

University of Mississippi

eGrove

---

Oral History Project (all interviews)

Oral Histories

---

11-12-2008

## Nadine Mann

Nadine Mann

Institute of Child Nutrition. Child Nutrition Archives.

Follow this and additional works at: [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/icn\\_ohistories](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/icn_ohistories)



Part of the [Food Science Commons](#), [Other Education Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Mann, Nadine and Institute of Child Nutrition. Child Nutrition Archives., "Nadine Mann" (2008). *Oral History Project (all interviews)*. 19.

[https://egrove.olemiss.edu/icn\\_ohistories/19](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/icn_ohistories/19)

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral Histories at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Oral History Project (all interviews) by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

## Nadine Mann Oral History Transcript

Louisiana native Dr. Nadine Mann is the Director of Operations for the East Baton Rouge Parish Child Nutrition Programs. Nadine holds Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Louisiana State University and a Doctorate from Texas Woman's University in Foods and Nutrition Institution Administration. She has been with the district for thirty-one years.

MH: My name is Melba Hollingsworth and this is Wednesday, November 12, 2008, and I am here in East Baton Rouge Parish School Food Service in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with Dr. Nadine Mann. Nadine, will you tell us where you were born and also tell us your recollection as a child of child nutrition programs?

NM: I grew up in Baton Rouge and went to elementary, middle, and high school in this town. I also went to college here, so this is my town.

MH: Were you born in Baton Rouge?

NM: I was born in Lake Charles, Louisiana. I don't have many recollections of that time. My first recollection of school lunch programs was in public school. I thought that every school in the nation had breakfast, because I remember eating breakfast as a child in this district. And I only learned much later when I went to work in the child nutrition program, that East Baton Rouge Parish was part of a pilot study in the late sixties to have breakfast in this district. We were a large district with over 60,000 students and 120 different schools, and we piloted breakfast, and it was from this time that I ever remember being in elementary school that we had breakfast in this parish, in this district. It was part of our program and I thought it was just natural, only to learn much later that we were one of the few across the nation that had breakfast offered. Lunch was always a

good memory for me. The school lunches were wonderful. We smelled them. We ate well. We had butter on our rolls and all those good things. We had good memories and ate well.

MH: So, tell me just a little bit about yourself when you grew up.

NM: Well, I am from a family of three and where I went to elementary school, I walked to school. I didn't ride the bus, because I was close enough to walk. And, like I said, I ate breakfast at school, and in middle school, I ate lunch in the cafeteria at Westdale Middle School and then Baton Rouge High. I graduated from there and ate lunch in the cafeteria there. My sister, being nine years older than me, was married to a man whose mother was a food service Manager at LaSalle Elementary School here in Baton Rouge. And I thought, wow, she has the best job. She is off on the weekends. She gets off at 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon, and it seemed like a really good family-friendly job, and at the time when I graduated and went into college to go into Dietetics, I thought, you know, I really like to sew and I like fabric, and I think I could do something with textiles, but I know that I can get a job forever if I work in the food area. So, I ended up in Dietetics and went through an internship at Charity Hospital in New Orleans, and came back to Baton Rouge and went to work in the school system, because of my sister's mother-in-law, who worked in the child nutrition program. It was a good experience and everything that I had ever heard about the school lunch program was good, and I thought it would be a good place to work. I started working in 1975, and have just about worked my entire career with the child nutrition program.

MH: You started in 1975?

NM: Yes.

MH: Wow.

NM: That's right. After college.

MH: Tell me about your educational background. You had a B.S. degree?

