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## Kim Hofmann

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## Kim Hofmann Oral History

With over 25 years' experience, Kim has extensive skills in multiple aspects of management, cost control, training, DISC, and customer service (and she is a past school nutrition director). She is a Trainer/Consultant and eLearning developer for ICN, and a certified trainer for DISC training. She has published numerous articles for Carroll Service's Child Nutrition Professional's magazine, has presented at many SNA conferences, taught Food Systems Management at the University of Akron, was a cost control specialist for US Foods, and was a trainer for Career Track/Fred Pryor specializing in management training.

JB: I'm Jeffrey Boyce and it is November 4, 2015. I'm here at the Institute of Child Nutrition with Kim Hofmann. Welcome Kim, and thanks for taking the time to talk to me today.

KH: Thanks Jeffrey. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here at the Institute and film this interview.

JB: Well we're happy to have you. Could we begin by you telling me a little bit about yourself, where you were born, where you grew up?

KH: Yes, I'm from the Ohio area, northeast Ohio, and pretty well still there today, travelled a lot, but living in Ohio.

JB: Ok. What's your earliest recollection of child nutrition programs?

KH: I went to a Catholic school, so we did not have a child nutrition program. So my earliest recollection is they used to take the milks before we went to church and put them on the registers. And we used to have to pack our own breakfast and our cereal when we came into school. And then so we had to go to church before we started school, and our class was really bad, so we used to have to sit in church for hours, and by then the milk was warm. So to this day I don't drink chocolate milk, and that's why I really appreciate students having some strong beliefs or feelings on certain foods, because I'm that way with chocolate milk.

JB: And you said a pack-on meal?

KH: Oh - you had to pack your meals.

JB: Oh, ok, you had to pack your own meals. Interesting, because I know a lot of Catholic schools participated in school lunch.

KH: Well now, but I'm kind of at that age.

JB: I've got photos from back in the 40s showing Catholic schools - the nun in her habit.

KH: In her habit - no, we didn't have it, so we had to pack our breakfast and our lunch.

JB: Ok, so you brought them both from home.

KH: But I guess I was sharing that because I realized that children - certain things could happen where they have strong associations with food, and I try to respect that.

JB: What did you usually bring for breakfast and/or lunch?

KH: Cereal, and then a sandwich for lunch. Then I went to the public schools and we had a lunch program - and the choices. That was back in the late 60s, early 70s, and we had lots of choices and options.

JB: What grade did you go to the public school?

KH: Starting in seventh.

JB: Ok, so the Catholic school was K-6?

KH: Yes.

JB: So what were some of your favorite menu items once you got to public school?

KH: Really it was the choices; it was even the Johnny Marzettis, it was oatmeal bars - probably more in the dessert area.

JB: What's a Johnny Marzetti? It must be an Ohio thing.

KH: Oh, I'm sorry. It is noodles with like spaghetti sauce and cheese.

JB: Oh, ok.

KH: So what do you guys call it?

JB: Spaghetti?

KH: Well no, because spaghetti's kind of the real thin noodles. Johnny Marzetti had more the penne or the thicker noodles.

JB: Oh, ok.

KH: It was a totally different thing, and then get some peanut butter oatmeal bars that were great.

JB: Tell me about your educational background. Where did you go to school?

KH: I went to Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and the University of Akron is where I got my dietetics degree. And I started out in home ec education, but I couldn't sew. So I decided that I probably would not make a good home ec teacher and then got into the dietetic program.

JB: And that was at the University of Akron.

KH: At the University of Akron - and I was in a first or second coordinated undergraduate program. So that was a relatively new program, where you did your internship along with your classes. So you'd still have the choice of doing the master's and your internship, or this was all combined.

JB: So you combined it all into one degree?

KH: Right.

JB: How did you get involved in the child nutrition profession?

KH: I wanted to be a therapeutic dietitian. That was my goal. I wanted to work in hospitals. And at the time - it was in the late 70s - there were no jobs for dietitians. They had another economic downturn. So I saw in the paper there was this little, teeny ad for a school food service director in a small district. So I applied, met the superintendent, and it was going to be his first year. And his main question was how could I change things. Things had not changed in that district for years, and he wanted change. I thought sure, I can change. I don't even know how things are now. And it was pretty interesting. First was at that time it was hard being a dietitian in schools. It was kind of like the lowest rung of the ladder. The "in" thing was to be a therapeutic dietitian. Administrative dietitians at that time were thought of very below. So thank goodness

things have changed. But I thought 'Oh, I can do this for a year until I find a job.' So I ended up getting the job, and my youngest cook was forty, and I was twenty-two maybe at the time, twenty-three. And I was going to be 'the manager everybody loved' - I mean why wouldn't they like me? Oh, I just got eaten alive. My first meeting went so bad there were \$10 bets I wouldn't make it to the first day of school - because I let everybody talk and I let everybody share. So it was an interesting start. Now, being at my age, I understand how very hard that was for my cooks, to have a brand new manager who had never really worked in schools. And then I had a superintendent that just wanted me to change, and they didn't want to change. So it was fascinating. It was a couple of years, and then I moved to a larger school district. So I learned a lot from the school of hard knocks.

