

LWV interview questions

Jackie Hays

1. What was your perception of League before you joined?

I saw the League as a group of women who were very interesting and very involved in the issues that impacted our daily lives. Most were about my age, 30 to 40. Most were stay-at-home moms with young children. But they were contributing to the health and happiness of the community. I wanted to be a part of that

2. How did you get involved?

I just showed up! Somehow, I knew about the League when we moved to St. Cloud more than 47 years ago. I knew I wanted to join. My husband was a college administrator and professor. Many other League members were married to professors. We had many social activities going on, but they weren't like the League: where you really got down to dig out the issues and determine what it is we need to do to make our community a better place to live. We were stay-at-home moms, and we needed an intellectual outlet, and League was an excellent example of that.

3. What did you find most satisfying?

What I appreciated the most was having the opportunity to work together as a team to improve the life of the community. Women have different hobbies and different ways of socializing. The League fit my need to be learning. And we were recognized in the local newspaper – our efforts were often the focus of articles.

4. How much has changed since you have been a member? In LWV? In the country/culture?

It's been 47 years since I joined the League. Society has changed a lot. The thing that has had the most impact on the League is the number of women who have entered the workforce. I go to meetings and look around and most of us have grey hair. A few younger people participate, but it has really taken commitment from long-term members to keep the organization going, because younger people just don't have the time. I admire the ones who have young children and still do a lot of work in the League and in the community. But I think it makes it rather hard for them. Women today have more choices. They can enrich their lives with other organizations. They are now accepted in what were once male-only organizations. So, the League has more competition. Young women can join Rotary, or the Lion's Club.

5. What was important to women about LWV at the time you joined? What is most important today?

As I have stated, the most important thing about the League when I joined was the intellectual stimulation, because otherwise, your choices weren't real good.

[Jackie: We need an answer here about what is most important today.]

6. Have you observed change in public attitudes to LWV?

I don't know if this is a universal reaction, but I think people are beginning to assume that the League is partisan, and we're known as a non-partisan organization. It's one of our basic rules. I think that there is some feeling that the League had a hard time sticking to that. We need to be really cautious about that because the type of work we try to do in the community – we are a lot more effective if we are nonpartisan. Still, if Republicans are complaining that we are partisan, why don't they join the League, so that they can participate in formulating our positions?

7. How was LWV important to the community through the years?

We identify issues at all levels of government, then we begin a comprehensive study of the issues, then we decide what we want to support in terms of lobbying and working to make policy more effective and meaningful. A good example is the juvenile justice initiative we took on in the early 1970s.

About that time, we moved from Virginia Beach, Virginia to Roseville. The League in Virginia Beach was looking at the issue of juvenile justice. Members were concerned about the fact that juveniles were put in jail with adults – in the same cells. There were horrible cases of assault and other abuses. So the League was looking at why that was happening and trying to get it changed.

So I moved to Roseville and low and behold, the League here was looking at that issue. So I thought—perfect, because I'd already begun to look at how difficult was to provide services for that particular clientele. It didn't take long until we had a whole structure of work set up. We interviewed all sorts of folks in the system. We worked in teams. It was heavy-duty work. We went to juvenile court, we interviewed the juvenile court judge, and we visited the facility in Roseville where they would take juveniles to keep them overnight, maybe longer. They handcuffed juveniles and put them in a van to take them to court in downtown St. Paul. I remember we rode with them in the van. That was very revealing.

It was really a team effort. When we finished pulling together the information we needed, we started lobbying for better services. We wrote a report that was widely used by different organizations that were lobbying for better service for these kids. In the end, they built a juvenile justice facility where they could hold the kids in a safe place – where they could just

walk to court. That was very satisfying – and typical of what the League might do with other issues.

8. Is there a particular episode or event that stands out in your memory?

I have a very vivid memory of talking to those kids being transported to downtown St. Paul. Maybe some people would say [such treatment] would make the kids think seriously about what they have done. More often than not, it just made them angrier—and more determined that they *were* going to do what they wanted to do. None of these kids would have been older than 18, most were about 14 or 15.

The other event that stands out in my memory is belonging to the League in Virginia Beach. In 1968, we moved to Virginia Beach. It was a very racist community. We tried to find a place to get swimming lessons for our kids. We went to a private club (there were a lot of private clubs in the city, because that is how they managed to exclude blacks.) We asked them if they served *all* people, and they didn't really answer us. Then we got a note in the mail saying we would not be welcome. So we knew what we were dealing with. But I very much wanted to get to know some black people. I had lived in a rural community in Kansas, and we didn't have any black people. I didn't meet any black people in college, either. The League in Virginia Beach was all white also, but we were asked by a black League leader if we would send a liaison from our League to the black league. I immediately stuck up my hand. Nobody else wanted it, so I was a shoo-in. I had the privilege of talking frequently to this leader and meeting in members' homes. She [the black leader] wanted to take the group to Washington D.C. for a day, so members could learn how the government works. They invited me to go with them. I was more than eager to do that. I had a wonderful day of listening to them talk about their experiences, their lives. So that was very memorable. I went on to find other ways to learn more about diversity. Our community was very racist. Now when I think back, it was right in the middle of the Civil

Rights movement. I felt good that the League so immediately reacted to respond in a positive way.

9 Describe the most memorable person/people you have been involved with.

Mindy Greiling. She has been a leader in Legislature and she started with the League. She worked hard on issues affecting women. She worked hard to get women elected to the Legislature. She stood up to the “good old boys” machine at the Capitol.

10. What is the lasting importance of this organization (if any)?

The League has a long and vibrant history of bringing the female perspective into the local, state and national debate. Our efforts date back to the suffrage movement. We continue to work to enhance the freedom and dignity of women.