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## Charles Kirby

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## Charles Kirby Oral History

Mr. Kirby worked for the USDA for 25 years, which included serving as Southeast Regional Director for 15 years. Subsequently, he served as the State Director of Child Nutrition in Mississippi. During his tenure in Mississippi, he helped develop and operate a statewide purchasing cooperative for schools. Since retiring from Mississippi, he has provided consulting services in the area of purchasing and financial management to state and local school districts and the NFSMI.

BC: Good Afternoon. I'm Beverly Cross. We are at the National Food Service Management Institute and today is March 4, 2010, and I am interviewing Mr. Charles Kirby today. Mr. Kirby, would you tell us a little bit about yourself and where you grew up and where you live now.

CK: Ok. I am from Louisiana. I was born and raised in Ruston, Louisiana, which is in the north-central part of the state. I spent my early years there and went to work for the Department of Agriculture after I graduated from Louisiana Tech. From there I sort of ventured through the USDA system for a while. At the present time I am living in Canton, Georgia, and I do consulting work for the Institute, state agencies, and some local school districts, mostly in the area of procurement.

BC: Thank you. We probably will have some time to talk specifically about some of those stops along the way, but I want to ask you now, what is your earliest recollection of child nutrition programs?

CK: Well first, being from Louisiana, Louisiana has long supported feeding children in school. There was a hot-lunch program in Louisiana before there was a National School Lunch Program. So I went from the first grade through high school and I ate lunch in school every day, and never realized that there was truly an option. I never took lunch. In high school sometimes I'd eat lunch and then go out and get a burger and fries or something, but I always had lunch before I went out. So that was my first experience, and later when I was in the Dallas Regional Office I came to find out that some schools didn't offer the school lunch program and I was totally surprised by that. I thought everybody had lunch food service as school and kids all ate lunch at school, and that was the first time I was aware that some people didn't.

BC: Was there ever breakfast offered when you were going through school?

CK: When I was going through school there was never an opportunity for breakfast. My first exposure to breakfast was when I was working in a field office in Louisiana and the regional office had us contact some districts to provide information about the Breakfast Program so the district could apply. That was late-60s, early-70s and the Breakfast Program was very small and just starting, very limited nationwide. We went out to try to encourage districts to apply, particularly those that had high free and reduced.

BC: We always like to ask people if they remember some favorite menu items, something that sticks in your mind.

CK: There was a concoction, it's a menu item, but I would refer to it as a concoction, it was a dish they fixed that they called Mexican rice, that was rice and ground beef and tomato sauce, but it was pretty spicy, and I always really liked that particular dish. They did offer some items I didn't care for. For example they had some commodity green peas that were as large as marbles; in the olden days they had these HUGE green peas, and to this day I still don't like green peas. But that being as it may, I enjoyed eating lunch at school and never really had a problem with the food that was offered. I typically ate everything that they offered.

BC: Do you think that there were some region-specific dishes that were served in your food service? We always think about Louisiana and some special menus.

CK: Where I'm from in Louisiana, it's the northern part of the state. In the northern part of the state they don't serve nearly the frequency of red beans and rice, gumbo, and so forth. In the southern part of the state that's very common. The northern part of the state is more like north Mississippi – meat, bread, and potatoes – it's not really the spicy, gumbo type of meals.

BC: Would you tell us about your educational background, which schools you attended and what your degrees are?

CK: First, I went to Louisiana Tech University, which is in Ruston, Louisiana, where I was born. My folks lived about three blocks from the campus, and so consequently, my father in his infinite wisdom thought that was perfectly good enough so I could go to school and never have to leave home. So I got a Bachelor of Science degree there in Agriculture. I started to go get a Master's once on my own time and I took a couple of courses, but then I started traveling a lot and missed a lot of classes and finally just gave it up and said it probably wasn't going to help me much anyway, so I finally quit that.

BC: How did you get involved with the child nutrition profession?

