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Memoir Project
August 8, 2013

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Growing up in a rural area of Wisconsin, I had never heard of LWV so had no impressions about the organization. My introduction came as a young mother with 2 1/2 children in Watertown. My husband became active in Rotary, and I was part of the Rotary Wives. It was one of those members that invited me to a League meeting. We met around kitchen tables and took care of our little ones on the side.

When we moved to Waseca, MN, I inquired about the League and was told that there used to be a group, but they had dissolved and become the Republican Women! Living in Duluth later I did get briefly involved, but found most of the meeting places were too far away. New in Roseville, I inquired, and the Welcome Wagon person gave me a number to call (along with a contact for Cub Scouts). The next step was an invitation from Mary Ann Palmer to a unit meeting!

I loved being part of a group of women not gathered to gossip. I love history and enjoyed learning accurate, objective information about issues. Also being part of a group of dependable members who accept responsibility --League can spoil you--if someone agrees to do something, they do it!

I read that now the average age of members now is 74. That sounds amazing, but I know that membership lags, and is not as we have wished. It's true that there are career choices changing all the time, and two working parents are necessary today. Service to the community is affected; we can't do all that we would like to. In our League the reality is that we now have few members physically able to set up and move furniture around for public events, for example. And we can't go door to door with info for the public. The last time I went door-knocking with Mindy, I had a hard time keeping up!

So we end up without the variety of voices that are needed. Our members tend to focus in the same areas [not enough attention to local schools anymore?] We don't get out in public like we used to, for example attending meetings wearing our League buttons.

Economically, socially, career-wise--everything is in flux. We lack people and finances to do the studies and research that we did. League volunteers did original work and produced valuable, in depth summaries of issues with objective information. The League's drop-out leaves a huge hole. There are lots of sources available to the public now, but it's dangerous to depend on the internet--so much is slanted toward a particular group's viewpoint.

What we can do is on a smaller scale, not just in our communities, but at the state and national level. The talented intern we had at the state office who left for the Humphrey Institute said she loved League, but there was so much to do! Not being able to cover it was a frustration.

Still, the limited educational efforts (like the meetings we did on the amendments) and the candidate forums are important. I regret LWV is seen as a liberal organization now. I understand the national League-run debates were not exciting TV, but still one of the best services provided for the nation. We continue to provide candidate forums for our community which are otherwise left to partisan groups. It has

been enlightening to experience the variety of cultures on the community level --especially candidate forums in Maplewood and Little Canada! In the past, we provided pressure to move Roseville toward more open government, with term limits, an open appointment process, and encouragement of citizen involvement.

It's harder now to be "seen" in the community. Our files have newspaper pictures of LWV events--that's impossible now. It's difficult to even get notices of public meetings in the local papers. We have a great web-site, but you have to go looking for it. We watch on cable instead of observing council meetings in person. Lobbying or observing at the legislature is very time-consuming and you have to invest a lot of time if you are to be known and acknowledged.

We are still a public presence at citizenship ceremonies, and we do useful studies when members are available, like the fire department issues. And special events stand out. We had many years of being part of the Roseville July 4th parade. I'll never forget the time we were diverted to the High School gym because of tornado warnings. Or getting caught in a rain deluge--I walked back to the cars with Marty --- who was wearing the chicken costume. She continued to interact with everyone, "clucking" to the kids, in spite of being weighted down with the soggy suit. "It's very important to stay in character!" she explained.

Special experiences stand out--attending state conventions was unforgettable! Getting together with members from all over the state and finding out how much we have in common. Serving as co-president with Ann Berry is a special memory. Ann is a very strong-minded person, ready to share her point-of-view, but very fair, very inclusive. She is probably the personification of LWV for many people.

It's tragic the way our country has limited itself. There is no picture of the world on national news programs these days. You have to go to the BBC. We are so illiterate about the world. You can see the eye-opener it is for the military who have had no inkling of other cultures when they realize how lucky we are in what we take for granted: clean water, garbage pick-up, dependable power for heating and light--how many countries have that?

Our children need to know everything is not given to you, you are not entitled, life is life, not always happy. Democracies are fragile--facing issues and getting people out to vote is the basis.