harris County handling this? Not as well?

JL: Well, things have changed in the past few years. Harris County used to be a lot better than the city. The city has now gotten better. I don't really know how to answer that too well. I'd say Harris County is doing its job. They could be doing better as well. I think they do a much better job than the state.

Tape 2

CC: We were discussing that Harris County has gotten better but the city with an environmentally conscious mayor is doing more than the county right now.

JL: I think so but I also think that the county is doing a much better job than the state. The county has no authority, no regulatory authority. They have to defer to the state. So, they can go out and do inspections but if there is a violation, it needs to go to the state and then it is the state who imposes the fine or works out some type of an agreement. So, the county doesn't have a lot of authority.

CC: Is there any way to change that?

JL: Well, you know, some states have like a regional air quality board. I don't see that happening here and I don' really know what the solution to that problem is. Well, the solution needs to be at the state level, yes, and I think that can be changed. It is not going to be easy but I

think there has been enough exposure of what the state is doing that if we could get some decent people on the commission and some support of legislators it could be changed.

CC: Is there any information that you would like to add to what we discussed? Is there any particular area that needs to be more focused?

JL: Well, there is one thing that we didn't talk about at all and that is vehicle pollution or mobile sources. Even though it is not the greatest source of pollution in the Houston area, it is a significant source. And what makes it more significant is that more people are exposed to vehicle pollution than are exposed to industrial pollution because people who live near industries are exposed the most to industrial pollution but people living just about anywhere in Houston are exposed to mobile sources or vehicle pollution, especially people who live or work or go to school near freeways. And that is something that we really need to be more focused on, is where we locate schools, for example, where we locate athletic fields, what type of outdoor activity is being done near freeways because our freeways carry tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of vehicles a day and what we are finding is that . . . I told you about particulate matter . . . well, diesel particulate matter is the most serious in terms of causing cancer. And our freeways carry a lot of diesel traffic. And that results in a lot of particulate pollution along freeways. And we have many, many, many schools located along freeways that are affecting tens of thousands of children. So, I think that is an area we are trying to spread into. We have been avoiding that because it is such a big issue but we are getting more resources now, we are collaborating with Environmental Defense who are doing a diesel project and hopefully we can get more funding and be able to address that issue as well.

CC: Mass transit would help?

JL: It certainly would.

CC: Do you see the city going quickly enough with mass transit?

JL: No, and I don't see the population supporting mass transit enough either.

CC: That has been stalled on the federal level for a long time. Funding.

JL: Well, because of our . . .

CC: Congressmen.

JL: Right. Thank you. The other thing to be said about that is they are the ones who have the money to build the roads and that is what they do. That is what they know how to do and that is what they do. They just build more roads and expand freeways and they are not going to stop. And that doesn't help the situation any when you make it easy for people to drive by giving them more lanes to drive on.

CC: You don't think the cost of gas is going to change that?

JL: Well, you know, apparently it already has. It is affecting some people's driving decisions but, you know, I don't think we are there yet.

CC: I am assuming Mothers for Clean Air would hope to see a mass transit system like San Francisco has or DC.

JL: I love to visit DC just because of their mass transit. I think we need to do a better job with thinking out our mass transit system here.

CC: That is true. We have one of the best medical centers in the country and yet, we don't see studies coming out of this medical center to deal with the pollutants, the ozone, the toxins, any of that. Has Mothers for Clean Air lobbied for some of these studies to be done and why do you think they haven't been done?

JL: Well, actually, we have been participating in SHERP which is Strategic Health Effects Research Project - something like that, where we have been working with a group of people to identify the gaps in health effects information in the Houston area and what studies need to be done. But I have been in research myself - my husband is a researcher - I know how those things get funded and I also know how hospitals in Houston get funded and a lot of that money comes from the oil industry. And so, they are going to fight any type of study like that. Fortunately, there are studies that have been done elsewhere that we can draw on and I don't feel like every study has to be done in Houston. I think there are some studies that do need to be done here but we can draw on information from other places as well.

CC: So, they are not politically motivated?

JL: Or economically motivated.

CC: Or economically motivated. However, doctors do seem to see links . . .

JL: Some doctors do. Other doctors, I mean, they haven't been trained to look for them and there are very few doctors who are willing to go public and say that air pollution causes health problems. We know a handful.

CC: And you think this is because of where they work specifically?

JL: In some cases, yes.

CC: But the public is becoming more aware of the hazards?

JL: Yes. You know, the deal with health effects is that people really don't see themselves being affected unless they are personally affected so, you know, if you have a child with asthma or if you have asthma yourself or if you know someone who has asthma and you know has an asthma attack or an asthma episode on a high ozone day, then yes, you see that link but if you are

healthy and you don't know anybody with asthma or cancer, then you go, they are weak, somebody else's problem, "I'm O.K., it's not the air because I am breathing it and I'm O.K.". So, that health effects link isn't as strong as you would think in the public eye. It really has to be a personal thing in order for people to make that association.

CC: Do we have a system in Houston that reports certain types of cases?

JL: Well, there are diseases that are required to be reported to the state but asthma is not one of those.

CC: So actually, there is no regulatory . . . the air pollution in Houston. According to an article in the Chronicle, we have an increase in upper respiratory illnesses. Have you seen that article?.

JL: Compared to?

CC: A lot of other cities.

JL: I question that. I know the ALA says that, too, but the ALA bases their numbers on one study, on one study that was done in low income schools. I mean, you would find that anywhere in the United States if you did that same study.

CC: So, it wouldn't be . . .

JL: It has more to do with low income than it has to do with air pollution is what I am saying.

CC: And yet, didn't the ALA also say that it affected the growth of children's lungs?

JL: Yes, that is based on a study, right, but that is not saying that Houston has elevated respiratory problems because of air pollution, or even that we have elevated respiratory problems. I have not seen any reports that show that.

CC: So, there are no reports out there that specifically link health to the air pollution here in Houston?

JL: There are some older studies. Very few.

CC: Is this an area that needs to be delved into more?

JL: Yes.

CC: I want to thank you very much for agreeing to this interview. I appreciate your giving your time and expertise to this project.