CK: Well, first of all I started out working with USDA. I took a job with USDA right out of college and I started out working in the Food Stamp Program. And I worked in the Food Stamp Program primarily there in Louisiana and then I went to the regional office in Dallas. And I stayed at the regional office in Dallas about three and a half years or so, and traveled over the Southwest, but also the areas now covered by the Mountain/Plains Region. So we went up to Montana, the Dakotas, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, as well as the Southwest. Most of my time was spent in the Food Stamp Program, but we bumped into child nutrition issues. Then I went to San Francisco; I was still working in the Food Stamp Program, but I worked in the regional office there and traveled over the Western Region principally in the Food Stamp Program, with some little assignments for child nutrition. My first introduction to child nutrition really was when I moved to Atlanta from San Francisco, and I went there as the Regional Director of Child Nutrition, which

was kind of an interesting experience to go – I spent ten years working in Food Stamps and then I suddenly became the Director of Child Nutrition in Atlanta, and never had worked in that program full-time at all. That was a very interesting transformation.

BC: Was there someone along the way who you would consider a mentor, someone who was influential in sort of directing you through.

CK: Well David Alspaugh was the Regional Administrator in Atlanta when I went there. And David Alspaugh had worked for the state of Ohio in child nutrition before he went to work for USDA. Mr. Alspaugh is the one that hired me as the Child Nutrition Director. I applied for the job and got hired there. But he is the one that sort of provided some oversight to get me accustomed to the process and sort of what it was. He had worked at the state and worked in child nutrition; had a very good background and gave me a lot of help to make that transition.

BC: I think you have covered the positions you have held except for where you went when you retired from the regional office in Atlanta.

CK: What transpired with me, I had been the Child Nutrition Director in Atlanta for a little over fifteen years and I could get an early retirement after having worked twenty-five years at USDA as a federal employee, and Mississippi wanted to start the statewide purchasing coop. My daughters had all graduated and my wife and I had family in Louisiana and Mississippi so we thought that would be a good thing to do. And it was something I thought I could do, would enjoy doing. Being a retired employee I would receive my federal retirement and I could be employed by the state, take a much lower-paying job and still be OK financially, but then I could do these good things that I thought were going to be effective for schools. So I took the early retirement, moved to Mississippi. I retired from USDA on Thursday afternoon and reported to the Mississippi Department of Education on Monday morning. And I moved over the weekend, so it was a very short retirement period, but it was something I really wanted to do because I'd spent a lot of time in that area and I thought it'd be very effective, be something that was hands-on that you could do with schools and make a big difference, and that kind of why I did it. Now after I got there and was there nine years we started having grandchildren and my daughters had all moved back to Atlanta, and my wife explained to me, with the grandchildren, we needed to be planning to go back to Atlanta. So that's when I left the state and went back to Georgia, and I've been doing some consulting work for the Institute and others since that period on sort of a part-time basis, and I've really found it quite enjoyable to do that.

BC: We want to get into the story of how you helped to set up the cooperative, but I want to ask you a couple of other questions first. How did your educational background help prepare you for your career in child nutrition?

CK: Well, frankly it didn't. That is one of those things that I knew when I moved into child nutrition, that I had a very large hole in my knowledge base of nutrition and child nutrition. And so I worked very hard to fill that hole, and try to employ people that had

that expertise that I could learn from. And then I spent a lot of time going to state conferences, meetings, workshops, other kinds of things to try to gain the additional knowledge that I thought was necessary for me to function effectively. That worked out very well for me. I had some very good people, some people from very different backgrounds. The state and local food service people do a lot to help educate you. When you don't know something they will help you learn rather quickly without that much encouragement to do so.

BC: That actually kind of leads me into our next question. Is there anything unique about the states you worked in with regard to the child nutrition programs?

CK: The first thing that I find rather unique is – most of my work in child nutrition has been done in the Southeast – I've done workshops and things around the country, but in the Southeast the school lunch program, or child feeding in schools is kind of like a historical kind of thing, it's a traditional kind of thing where we provide meals to children in schools, and we're quite proud of the fact that we do, and most children eat lunch at school in this area. That is something that is kind of unique to this part of the country and it's something that you work very hard to maintain. And I find that states and local directors work very, very hard to maintain that. And I find that somewhat unique in that other areas of the country don't seem to have that same level of participation rates that you see in there. That's a general statement, not all applicable, but I find that rather unique and I found it enjoyable. I also find it rather unique that you see all of these various groups, special groups that you're trying to deal with. Going to South Florida you have a very large Cuban population, Hispanic population, you have some Haitians, you have a mixture of people, you see a mixture of menus and offerings and so forth, plantains or something you wouldn't typically offer in North Mississippi, but yet you may go into South Florida and see that. If you go into coastal areas you will see things like gumbo and fried shrimp and things of this nature, or you go into South Carolina you may see grits and shrimp; you see some very different things, and I always thought that was very unique because the program is that versatile as it applies to the local population; and I think that uniqueness makes it relevant and makes it work today. People can make those adjustments to meet what their local situation warrants or needs. I think that's a key, key thing that it makes it survive today. Some other programs have come and gone and School Lunch has not. I think that's why it's still here.