JB: How many cooks did you have at that school?

KH: At that one I had around twenty-five, twenty-six.

JB: In one school?

KH: Oh, I'm sorry. I had six schools.

JB: Oh, ok, so you were the director then, not the manager?

KH: Correct. And also I was not going to be an administrative dietitian, so I had learned a lot of the stuff to pass the test, so I ended up going back to school and taking accounting and several other classes, because at that time in the dietetics program we took consumer equipment, so we learned how to buy hand-held mixers, and washing machines, and what to look for in dryers. Nothing was commercial, so I only knew how to

do things household. We took household economics so I had never taken any business.

JB: No quantity food prep?

KH: We did do a quantity food prep but our kitchens were home kitchens, so they were the normal home range, no convection ovens, no dishwashers that steam was coming out of. Those things were intimidating when I first started.

JB: You didn't have any steam-jacketed kettles?

KH: Oh no. It was a basic home ec kitchen, a home ec class kitchen. So I got into food service and I remember seeing like a vertical cutting machine. I had no idea what some of that was. In truth I was intimidated by some of the steamers, and the dishwasher. So I think that that also has helped me in my profession, because I kind of relate to how a new cook might feel when they're starting, some of the fears. So it was kind of a baptism of fire.

JB: What were some of the techniques you used to reach out to those cooks the first couple of years?

KH: Those first couple of years were pretty interesting. The principles weren't speaking to me - oh, I forgot to mention the fact that the head cook in the high school fully expected to get the job. And the person that had the job before me had a brain tumor, and she was in the hospital not expected to live. So everybody thought the head cook from the high school was going to move into the director's job, and then they hired me. So that part was interesting. It was a lot of baptism by fire, and I mean I needed to in some ways get up to speed really quick too.

JB: You said six schools?

KH: Six schools.

JB: How many students?

KH: Oh boy, that was back in the 70s. I can't remember. I know I moved to Barberton Schools where we had eleven buildings, and I know I had 50-some cooks. So I was at Crestwood Schools for two years, and then moved to Barberton Schools. And by then, having two years under my belt, I decided I really liked administration. I love the management part. So from there I went to Barberton and that was such a learning experience, because that was in a very strong union town, so lots of grievances. And the most interesting thing was that most of the grievances that were brought against me were not from the cooks, but were from maintenance, filing on behalf of the cooks, because they didn't think the cooks should have to do this or that, so my cooks didn't want to file the grievances, but they did - maintenance did. And I've been through strikes.

JB: How did you handle that?

KH: Well, it was pretty interesting, because at that time, that was back I think in the 80s, the vendors wouldn't cross the picket lines. So my certified cooks, which were the teachers, were on strike. The non-certified still had to work. So my cooks had to be there, but it was a very strong labor town. The cooks, the employees were kind of brought up that management was evil, from a very early age, so they had a real tough time crossing the picket lines, but they had to work or they would have lost their jobs, the way the contract was written. But I used to have to go to bowling alleys to meet bread trucks. I had to figure



out how to get all the food to the schools, because my delivery people were union, so they weren't coming into the schools. And we were feeding 5,000 kids a day, so it was a lot of food, and a lot of ways of trying to figure out how to maneuver things and try and get the kids fed, because one of the things - it really hit home how important the school meal program is to me during that strike, because these kids were coming for breakfast - we fed about 80-percent free and reduced meals. The kids would come in for breakfast and then leave. They weren't supposed to, but during a strike everything is all changed.

JB: Oh, so they weren't going to school, but they still came in for breakfast.

KH: They came in for breakfast and left, and then they came in for lunch, and left. It was a three-week strike, so they came in for the meals. And that was when - I mean I believed it before - but that was my 'aha moment' on how much a difference we were really making to these kids and how necessary the school meal program was for the nutrition and the health of these students.

JB: Do you remember what your participation rate was in those years?

