

## Transcript of Interview with Deborah Lydon by Lauren Meister

**Interviewee:** Deborah R. Lydon

**Interviewer:** Lauren L. Meister

**Date:** 03/30/2020

**Location (Interviewee):** Cincinnati, Ohio

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**Transcriber:** Lauren L. Meister

**Abstract:** Deborah Ruth Lydon grew up in the greater Cincinnati area. She attended the University of Cincinnati (UC) as an undergraduate, majoring initially in math, then in biology, ultimately receiving a bachelor's degree in general studies. Afterward, she attended UC's College of Law, receiving her Juris Doctorate in 1981. While attending college and law school, she worked for eight years with a health care management company. Since receiving her J.D., she has worked at the same law firm for 39 years, primarily as a healthcare attorney as well as a commercial litigation trial lawyer. She was married in 1990 but divorced in 2016, after having children in 1993 (Lauren) and 1996 (Matthew). She is passionately involved in community service including efforts to reduce poverty, as well as advocacy for groups who are oppressed. She has been attending Crossroads Church and has been very involved there for over 20 years. She's had to face personal crises including ones related to her family, loss of a house in a tornado, and the sudden death of her father. National crises that have impacted her the most include the assassination of President Kennedy and the events surrounding the Challenger explosion and the 9/11 attacks.

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**LM (00:01):** My name is Lauren Meister and I'm here with my mom, Debbie Lydon. Today, I'm interviewing her via audio recording, uses the the REV iPhone application on March 30th, 2020, as both of us - both of us are in the same household in Cincinnati, Ohio. We are completing this interview as part of a project with the University of Cincinnati Department of History for contribution to an archive about the coronavirus pandemic and other crises. So to get started, how are you doing today?

**DL (00:35):** I'm good. I hope you are, too. You look good.

**LM (00:38):** Thanks, [LM laughs] you do, too. Would you mind stating for the record when and where you were born?

**DL (00:45):** I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1955.

**LM (00:49):** All right. With that, let's get started with this. What do you know about the coronavirus?

**DL (00:58):** I think I know a lot based on what's available publicly, at least. I've been trying to stay apprised and you helped me with that, so I appreciate it. Basically I, you know, check the internet a lot. I watch a lot of news sources on TV. I get a lot of updates

from other people, especially people at my office. So, I think I'm trying to, you know, stay apprised as much as possible. I particularly have been following things like the history of various cases in our county, our city, our region, our state, but also nationally, globally. Happy to talk about more things that I've been focused on in that regard, if you want me to.

**LM (01:48):** Yeah, maybe if there's one or two of those, in particular, that have been brought to your attention more, if you can elaborate on those.

**DL (01:59):** Well, obviously we're all looking at the hurdles everybody is facing. The need for social distancing, the need for isolation. We're all, you know, hoping for a remedy. We're hoping for more testing so we can understand how broad this is. We're hoping for a vaccine, although that seems like it's going to be further off than some more immediate solutions. I was really feeling pretty good last night when we heard that one of our Ohio companies has come up with a way to sterilize personal protective equipment--at least masks. So that was a real positive sign because everybody's been concerned about the healthcare workers, in particular, and making sure they're protected, making sure lots of people are protected. You know, in addition, we're looking at things like the financial impact, what type of help we can provide one another. You know, the heroics that are going on with our healthcare workers, I think, are what's most amazing, so, you know, just trying to pay attention as much as I can and check on people and respond to people checking on us.

**LM (03:17):** Yeah. It's- I really appreciate also just everybody that's been in the healthcare industry and first responders, just all their work they've been doing within this crisis. Can- do you remember when you first started hearing about it, or what your initial reactions were, when hearing about the start of the pandemic?

**DL (03:43):** I think I heard about it at least by late January. I was reading about it occurring over in China. Was looking at some of the responses we were getting from government officials in that regard, both at the national level--mostly at the national level, and then followed it throughout February. I tend to look at the news probably eight to 10 times a day or more. And tend to follow national and international news as much or maybe more than I do local news. So, I knew about it, you know, in general, but then obviously became aware of the severity of it more so by March.

**LM (04:28):** [rustle papers] In regards to response I guess from a local perspective, being in Ohio, how do you think Cincinnati in Ohio has been doing in response to, or just in response to, everything going on day by day?