BC: Our next question relates to what a typical day was like in your career if there was such a thing as a typical day.

CK: I don't know that there was such thing as a typical day because in child nutrition every day can be a new experience, and the one thing, whether you work at the state level or federal level or local level, you better learn to be a little flexible, because what worked yesterday doesn't work today. You have this crisis or that crisis tomorrow. I think being flexible to meet those needs is probably one of the reasons these jobs stay young, or keep you young, is you never run out of new things to do or new experiences to bump into, because they're never the same. You have a Hurricane Andrew or a Hurricane Katrina or someone else. You have disasters and emergency feeding operations you are doing. You

have visitors – you have a Secretary of Agriculture or VIPs. The President’s wife was just in Jackson Public Schools the other day. If I were still in the Mississippi Department of Education I would probably have been at Jackson Public Schools yesterday. So you see a lot of those things, short-notice things you’ve got to react or respond to, so you really don’t have a typical day. But I think that’s one of the strengths and why you like this work.

BC: What were some of the biggest challenges you faced?

CK: The biggest challenge I think I ever faced was walking into the office and being the Director of Child Nutrition in Atlanta and not knowing anything about the program and not knowing any of the personnel that worked on the staff. So I walked in the office and one of the staff walked up to me – one of my staff walked up to me – and said, “Can I help you?” and I told him who I was and that I was the new Director. He didn’t know me and I didn’t know him. I thought that was a major challenge because I had no knowledge of any of the people, I had very, very little knowledge of any of the programs, I didn’t know any of the state people, I didn’t know any of the local people. So it’s kind of like you walked into a brand-new world. I found that pretty challenging because I had been very, very confident in my knowledge and expertise of what I had been doing. So you go from a high level of knowledge and expertise to zero. It was kind of a crash time, but that’s the way you learn things and I really enjoyed doing it. I went to work at it and kept my ears open and read and studied and listened, and the first thing you know you knew up from down, so it worked out fine.

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

CK: Well, I’ve seen lots of changes, but one thing that I think overall is a real big change is that when I first started a lot of people had worked in child nutrition for 20 years, 25 years, 30 years, for long tenure in various schools and school districts. And nowadays you are seeing a lot less people who have worked there for that period of time, and a lot of employees are newer, and the turnover rate is higher than what it had been in the past. The menus and the foods we serve, and so the criteria of the foods that we do serve are totally different today than they were the first day that I showed up. The emphasis is on fat, salt, sugar, fiber – all of the things we’re trying to do with better nutrition has been a radical departure from where we were in the mid-70s when I first got to Atlanta and got into reducing fat, sugar, and salt. We’ve come a long way with fat, sugar, and salt, but the biggest change I think is in the turnover and the new type of people that you have running food service today. Some of these others have been there – I was thinking about Gertrude Applebaum. She started in the original school lunch program and she’s still doing consulting work today.

BC: What do you think has been your most significant contribution to the field of child nutrition?

CK: I think clearly in the field of child nutrition the biggest contribution I made that really impacted in any substantial degree has been the area of procurement. The Federal

Procurement Standards were extended to child nutrition in 1978. I took over the Directory in '77, so here was a brand-new requirement nobody knew and understood. We had very few districts that were in compliance with those requirements and we spent a lot of time and effort to teach folks at the state level and the local level how to go about implementing those requirements and standards. The southeastern part of the country has done a pretty good job of getting that done. Some of the states have statewide cooperatives, and I had a lot to do with getting that done, not totally, but I had a lot to do with getting that accomplished. I think that's probably something that was a major contribution that improved the program substantially in this area. Not the only thing I did, but I think that's probably the major contribution.