NM: I received my Bachelor's Degree from LSU, and then went on to a dietetic internship in New Orleans at Charity Hospital. I learned right away with the hospital work that I didn't like working around sick people. I would rather work with well people and I loved working with children and in the food service setting. So I worked eleven years as a Food Service Manager for East Baton Rouge Parish, and then went to school to get a Master's Degree at LSU in Home Economics, and then followed that with a year's work at LSU as an instructor on campus. I left Baton Rouge for a year and lived in Denton, Texas, and got a degree, final degree, terminal degree, a Doctorate in Foods and Nutrition Institution Administration from Texas Woman's University in Denton, Texas. That is where I ended up. Once I finished that and returned to Baton Rouge, I was offered a position as Area Supervisor with the child nutrition program. So, I had thirty-three schools instead of one school being a Manager, but I have come up through the ranks with school food service, started as Assistant Manager, Manager, Area Supervisor, Assistant Director, and then Director of Operations, which is the title that I now have. Of course, that job involves a little bit of everything, but mostly personnel management. We have over 500 employees. And you know, every day is a new day dealing with employee issues and problems. You know, from alcohol on the job, theft, dealing with turkey roasts that are in the back of a car, that an employee has snuck out in a garbage bag, to whatever. An employee touching a child improperly or trying to discipline a child for

squirting milk on them; whatever it is, we are dealing with that. That takes a tremendous amount of my time these days.

MH: Could you say that there were any mentors that you feel were influential in directing you into child nutrition programs?

NM: Over the years, Mary Eleanor Cole, certainly, was a mentor and my first boss. Mildred Stringfield was the boss, actually the one who hired me.

MH: Really?

NM: Yes. Right before she retired. And you know, I have to say, Melba, my friend, Melba, was a great influence also.

MH: Is there anything unique about Louisiana in regard to child nutrition programs?

NM: Well, I think the uniqueness of Louisiana lies in the fact that we do not have a-la-carte sales. I am sure that has been said by those who have talked before me. But, we have extra sales. That is one big thing. This state has been a proponent of the reimbursable meal, which guarantees that the children will have all of the components before they choose those extra items. So, that has been a good thing, I think. We are one of maybe three states, or maybe just two, that have that. Additionally, I think it is a unique situation that we offer Provision 2 Breakfast Programs or Lunch Programs in this state. That's one of the things that I was able to get, Provision 2 Breakfast, breakfast only. And we have had that in this parish for about ten years. This state is a little bit unique in that no other district has been allowed to do that. So I think those are two things that I come to mind.

MH: You have other things that are unique - the scanning.

NM: That is another unique thing. It actually started in this district and it is something that I am really proud of. We had a major problem with our free lunch applications. We had papers all over the place. We had thousands and thousands and thousands of applications, and we needed a way to handle those and to process them. We worked, I worked with the software vendor and of course, everybody was involved because it was totally consuming to process the numbers of applications...single child applications...that we had. We needed a better way. It was not being done anywhere in the nation, or in this state. So, we worked with our software vendor to come up with a scanning method and then moved into a household application that allowed us to be able to process those applications in a timely manner - within ten days. And that proved very successful. It is handwriting recognition. And we actually won an award in 2003; we applied for an ASBO Pinnacle of Excellence Award and we won that award for this district. That is a unique thing. Several things, though, that I feel are significant contributions I'd like to talk about a little bit. That kind of leads into it. One was another Pinnacle of Excellence Award that was awarded in 1993 to this district, for some work that was done on recycling. That has become commonplace and we don't talk about it as much now as we used to because it has become a kind of everyday occurrence. At that time, it was really unique, and we did develop and implement a solid-waste recycling program for cardboard and tin cans, which was not done anywhere in the United States. But, we were successful in getting it implemented in all of our schools; thirty tons of cardboard, five tons of steel a week we recycle. We have continued that process since '93. So, we are looking at 15 years that it has been going on. It is still successful. It is still going on, and it is still very successful. In 1993, we did experience a \$30,000 cost

savings, and it was significant. It won the ASBO Pinnacle of Excellence Award for this district, and it was the first time a school food service or a department outside of the Education Department was awarded that particular award. It was the first one given and it was nationally recognized, so I feel really good about that. The scanning process came about ten years later. The problem was we just had to figure out a better way. You know, you are figuring out a solution to the problem, and the scanning was extremely successful. It has been taken up, not only by other districts within Louisiana, but across the nation. That received a Pinnacle of Excellence Award, also. The free breakfast program for all of our students has been in existence for ten years, and it took quite a bit of convincing of our State Department personnel to get that passed and pushed through. And, so far, there has not been another district in Louisiana that has been afforded that luxury.