**DL (04:56):** I think it's pretty remarkable, actually. I think Cincinnati is probably exemplary. State of Ohio is exemplary. Our governor took some pretty quick action with regard to requirements for remote working and other aspects. So, I think we're doing really well. I don't think we've had any deaths in our county. I think we've had very few cases reported. In part, that's because we haven't tested that many people. So, I realize that- I actually took a course about 30 years ago, in epidemiology for a week. It was a 40

hour long course for some work I was doing, so I am able to follow the epidemiology and the statistics and the rate of exposure. And one of the people who has been talking about this quite a bit is an epidemiologist from Minnesota named Mike Osterholm, and he and I worked together on many projects back in the 1980s. So, I respect his opinion, in particular. I've been following that. But with regard to Cincinnati in Ohio, I think we're doing really well. Hardly anybody's hospitalized. So, things are good here, even in the region. Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana seem to be doing pretty well with all of this.

**LM (06:15):** Just to clarify for the listeners, can you briefly explain epidemiology?

**DL (06:22):** Yeah. So, it's the study of the spread and potential causes of disease. So, it tends to rely a lot on statistical data. But you know, after looking at the number of cases, trying to rule out possible other explanations for, for somebody's illness, tracking information and potential causes and seeing whether there are any biases that might be affecting the results that we're seeing, whether it be a reporting bias or a diagnostic bias or a testing bias or something else. So, you know, generally it's just the study of disease and more the cause, not - not so much causes from a clinical, clinical standpoint as much as causes from a statistical standpoint.

**LM (07:25):** Thank you for that clarification. So, [rustle papers] moving forward, how are you preparing or have prepared already for this crisis?

**DL (07:33):** You know, most importantly to me, it's a really continuing my faith in God, you know, and just, not only maintaining that, but you know, praying more for others and for ourselves and for our country and for the world. But in other more, you know, ways that can be seen by others. You know, I've made sure that we have a month or more supply of food and other necessities here at our house. I've been social distancing, staying abreast of updates. As I said, I'm working more remotely, more often from home. I was used to doing that anyway, but my office is in downtown Cincinnati, so pretty much everybody there is able to work remotely. We've never had our staff work from home so much: our accounting staff, our secretarial staff and so forth. But all of them are permitted to work from home now. So that's a good thing. I'm trying to stay physically fit and healthy. Trying to mentally prepare for the long haul, if needed. I'm being more frugal, trying to be prepared for a severe financial impact and, you know, just generally trying to find ways to help other people who may need it.

**LM (09:09):** [Pause] Yeah. So, yeah, I think we all have been trying to figure out with these breaks, like just either getting stuff done at home or working out. So, I think that's what you're saying has been reflective of what a lot of people have been doing right now.

**DL (09:29):** Right.

**LM (09:29):** How do you think this pandemic will change your life or society in general?

**DL (09:37):** Well, on a personal level, I would say I'm most concerned about my children. So, [chuckles] I have you and I have your brother. So, I try to check on you guys a little bit more often and make sure this isn't impacting you too severely, given that you're supposed to take a new job in one month in Chicago and we haven't figured out how that's gonna work out exactly, since they're even more isolated, I think, there than we are here in Cincinnati. But I'm confident everything will work out in that regard. Anyway, other changes: I'm working more from home as I said versus the office. My retirement funds, which I plan to draw on in the next year or so, have declined greatly in value, but I'm not too concerned about that. I think things will bounce back and you know, we're very blessed. I'm very blessed, and so I'm not too concerned about that. I am concerned about the impact it has on other people more so, I di- I am con-, encouraged though about a lot of things that may come out of this, sort of a silver lining. So, as far as changes in society and that sort of thing, I think that we've seen the use of telemedicine increase and that's been kind of, a passion of mine for the last 10 years is to help find ways to enhance telemedicine and opportunities for people to use telemedicine. So, that's essentially providing healthcare, you know, electronically or by phone or by video, as opposed to requiring people to go into the office. I think it will be more cost effective, more clinically effective, et cetera. But, you know, the fact that so many people are now able to work remotely, whether it be from home or somewhere else, I think, is wonderful because, for a long time, I thought that if we could find more ways for people to work remotely, it would help with childcare issues that a lot of parents have to face. It would reduce the time it takes to get started on a project. More time available for work projects, that sort of thing. I also think we're going to have more online learning opportunities in the future. I'm hoping we're going to have less divisiveness in our country, because there's been a lot of that, before this came up. There's still a little bit of it going on, but I'm encouraged. I think there's more interest now in universal healthcare and that's also been important to me to try to help people find ways to get more access to healthcare. I think there's more knowledge about disease transmission and we're coming up with a more, and easier, ways to vote, more ways for legislators to take action remotely. So, I see a lot of benefits eventually coming out of what I consider a trial period, and all of these things, enhancing telemedicine and so forth. So maybe, you know, we'll get something good out of this, but obviously, you know, as far as any other just changes in society, I think we're all appreciating one another more. We're appreciating our communities more, the value of communities and not being quite so self-centered, perhaps.