BC: Could we talk just a little bit more specifically about the cooperative? You said you came to Mississippi to set up a purchasing cooperative, so could we talk a little bit about that, the reasons why, how you went about doing it, and how it worked well for this state and how you introduced it to other states, if you could just kind of tell us the story there?

CK: The first issue, and this again kind of goes back to other people, not just me, but I think it was Marlene Gunn and some of her superiors in the Department of Education recognized Mississippi was having a problem. There were not very many distributors and there were a lot of schools. Schools were paying too much money for product and so forth, and something needed to be done to change what was occurring. They tried forming some small coops, and what would happen, a small coop of three, four or five schools would in fact work for a while and make some improvement, but you kind of maxed out the kind of improvement you can have with that small a group, so you very quickly ran up 'this is about all I can do here'. If you looked at it it's fewer private sectoring. You are running a chain of restaurants, and you look at all the schools as your restaurants. How would you go about providing food to this chain of restaurants? Well, you wouldn't be doing it by letting everybody buy their own things. You would look to manage it on a broader scale. And that became sort of the focus – we need to manage this just as if it were a chain of commercial restaurants we were operating. So what we did was sort of take the design that you use in commercial restaurants – how they control costs, how they control quality, and we took some of those basic concepts you see in the restaurant industry and we applies those to a public enterprise which was school districts. And from that point we said, "OK, this is what we need to do." Who's out there? Who will bid on this business? How do we go about doing it? And we stole ideas from the private sector, the public sector, and we put this package together. The product that ya'll now offer under First Choice, that First Choice training that you offer in that manual really sort of documents the process that we went through to set up, create, and operate that coop. It operated very effectively. We started small. We let it grow on a voluntary basis. Now it represents almost all the districts in the state. Then what happens is other people look at it and say, "We need to do something for the same reason Mississippi did." They need to do the same thing. So what we tried was to share our experiences in Mississippi. That helped a state like Alabama. Then Alabama took our experiences and our sort of design, they took it and they implemented it in Alabama. The state of South Carolina came over and we spent a lot of time with them, but what they did, they went back and took a lot of the concepts we had, but they set it up and designed it a little bit

differently, rather than run it as a statewide coop. But the principles of volume to food items and so forth, most all of the key principles exactly the same. They just managed it a little bit differently. And then I think that helped spin off some coops. They're not statewide but there's like a large coop in northeast Tennessee, there's a large coop in Florida. So a lot of these coops sprung up, and they sprung up from the training that was done earlier, and it replicates many of the design elements that we put together in Mississippi. I found the entire process to be very interesting and very challenging. It was one of those that it's really kind of no end in sight. The more you look at it and the more you work on it the more you know that can be done, it's just if I had the time and the energy to go do this. And I found it very challenging, very interesting, but highly productive, because it raised our product quality and lowered our product cost. And I could ask nothing better. You have the quality of the foods go up and the cost of product go down. So, more kids participated because the quality of the food went up and then the district's in better financial shape because the cost of the food went down, and that was what a success it was. So I thought it was very successful. And like I say, I enjoy doing it and I worked hard at it. I worked very hard at it but I thought it was very productive for us.

BC: I guess this would be a good time to talk about memorable stories. Do you have any memorable stories – special children you served, or people you worked with – that come to mind as you think back over your years in the profession?

CK: There are a couple of stories that I want to relate. One, shortly after I got to Atlanta they changed the procurement standards so we had our first regional procurement conference. USDA and DC kind of laid out what they wanted us to do. They wanted to have it in a remote location. They wanted to have multiple breakout rooms. They had some very specific things. So we decided to hold ours at The Falcon Inn, which is the Atlanta Falcons training camp, which is out east of downtown Atlanta. So we go out and we negotiate with the hotel. They have all these training rooms for these football players so it's ideally set up facility-wise. We thought we'd have about 200 people so we set that up and we reserved a block of rooms. The restaurant could cater lunch for 200. And we made a slight mistake. We allocated to each state a certain number of rooms. We had 200 rooms; we allocated these rooms to each state. Well, what happened was some people decided to put more than one person in a room. So consequently I had 200 rooms but I had almost 400 people preregistered. So I had a slight problem because the eating/dining facilities could only handle 200. So they had to set up a separate buffet and we had to find some more motel rooms and so forth – got passed all that. The afternoon people were checking in we had one of those famous Atlanta afternoon thunderstorms – a little weather blew up. It so happened they were painting The Falcon Inn sign. Falcon colors are red, white, and black. So we have a tornado alert. We have a tornado that goes over this motel – it didn't touch down – it went over this motel/hotel complex. The painters painting the sign, in their haste to get off the sign, left all this paint on this HUGE sign. Wind picks up those open buckets of paint and throws them all over cars in the parking lot. Now, we haven't had the first session, not one. So one lady from Tennessee whose new van that she talked her husband into allowing her to bring to this conference was covered with red, black, and white paint. So that was the way the day before the start