KH: It was high. We had probably in the eighties and nineties. When I left Barberton Schools we had won the top award in the state of Ohio, the Showcase of Excellence, for marketing and participation and budgeting and things like that. So I'm patting myself on the back - to make it from \$10 bets I wouldn't make it to the first day of school to winning the top award in the state was pretty exciting.

JB: Did you have any mentors during this time, anyone who tried to help show you the ropes or help you along the way?

KH: Not really. That was one of the hardest things was trying to find mentors. By the time I got to Barberton Schools after going through my two years at Crestwood I was the one that was almost the mentor. There were a couple of others with the large city schools, but they didn't really have the time. There were probably at the time three dietitians in the area, so we ended up mentoring each other trying to figure a lot of this out, sharing ideas, sharing purchasing. We did line-item bids and each of us would take a section of it and try to figure it out, and figure out the specs, because at that time the purchasing was a lot of call it the 'good old boys'. The sales reps would come and say, "Hey honey." They were more trying to schmooze you than to run a professional operation, so we really tried hard to change things.

JB: Were you active, or did you participate with the state association?

KH: Yes.

JB: Was that beneficial?

KH: That was beneficial, and it would have been a lot more beneficial had I had more time. At that time I had two young ones at home and with the time working - I wish I had been more involved. I didn't even hear about the Institute until way after I was out of school, and I wish I would have. Dorothy Pannell Martin - her book was a godsend. She wrote a book, it had a reddish-orange cover, on school food service. I had to buy

another book; it was so used that it was falling apart. That was my main resource.

JB: So how long did you stay in this second position?

KH: Probably about eleven years. And then because of that I was recruited to work for a company called Market Day, which most people haven't heard, but it was working with schools and working with PTAs and food and fundraising. And that was interesting because I was building my own business. We started with zero schools, and when I left we were doing 560 every month, and I had 141 employees. And then I went from there to working for a food vendor. So I was a cost control specialist and then moved more into long-term care, and did that for probably seven years, and then moved into being a trainer for Career Track/Fred Pryor. Now everything's kind of come full circle, because I'm a consultant and I mainly train. So I develop webinars and do online training and I consult with schools. And it's just been wonderful to be able to kind of give back to - the whole process, and being able to help students in that way. I was teaching at the University of Akron, Food Systems Management II last fall, and it was interesting. They were all senior dietetic students and not one of them wanted to get into administration. Do you remember the Dr. Seuss book *Oh, The Places You Will Go*?

JB: Oh, of course.

KH: And to me that is school food service. I mean that needs to be the start for everybody's career when they're getting into school food service, because it opens up so many different avenues, so many different ways you can go. You can stay working in schools. You can work in the state department. You can work with

vendors. You can get into nutrition education. The opportunities are kind of limitless, and that's one of the things I would really love to get across to people, that once you get into schools there are just so many different pathways, so many different doors, so many different opportunities if you want to take advantage of them.

JB: Do you feel that your educational background helped prepare you for your career?

KH: Truth or lie? Yes and no, but not so much the straight pathway, because, and it's my own fault in a lot of ways too, because I wanted to be a therapeutic dietitian, so I basically learned what I needed to learn for the test, and paid attention to the therapeutics, and then I had to go back and relearn everything on my own. But the good thing about that was I'm rather good at research and I'm a lifetime learner, so I love to learn. So I kind of set my own education path and continuing education. And that's why I'm doing this now, because I think being a school food service director has gotten a lot more complicated. I mean it is a difficult job. And especially when I was training these seniors that were, well right now they're out in the world, realizing how little they really knew, because there's so much to learn. Not just even the technical parts on writing a menu, but the management, the employee skills, the communication skills, the requirements, the regulations. I had them write a school lunch menu. We covered all the requirements. Not one of them made it with really meeting the requirements. Some did, but the kids would never have eaten those meals - or they were all white, or they were all - I wish there was more of an emphasis in the dietetic programs for the avenues of school. I found

that there was still huge pressure to be a therapeutic dietitian or work in the community, and there needs to be more of a push to get more dietitians, more people right out of school, to get interested in the school food service program. It seemed to again - you may be able to help me more on this - internships seemed to be such a big issue, and I know that when I was at Barberton Schools I took interns the entire time I was there. But I think more schools need to open up their programs to take interns, to make the program available and get more trained students out there and open their eyes to really -

JB: Well, it's been my experience that it's the school food service people who have to reach out to programs and request dietitians.

KH: Really?

JB: We have a consultant in Birmingham who teaches at UAB and she had to approach the dietetics department to get interns, because they had no clue that they could have a career in school nutrition. So I think it's more the school nutrition people that are reaching out to the dietetic programs.