**LM (13:21):** [Pause] Yeah. In regard to all of the, everything moving online during this time, what do you think is the largest change in that regard?

**DL (13:31):** I would say, in particular, telemedicine and options to work from home are two of the biggest options. Obviously, since you're a student and we have so many young people affected by this, you know, the ability to, to access online learning, I think, is a, is a big deal. So those are probably the most important that I see.

**LM (14:04):** And then in contrast, how do you think that life or society, in general, will stay the same, after this has all cleared up?

**DL (14:16):** Well, I think we, you know, we'll still have some divisiveness. I'm hoping we'll have less, at least in the United States. You know, it's, it's hard to say, because there were concerns, for example, in the last year or so, heightened concerns about the environment. And I think that we'll continue to have a lot of concerns about the environment. And this will probably, you know, we'll continue to have that concern, but it might be heightened, especially with the way warmer temperatures may be impacting transmission of disease from humans, from animals to humans, that we hadn't encountered in the past. But, as far as how things have stayed the same, I think compassion for others, hopefully, will, will stay the same or get enhanced. Faith in God, hopefully, will stay the same or get enhanced. You know, hopefully, we'll still be able to have sports. [LM chuckles] We'll still be able to have manufacturing jobs and other such things. We just have to be patient.

**LM (15:34):** Yeah. In regard to your comment about heightened concerns about the environment, I know, I've been seeing stuff in the news that conditions have been decreasing slightly, with factories not running and pollutants aren't getting into wa- water. How do you think- or what's your perspective, of how you think people will respond in the future, seeing these changes? Just from a pause period.

**DL (16:06):** I think that's a great point, because I think it's going to be studied a lot. They're going to look at this period of time and see that we had, not only less water pollution but less air pollution and see the impact they- that may be having beneficially on populations around the world. You know, similarly, we don't have as much travel going on, so we probably don't have as many auto accidents. We, we don't have as many on-the-job injuries, because we don't have that many people working in conditions, factories and so forth, where those sorts of things occur. So, I'm sure it will be studied quite a bit to determine what impact occurred. And again, hopefully, there'll be some observations made that will improve things for the future.

**LM (16:56):** And then with another thing that you brought up, in regard to sports, just from my personal perspective, I know that you and I are big fans of the Olympics. What are your thoughts on them moving the games until next summer, most likely?

**DL (17:14):** Well, I think that was a good decision. I feel bad for the Japanese having to postpone things and try to find other uses for their stadiums and so forth, in the meantime, and all of the money that Japan would have made and the news stations and all of those. I mean, I feel bad for the athletes, obviously, but again, I think this is something that could bring people together, globally--that we all are facing the fact that it's the Olympics are being postponed. We're all in this together. We're all going to be even more excited when they occur. So, I think it's just one more thing that shows, you know, we're all in this together and where it's not just one country or one city or one type of population that's affected.

**LM (18:09):** What other crises have you experienced and how did this affect you? So, you can go into something that's either at a global scale or a personal level, whichever you prefer to share about.

**DL (18:25):** I think that's an interesting question because I think if you do go through crises, it helps you for the next one to be prepared. So, you know, I, I think the crises for me that have occurred in my life or affected me started when I was a child. So, for example, at age six, when my parents split up, it was pretty traumatic for me and my five siblings, and my siblings kind of went off in different directions. Some went with my father, some stayed with my mother, some went with grandparents. So that was, you know, my initial crisis in life, probably. And then, this seems relatively minor, but at age seven, I broke my foot and we didn't have any healthcare insurance and we didn't have enough money to take care of my broken foot. So, I went for a while without attention, eventually got a cast that stayed on for too long, for a couple months and kind of stunted the growth in my leg. And what that pointed out to me later in life is just how important healthcare is. And that's why, I had mentioned earlier, telemedicine and universal healthcare and that sort of thing. But I remember that being pretty traumatic for me. Then, you know, the following year, at age eight, President [John F.] Kennedy was assassinated and that was a national tragedy. That just kind of stopped all of us in our tracks. I remember, as everybody does, I remember where I was when I got the news. I was in third grade at school. I remember how everybody was traumatized. I find that interesting because you were eight years old when the 9/11 attacks occurred in 2001. So, we each had something similar in that regard.