occurred. The first day of this conference – not this is the first time that I had met some of these folks, and most of these local people I had never seen or heard of before – so the first day of the conference we do our little breakout things and we have an afternoon closing session. In the afternoon closing session you tell people about restaurants in the area and things they can do, etc. Well, I gave them very explicit instructions to a large shopping mall that was nearby. Everybody goes on their merry way. The following morning we had another general session. Vivian Pilant, who was a director from South Carolina, asks if she could address the group first thing in the morning. Being a good host I said, “Certainly you may.” She thanks me very graciously for all of the directions and information I provided the group the previous day, but she said I made one slight mistake. When I was giving them directions to the mall, I told them to go east on Interstate 85. They should have gone west on Interstate 85. So what happened, they drove further out of town. They should have been driving further back [to town]. Well, I hadn’t been living there that long. I didn’t know where the mall was. Somebody told me. I gave directions. Unfortunately they were wrong. But then Vivian gave me a gift. The gift was a small compass. And she said, “This compass is so you can provide better directions in the future.” I still have that compass, because I will remember that forever.

BC: That is a great story.

CK: Another story I wanted to relate dealt with the first reception we ever had with the Secretary’s office with the School Food Service Association Executive Board. They had the national convention in Atlanta and we wanted to do something special for our new Assistant Secretary. So we were going to hold the reception at a private residence and have the Executive Board go out to this private residence. We were going to have this nice little wine & cheese kind of reception for her to get to meet the various members of the Executive Board. So they had a downtown function in Atlanta and this function was to be over at an approximate time, and it was in a park. When the Executive Board members got through with this function they would come outside and we had arranged for an executive bus. And this executive bus was supposed to pick these people up out of this park and take them to this private residence for the reception with the Assistant Secretary. Now this group is all dressed in antebellum dresses and so forth, so we’ve got on the full regalia here. We’re out in the sun in Atlanta in late-July. It is very warm in all this regalia out in the park. We go strolling out there in the designated parking spot by this church. There is no bus. I now have the Executive Board of the Association in a park, all in this formal attire, and I have an Assistant Secretary fifteen miles away waiting for these folks to show up, and my executive bus is not there. I call five cabs – I call five cabs. Well, you know, it’s five o’clock in the afternoon in Atlanta, it’s rush hour, you know, trying to get five cabs to one location at one time. . . . . Gertrude Applebaum was out in the street and hiked her dress up with her pink stockings or whatever, and had her leg sticking out trying to hail us a cab. Finally, the five cabs showed up and we got all of the people out there and had the nice reception for her. The one thing those stories all taught me is that one, you better learn to be quick on your feet, and you need to be flexible, because things are not going to always be as you want them to be. So both of those were experiences that were kind of embarrassing on one sense, but in another sense

confirmed the fact that you need to be flexible, you need to be able to adjust to circumstances, and those are very good traits for folks that are in child nutrition.

BC: Good stories. Thank you for sharing those. I'd like for you to talk a little bit about your responsibilities as an 'enforcer'. I've heard you reference that in some of our First Choice procurement seminars and how it was your responsibility to go to people who were not following the rules or were perhaps even breaking the laws and it was your job to straighten them out or suffer the consequences.