MH: How many children are eating now in the universal program?

NM: About 18,000 a day. We feed them in 20 minutes. We are the fastest fast food restaurant around. Of course we have constraints, busing constraints, walking students, and bus schedules, and teachers arriving on campus, and they won't allow the students into the cafeteria until someone is on campus to supervise them. So, it also has some restrictions. We also have a no-charge policy that is for our paying students. That happened about ten years ago. It's not perfect, but it is certainly better than what we had in the past. We had thousands and thousands of dollars owed to us, and every so often, I will read about a Food Service Director or in a newspaper where a district is in trouble because they have such huge charges, so many paying students who do not pay their bills. So, we do have a no-charge policy that has been successful. Another thing that I am

really, really proud about is in 2000 this district took part in a national USDA study to verify directly certified students who come to us through the Food Stamp program. In years past, those DC students (Directly Certified as they are called...they shortened that to DC) they looked at, if we bring these students in and we verify them, will their status change? We were the only large district in the nation who volunteered or were even willing to take part in this national study. When the people from the federal government came and USDA to look at what we were doing, they were so impressed with the use of the household applications, which we had implemented and we were using with our scanning process, that when the results of this study came out, it also included a mandatory requirement to use household applications. And I feel like that came from what they found and what they saw could happen in this district. I felt really good about that. Regarding this participation in this study, because they had such a large number, when I went to the meetings that were held, the people bringing their DC file with them, came with one sheet of paper and it would be in a folder. I went with a three-ring, D binder that was three inches thick of our students. That's how many directly certified students, like 12,000 DC students. So, it was a huge number and USDA wasn't quite sure what to do with us because we had so many, but, whatever policy they made, it had to be applicable to a large district. And so we were the ones that they did the test on and it proved successful. The result of that was if a DC student comes in DC at the beginning of the year, no matter if they bring an application, they remain DC for the whole year. In the past that is not quite the way it was. There was policy change that was a result, and I think it was very good for the students and it was beneficial to them. So I felt really good about that. Something else that I have been involved with and I have been very proud of



is my work with the Institute. And that is with the Orientation to the Child Nutrition Program. So I have been able to share what we have done in this district in terms of personnel management, in terms of scanning our applications. I felt very good about that.

MH: As well as the rest of the nation with you sharing all of those forms and such.

NM: Lots of forms, and it takes time to develop those.

MH: The nation appreciates all of this information, believe you me.

NM: That's what it is all about, the sharing. There is no need to reinvent the wheel when someone else has a good product. We are willing to share that. And the last thing I want to mention that I have been involved with is my work with *Managing Child Nutrition Programs: Leadership for Excellence*. I have co-authored two case studies, one in each of the editions; one was on the scanning process and one was on the recycling process. Those two things I felt really good about.

MH: So, those are really significant contributions to the field. Do you have any memorable stories or anything more that comes to your mind as you think back over the years in the profession?

NM: I think back, as a child, having the pat of butter on my wonderful yeast roll and the changes that have occurred over the years in the food products that we serve to the children. I think about changes with the employees, because a lot of my work now is with personnel. And the staff, the day-by-day workers that we hire, the staff that we have employed, I don't see that they have that love for cooking. Somehow, it has gone away from that and we have partially socialized our children to do fast food. I don't cook at home the way my mother used to cook. It is just a change in the way that society does things. I don't see that continuity being passed from mother to daughter, the love of