**LM (20:30):** Right.

**DL (20:30):** I think as a result of, of that assassination, though, my sisters and I at least bonded a little bit more. I kind of realized how bad things can occur. I also grew in my faith after that and knowing more about why God may do things he does. At age 11, my twin sister almost died from an appendicitis attack. Her appendix ruptured. She was rushed to the hospital. I had to stay there for a couple of weeks and I was by her side every day. So I almost lost my sister, ended up having to take care of my sister at a young age. So that kinda gave me a better perspective of the importance of family. At age 19, I lost a house in a tornado, had to move to a different house. For the most part, I just tried not to think about all of that for a while and just kind of moved on. And I remember, you know, when the Challenger space ship exploded in the 1980s, I think the country was pretty traumatized by that. You know, and then my father died suddenly in the 90s. I had to handle his estate and all the emotions of family members. So, I think a lot of those things helped prepare me in life. And then, obviously, when 9/11 happened in 2001, and the attacks, you were eight, as I said, your brother was five. I think that left a permanent scar on the United States, on the world, really. But it changed the way we travel. It changed our level of awareness of people around us. And I remember being most concerned about you and your brother and just helping you to understand tragedies like that, but not go crazy while still trying to be more cautious. So, I think those were probably the biggest crises that occurred. And I think, as I said, each of them helps us grow stronger to be prepared the next time.

**LM (22:45):** Yeah. Thank you for sharing all of those events like with everything you had to deal with, just as a kid with your sister and your broken foot, and just the reality of our healthcare system and how it may need to change in the future. Especially in regard to this coronavirus pandemic. [Pause] Yeah. So, with wrapping that up, are there other comments about the pandemic that you'd like to bring up that we haven't already discussed yet?

**DL (23:29):** Well, I think for posterity purposes, it might be helpful for the listeners to know that there are new things happening quickly, every hour of the day, really every minute of the day. Everybody is working so hard to deal with this, again, globally, nationally, locally. And it's obviously still evolving and the full story hasn't been written. I understand the first transmission in a human, the first disease being found in a human, was late in, you know, December or so of 2019. Here we are just a few months later, three months later still, you know, early in the process. So, I think this whole story is yet to be told and we won't really know for a year or maybe five or 10, what really happened, how it happened, what was the resolution, what are the best predictions for the future. But, hopefully, we'll be better prepared for the next time something like this happens.

**LM (24:45):** Yeah. Hopefully that isn't as - doesn't come up sooner versus later. [laughs]

**DL (24:54):** Hopefully not in your lifetime.

**LM (24:55):** Right. So, as we wrap up, what are you planning on doing this week to pass the time at home, since we're all practicing social distancing across the country?

**DL (25:09):** Well, it's been beautiful. Weather is sunny right now. It's really nice that things are warming up while we're all going through this. I think if it had happened in November or December, at least in our part of the country, it would have been more depressing. So, I plan to continue to work remotely on matters that I would have handled anyway. I'll continue to enjoy my time with you [LM chuckles] while you're staying here, while you're continuing your college education. I'll be outside a lot, work outside. I tend to work a lot on the yard and do various things on the house. I'll go for walks. I hope to go biking soon, this week possibly. And I occasionally get out to the grocery store or the hardware store when we need something.

**LM (26:07):** Well it sounds like we're at least still keeping each other busy during this time. 'Cause I know some people are trying to figure out how to pass the time at home, but I think we've been pretty active about coming up with a bunch of things.

**DL (26:26):** We have a lot we can do here at the house and I've never been bored in my life, [LM laughs] so I don't ever find that to be a problem. So, yeah, we have access to movies, to games, to, you know, just sharing experiences with each other, planning for the future. So, I think we'll have a great week despite what's going on.

**LM (26:48):** All right, well, thank you so much for your time discussing your reaction to everything going on surrounding the COVID[-19] crisis. I know people listening will also appreciate your perspective as we are all evaluating everything going on day to day. So, thank you again, so much.

**DL (27:07):** Okay, you're welcome. Good luck.

**LM (27:08):** Thanks.