CK: Well, the compliance part, compliance enforcement of any regulatory agency, whether you are a state agency or a federal agency, is one of the tougher parts of your job. And the reason it's a tough part is you're going in to review something or audit something or you have information about or whatever it is, that you're going to meet with people and you're going to give some very bad news. And the very bad news could be we're terminating you from the program, we're taking your money back, we're sending you the bill, or whatever this issue is. I don't know of anyone that that makes happy. I don't know anyone that really likes to do that. But I think the way you have to look at that is the first part of your job is to try to be sure the people that are operating these programs and so forth clearly understand what's expected of them. And I always felt like it was my job to be sure that they understood what the requirements were. Now once they understand what all the requirements are, then I expect folks to go forth and do and meet those requirements. If you go back and they're not meeting those, then my sympathy or empathy for their certain situation is not nearly as great. If they don't know is one issue. If they know and they willfully don't do that I don't feel nearly as badly about saying "You owe us this money back" and so forth. That's just the way that is. People can really irritate you on occasion about that. I went to a district once and they had taken over three million dollars in food service monies and they had used it to subsidize for general fund revenue, and they'd just taken the child nutrition money and paid all these other bills [with] it. They let the principal control the food service money in each school. One principal had taken his food service account and invested it in the stock market. If it made any money he was going to use it in his principal fund. If it lost any money food service was just going to be out of money. And I went down there not real pleased with this district. They had misappropriated \$3,500,000, and I have a principal over here who had put the money he had in the stock market, and he could have lost all of it overnight. So I was not real enthusiastic about this. So I go in there and I meet with the superintendent and all these board people and deputies...and they went through this whole long litany of discussion about all the tight monies and everything else, and the bottom line was 'We'd like to pay the money back, but we can't', just frankly told me 'We can't pay it back'. And I said, "Well, we've already withheld two months of your reimbursement, and if I withhold one more month I'll have the \$3,500,000. Now, all you'll have to do is come up with the other \$1,500,000 you owe us in interest, and I figure one more month will probably get that done." The superintendent turned to me and said, "Well, you know, our local newspaper might not think that's such a good thing, you taking all of our money and not giving us any money." He said, "You know, we might just have to take this to the local media." I said, "Well, that sounds like a pretty good idea." I said, "I think when the Assistant U. S. Attorney finds out about you misappropriating \$3,500,000 he may have a

lot of interest in what you did with the money as well, so if you'd like to take it to the media I'll just be more than happy. We'll just take it to the media." But it's the kind of thing where if I have done my job properly and they know what the rules are, then people should not be surprised when someone knocks on their door and says, "You owe us money back." I don't have any difficulty with that at all. I do feel sorry for people that don't know what the rules are and here comes somebody and zaps them for something that they were unaware that they weren't in compliance with. So I always felt like it was our job first to be sure they were informed, and then when you work you should anticipate that they're doing what they're supposed to be doing. And I really have never had a problem with that. When it's my mistake I try to be the first one to own up and say, "Well, that was my mistake." When people do that I feel badly for some of them, but most of them I don't. We sent a guy to the federal pen in Atlanta one time for five years. And he had operated a childcare center. First of all he wasn't keeping any children and he wasn't serving and meals, but yet he was filing a claim with us and we paid him reimbursement. He was a public figure, an elected official. He was using the reimbursement to support a girlfriend that he in this location. When we found this out we went in, did a criminal investigation, and we prosecuted him. Well, you know how much sympathy I would have for someone that one, files false claims this whole period, didn't feed not one child, took the money, misappropriated for those purposes – the fact that he went to prison didn't make me unhappy at all. I hate seeing anybody in prison but he deserved it and he went there and I was proud for it. I'm glad to see him there. I thought he earned it and he got his just reward the way I saw it. But I find that to be abnormal and unusual, but that comes with your job and the things that you have to do, and if you're not willing to do those things then you shouldn't be in those jobs is kind of the way I look at it. I'm not a mean person. I'm not a nasty person. I'm a vary straightforward person and I can get in people's face pretty well if need be, but most cases there's really no need to. You just very matter of factly deal with things and I never had any difficulty with that.

BC: Was there a happy ending to the \$3,500,000 misappropriation story?

CK: Yes, there was. They replaced the superintendent, we got the money back, and then the child nutrition had the funds to operate. They couldn't pay their food bill. They put a distributor out of business because they did not pay their bill. The distributor went broke as a result of that. But by restoring the financial capability they were able to improve the quality of the meals they served, they were able to provide money to their vendor to continue to be able to buy food to prepare and serve meals to children. And that's the whole thing, to get this money back so they can operate and provide meals.

BC: What advice would you give to someone who is considering child nutrition as a profession today?