cooking. Consequently, the cost of labor has gone up and we have gone to more pre-prepared items. Of course, there are better pre-prepared items than there used to be years ago. I see that as a big change. Memorable experiences...the two greatest challenges for me and to think back of how we managed, have been the survival during the hurricanes. Katrina...actually, one of the case studies that I did write for the latest version of *Managing Child Nutrition Programs* was on the two sister hurricanes, Katrina and Rita, and how we managed in this district. Very different from this most recent hurricane, Gustav. We were not affected as much. Our schools were not affected by Katrina and Rita the way they were for Gustav. Because with Gustav we were without electricity for ten days and most of our schools were closed. For the previous hurricanes, we were only closed five days with Katrina and two days with Rita, so a total of seven days. The school districts, the buildings, were not damaged with the first hurricane as it was with the second. We were actually on the good side of the hurricane. But, we felt the influx in the city of evacuees coming from New Orleans. So, the challenges from Katrina were certainly in dealing with the influx of 10,000 students that we enrolled and how were we going to feed them? Our food chain was interrupted because of Katrina and Rita. There were problems with the vendor who was out of New Orleans. Our vendor was interrupted, and we couldn't get food deliveries. That affected us, but it was not the same as with this current storm. It was different. So, both were just tremendous in dealing with catastrophes. They were each a little different. They were all costly. The most recent storm, Gustav, was financially more costly to us because we lost our warehouse freezer. And we are now, even as I speak, we are renting four freezer trailers, and we have all of our frozen and all of, well most of, our refrigerated foods and all of frozen

foods in freezer trailers. So, we are operating out of trailers while they repair the roof of our big major freezers. So that has been a tremendous challenge. We couldn't get freezer trailers because they were being used by other companies, and it was difficult to get that product. But, we were able to finally locate those freezers. So those were the major things.

MH: Those are very major things.

NM: They are.

MH: Were procedures in place?

NM: We had procedures in place. They worked, but we did not anticipate...in Hurricanes Rita and Katrina, we were able to pull in our frozen foods from the kitchens. That worked. We were able to get them in and we had a landing spot for them in our huge warehouse freezers. This time, we lost the roof to our warehouse freezers, so we had no place to keep the food that we brought in, plus we were without electricity for a longer period of time. We actually didn't have electricity in the warehouse for a longer period of time. So, when you have no power...we actually got in a generator, but by the time we got that in, the power had already been off for five days. By that time the freezer had started to collapse, the ceiling had started to collapse. So, we ran into some problems with that. The generator that we got actually operated the airport. That was the size of generator we had to have for these huge three freezers that we have at our warehouse. So, that was a challenge.

MH: What advice do you think you would give to future child nutrition Directors or Managers or those planning to go into the child nutrition field?

NM: What advice...

MH: ...for future folks.

NM: In terms of handling disasters?

MH: In terms of just picking this field of child nutrition.

NM: In picking it as a field? It is a very good field for working moms. For people with children. Financially, it can be a good career. That's why those you interview have probably been around for thirty years and stay with it, because it is a challenge. If a person likes handling multiple tasks and doesn't like a straight line, because it is never a straight line...

MH: Troubleshooting?

NM: Troubleshooting and planning and project management. It is just a challenge if a person cares for that and they like that. If they don't mind being out of their element a little bit and pushed, somewhat, to figure things out, and to find solutions, it is a good field. I challenge anyone who has those interests that we need people to come to work in this field. It is a good career.

MH: Very rewarding?

NM: Very rewarding. Yes. Absolutely.

MH: Now, you started to work in what year? You have been here how many years?

NM: I started in the child nutrition program in 1975. However, I had a three-year leave. One of those years, I worked for LSU as an Instructor and then two years, I was in school. So, I had a break in employment. I actually have 31 years with the child nutrition program in this district.

MH: Anything that you want to add, other than we were college roommates at Texas Woman's University? I had the top bunk and you had the bottom bunk.

NM: Yes.

MH: Talk about memorable. And that is all that we ever talked about, the child nutrition program.

NM: That's right. It has been a challenge and there are plenty of research areas. It can be a real challenge. Very rewarding.

MH: Well, thank you, Nadine. We appreciate your coming in and taking the time out of your hectic day.

NM: I have to get back and deal with a theft.