KH: And the dietetic programs need it, because there are less and less internships in hospitals.

JB: I also did some oral histories at the archdiocese in New Orleans and they had done the same thing. They were bringing in dietetic interns in rotation and introducing them to school food service. Is there anything unique about Ohio regarding school nutrition programs?

KH: Not that I can really think of, because I've been fortunate enough to travel, so I guess I think that

everybody else is unique in doing things different, but no, not that I really saw compared to everybody that I've talked to in other states.

JB: What was a typical day like when you were a director?

KH: Crazy. I think that's the excitement of it too. No two days are the same. You can have a laundry list of things and depending upon what fires need to be put out, because there's the whole staffing, and then you've got 5,000 kids, and back then we did a lot of creative things that are being done now. Like in my high school we put booths in all around, because I hated those long tables. And again, we're talking about late 70s, early 80s. So we put restaurant style booths, they're like Arby's, you know, fast food booths all around the perimeters. We put awnings over the serving stations and moved into more of the serving stations, which very few people were doing at the time. And yes I got grieved on all that because they were harder to clean. In the elementary schools - I hate, I hate long tables. I think it's hard for adults to talk, even in a room like this, so I moved to all circular tables, and again got grieved on all that, but that way the kids - I believe that, believe very strongly that the meal not just nutritionally, but socially can be the high point of these kids' days. And I really stress to my cooks how important a smile is to these kids, because you never know what kind of home situation these kids could be coming from. They could be coming from alcoholic homes. They could be abused. You just don't know. It could be in a classroom, especially in elementary schools, where you have the same teacher all day, that they may not get along with that teacher; that whole time in that classroom is kind of hell for that kid.

And this could be their chance, and I really stressed that all my cooks, when those kids came through, they made eye contact with them, and they said, "Hello", and they learned those kids' names, and made that kid feel special just for a few seconds. And maybe it was having nuns and going to a Catholic school that I felt so strongly on that. And if my cooks were having a bad day, take it out on the pots and pans. But when those kids came through I expected them to first show customer service, but really to care for those kids. And again when I first started it, "You want us to be a clown Kim?" I got all those kind of feedback from my cooks, but they really came around. I really felt like we were making differences. And I guess that's also what kept me in it - that's why I'm still in it today. And also too with my cooks I believe, because we were a school, we were education, and I do believe in education, that I required all my cooks to get their GEDs, because a lot of my cooks didn't even have high school educations. I gave them five years to do it, and I can't tell you how many of them came back to me afterwards just so appreciative, because they were forty, fifty years old, and that was something that was kind of always on their bucket list, but they never thought they would do it. So we set up programs for them. We worked with the after-school. Every single one of my cooks got their GEDs. So things like that, where you can make a difference, sometimes it doesn't have to be the 5,000 people, but even if you make a difference in one person's life, you just never know that butterfly effect or that ripple effect.

JB: What are some of the biggest challenges you faced in your career?

KH: Depends on which part of my career and which time. In the beginning was being twenty-three years old, not knowing really what I was doing, and working with cooks that were forty years and older, and trying to learn the nutrition program. After that it was growing the program, managing the program, and by growing it, it's easy to kind of get stagnant. You keep doing things the same way - [we need] to keep stretching yourselves. I finally got through the cooks' meetings where - I mean I learned so much through the school of hard knocks - I learned not to have meetings first thing in the morning until I really had the confidence level. I had my meetings at three o'clock on a Friday, when the cooks left at three-thirty. We covered the agenda, and if they wanted to talk about anything afterwards then they could stay. You know, I really had to learn all that. I had to learn how to manage everybody differently. You had to treat everybody fairly, but also everybody was unique. You could not treat everybody equally. I'm a DISC trainer, a DISC-certified trainer, so I teach different behavioral styles, and it was learning about those that really made such a difference in my management. You have some employees that are bottom line, just tell them what you expect and let them go. You have other employees that want the whole binders. They want everything stepped out one, two, three. There's another group that needs a lot of hand-holding. To me, if you want to see the worst out of me, you breathe over my neck and micro-manage me. So when I first started out I tried not to do any of the - I tried to treat - I tried to follow the Golden Rule to treat other people the way I wanted to be treated. And it wasn't until I learned about behavioral styles at DISC that I realized that you need to treat people the way they need to be treated, and the way they wanted to



be treated. And just because I like to be given more of the bottom line and say, "Go. Figure it out." not everybody else felt that same way, and that I had a lot of cooks that needed hand-held. They needed to check in with me, and that was ok. I had to learn all of those things kind of from the school of hard knocks. You had to realize that some people were definitely more people oriented, and they get their energy from other people. And they're more concerned about how Johnny is today, and that brought another whole issue too, because they were the ones that would give - Paul's playing football - you give him extra scoops of food, and oh, Mary's mom said she was trying to lose weight and they'd give her a little bit less, but they were people oriented. Other people were time; can we do it in a certain amount of time? You had to find out what motivates each person and work with them that way, and that was something I also tried to teach when I taught at Akron U, because that was like a magic wand to me when it came to management.