CK: Oh, I think it's a great opportunity. It's a tremendous opportunity, and it's a thing that you can shape and mold yourself. I mean, there a lot of rules that you have to comply with, but there's so much flexibility and room to do things, that I think it's just a wide-open opportunity for people that want to do that. If you want to apply yourself, make a difference in the lives of children, make a difference you your local environment, your

local community, the food service program is a wonderful place to do that. You have so many options that you have a lot of opportunity to apply creativity and your imagination in things to do, and I think it's something that you should see more people into. Institutional food service is going to get larger. You are going to see lots more coops [and] there are going to be a lot of opportunities for people to do that. I think it's a great opportunity. In the say, thirty or forty years that I've been working, I have found child nutrition to be far more rewarding than any other job that I've had and I've met some of the world's best people. You go out into these local schools and there are people out there that go to work every day and work hard, and that's a good group to represent and work with.

BC: I totally agree with that. Is there anything else that you would like to add that we have not covered?

CK: One thing I think might be somewhat interesting, and it's something I think that the food service community as a whole can benefit by a little bit is that all too frequently we tend to think that we have to do everything on our own. You know, we're out there 'us against the world' and so forth. And when I was Child Nutrition Director in Atlanta, one of the things that we did was try to get the states to work on joint projects and efforts, group kind of efforts. And early after I was there we produced a product with the states called the School Lunch Portfolio [which] for lack of a better term was a cookbook. And what it did, it took all of the USDA recipes and so forth. We did some quality food photography in it. It updated the recipe card file - and this is the way a pan is supposed to look and how to prepare it and so forth. And we did that as a multi-state effort with the states. Turned out that we produced 15,000 copies of this portfolio and the whole project ended up costing close to \$1,000,000. But it was the first time that schools had something other than the USDA card file ever. And this was all laminated so they could take it out and work with it - but no state could have done that. USDA didn't have the money to do that. The fact that all of these states went together and shared the cost, they were able to do that. Culinary Techniques, which was one on food production, quantity food production, was developed exactly the same way. One state could not afford to do that because they don't have enough developmental money to do that. So what we did, we had a group of states that pooled their money and put that product out. I think that there are a lot of needs that we have in food service for materials or whatever it might be, that if states would join together and use their limited developmental money they could do some of these larger scope activities for the benefit of all their schools rather than to try to do their own thing. You simply don't have enough revenue to do a quality job for some of the scope for some of these various activities. You have to have more money to be able to do it than most states - they just don't have the money to do it. You're not going to get state appropriations, you don't get enough administrative money from USDA for it. But if they pool their resources they can. And I think that's something - I know we did it in Atlanta several times while I was there. But each one of them ran up into that \$1,000,000 vicinity and you're going to have to have some way to get additional money to help do it. The problem is agreeing upon what needs to be done. And once you agree on what needs to be done, then it's a fairly straightforward process figuring out who pays how much. But that again is something that I think should be done, needs to be done, because you're

seeing money become tighter and tighter and tighter, and you're seeing less of those activities, and that's sort of a hole that needs to be plugged.

BC: Good thoughts. Well Mr. Kirby I feel like that there are many, many stories to be told. I know that you have really made an impact on school nutrition programs, and we just thank you for taking the time to talk with us today. And if you have anything else...?

CK: I don't want to say too much. Some of these things have a way of coming back. I would say this. There are some excellent people that work in food service all across the nation and I have really enjoyed over the years, not just current folks, over the years I have really met some superior individuals that have worked hard and done a good job for children all over the country in lots of different kinds of ways. That's kind of something that you just can't [pay for]. Those friends and that expertise and that experience has been super. I'm talking about Gertrude Applebaum. I know she can't take a driver's license test but she is a grand person and I love her to death. But there are people like that. I just picked her out, but there are people like that all over the country that have really worked hard and made a big impact on these programs, and a lot of them do not get much recognition for the effort that they've put into it. Marlene Gunn is one that doesn't get much recognition for the effort that she's put into these programs, but there are other people like that around the country. We could sit here and go down a long list of those. But being friends or knowing those folks over the years is something I have liked and enjoyed.

BC: I'm glad you mentioned Marlene Gunn's name. Could you just talk about her just a little bit because she was such a key force in the development of our procurement materials and seminars – if you could just give a little bit of your recollections of her and what she did?

CK: When I first met her a gentleman by the name of John Walker was the Director of Child Nutrition in Mississippi, and Marlene was the School Coordinator for the Mississippi Department of Education. And a School Coordinator is like a specialist. He was Director, and they had a Child Care person, and a School person, and whatever. But she took schools and she looked at schools a little bit different than some other people did. She'd worked the local level, she'd done some consulting work for hospital and so forth, but she had a very good handle on what schools were and what they weren't, and what people did and didn't do and the kinds of problems and so forth, and she had a very, very good feel for that. I told you about the School Lunch Portfolio we talked about while ago. She was the School Coordinator when we did that, and she was one of the state staff. That contract was awarded by the Mississippi Department of Education on behalf of the states, and we worked with her extensively in being sure that contract met all the federal requirements. But I got to know her very well, and she was looking at issues like procurement issues, and quality food production. She was looking at some of these issues early on while some other people in other states didn't even know they were issues, much less working on them. So she was kind of out in front of a lot of those issues. She was not a real forceful person in one sense. By that I mean she didn't look for a lot of front and center publicity for herself. She wanted to see things move and change but she wasn't one

that went screaming out front and say 'Look at me and what I have done'. Most of the things that she did she kind of did behind the scenes kind of quietly, and a lot of people didn't realize exactly what all she was doing. She was an honest person. At one spot she had this good idea – why don't we approach this procurement problem this way or that way?, and sometimes she'd be right. And sometimes I would say, "That will never fly." And she'd go, "Well, I'm going to try it anyway." But she was honest. She would come back and say, "Look, you were right. It didn't work." So I always found her to have a lot of personal integrity about things, where if she said, "I'm going to try it", and if she was wrong she would be the first one to say she was wrong. I never had any problem with her doing that. But she was always looking ahead. She also was able to look at the private sector and be able to pick up concepts out of the private sector that we could plug into the schools. We often think we are unique in schools and we know all there is to know. Well, there are good ideas and practices that we can get all over the place that we need to integrate into our business. So she was very effective at doing that. She was able to push an agenda many times that I didn't think had a chance. And by that I'd say that she was very skillful in getting things to come out the way she wanted them, without necessarily doing a lot of grandstanding. She was very effective at moving things around. Personally, I always [found] her to be a #1 kind of person to work with. A lot of people whenever – I'd been the Regional Director of USDA – Marlene could be a little bit ornery about things, and she could be a little bit difficult if she wanted to. When I said I was going to retire from USDA and go to work for the state [of Mississippi] a lot of people said, "You'll never be able to work for her." And I said, "I don't think that will be a problem for me at all." In fact it was not. Now, she and I had some similar traits I guess, being a little bit direct and getting things done, but frankly she and I were able to work together very, very effectively, and that direct confrontation and discussion, I'd been doing that with her for years, so it wasn't anything new. But it wasn't an adversarial kind of deal, it wasn't a problem kind of deal, it was just kind of a direct conversation and I thought it worked very effectively. It was interesting working for her, because before in my USDA capacity I was supposedly a regulator making sure she was doing what she was supposed to. Now I'm supposed to be taking direction from her. But I really had no problem working with her or for her either one. And she passed away and I thought that was a major loss for the food service industry, and I also thought she never got the recognition that she earned based on what she did in the area of procurement, and what she did about trying to focus on food service workers in schools, local staff and so forth, trying to get them better trained and better prepared. She was always interested in better quality meals. One time we bought – we had a contract in our coop and one thing we had under contract was diced potatoes. She said, "Now think about this. A school can buy diced potatoes, that's one of these pre-cut vegetable items, and actually make mashed potatoes from real, fresh potatoes. If they were willing to do it, they'd actually have diced potatoes, peeled and diced. They can make fresh mashed potatoes from fresh potatoes and be far better than those instant potatoes we serve." So she didn't just look at it as 'here's a handy thing to use', think about what difference this is going to make in the quality of mashed potatoes. And I think that interest in kids is kind of an example of how she took that the next step and next process. I always admired her for that. She really could see that next step. It made a big difference in the meals and it made a big difference in children, it

makes a big difference in the participation rate because of the quality of the meals. She really pushed that and promoted that. I have nothing but respect for her.

BC: Well, thank you so much Mr. Kirby. We appreciate your time.

CK: You're more than welcome.