JB: What changes have you seen in the child nutrition profession over the years?

KH: When I started butter was a requirement - a pat of butter. You had to have a roll and a pat of butter. I think I'm seeing things going full circle. When I started everything was scratch cooking. We had potato peelers, the Hobart potato peelers where you put the potatoes in. we panned our chicken out. I had bakers. Everything was made from scratch. And I'm also a big believer in all that, so we never had Little Debbie's. I never sold chips. We had vending machines. We purchased vending machines, but we put all our sandwiches in, our cookies. It was interesting when I first started. There was the whole thing about the anti-sugar. The sugar

blues was popular and I had a board member that was a dentist that was just so upset about that I served desserts at times on the lunch menu. And then I had a group of teachers that said I was making the kids hyper. And I'm a big believer in teaching kids moderation. As long as you don't have a special diet you can have whatever you want. You can have a cookie, but don't make it a dinner size. You can eat four or five chips, but you don't have to eat the whole bag. And I believe part of the school lunch was to teach kids to try thing and to learn that you can have a little bit of - everything kind of fits in. But as I said I had teachers that were swearing that we were making all the kids hyper because we were giving them a little cookie. And one of the things that I challenged them to, and again, this was back in the early 80s, was to have recess before lunch. Most of the teachers would not take me up on it because it was more hassle, especially in Ohio in the winter with the boots and the gloves and things like that, but the teachers that did saw such a dramatic improvement in their kids after lunchtime, because before they were hyper because they were coming in from recess. They had just been playing tag and kick the can or ball or whatever, and then to come and sit still? We need to have recess and then lunch, though you really had to train the monitors that these kids are going to be hyper, more hyper, because they're coming in from running around. But it gave them a chance to step down. You can't expect 8-year-olds to self-modulate themselves that much. So we went from all of that, from the scratch cooking to more of the processed foods. I do a lot of consulting now where nobody cooks! They just know how to heat things up. They may make spaghetti noodles, but they aren't making the sauce from scratch, and things like that. So I'm

seeing that there's getting to be more push to scratch cooking, so we're kind of going full circle.

JB: What would you consider your most significant contribution to the field?

KH: The training; to try to get the interest in the school nutrition program. My belief that it really makes a difference and it can make a difference to the staff. It can make a difference to teachers. And most importantly it can make a difference to students. And I think that the school nutrition program needs more cheerleaders, more people that are out there talking about all the good that the school nutrition program does, compared to all the negative and the badmouthing. And to encourage people to look more at the positive in what all we do instead of all the negative. I mean you still need to address those, but I believe that in people too. There's good and bad and you can find positive and negative in anybody. And the more you can focus on the positive in a person the more you'll see those positives. And I believe the same about the school nutrition program. So I have been so honored to be part of the Institute, to be able to give back now. As I said, I've kind of gone full circle in doing trainings, getting out here, getting out to the nation and talking to food service directors and having a chance to inspire them through the different training topics has just been wonderful, and I just thank you so much for the opportunity.

JB: Do you have any special stories either about people you've worked with or kids you've served over the years?

KH: When I think back to all the cooks that got their GEDs, or the students that really were fed, that made a

difference in their day, I think working through my cooks to make a difference in the program, to make a difference in the kids' lives, it's a team. You can't do it by yourself.

JB: What advice would you give someone who was considering child nutrition as a profession today?

KH: Go for it! I say that though with some restrictions. It's a rollercoaster ride, and if you want things to basically, you want the same kind of day and the same kind of routine this probably isn't the field for you. But if you like rollercoaster rides, if you like every day being different, if you like to be able to make change in students' and staffs' lives, give it a try. Just buckle up.

JB: Anything else you'd like to add?

KH: No. Just thank you again for the opportunity. It's made such difference in my life. When you pick the roads, I picked this road and it's been such an adventure, and I'm so glad I did.

JB: Thanks for taking the time to share with me today.

KH: Thank you again for the opportunity.

JB: You're welcome.