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Interviewer: Meredith Johnston

Interviewee: Beverly Lowe

Interview Date: April 20, 2004

Beverly Lowe is a registered dietitian and is certified by the School Nutrition Association (SNA) as a School Nutrition Specialist (SNS). She has served as a Cafeteria Manager, Nutrition Specialist, Food Service Director, and Consultant during her career in School Food Service. Beverly's notable honors and accomplishments include USDA Best Practices Awards, IFMA Silver Plate Award as School Food Service Operator of the Year, Ivy Award from Restaurant & Institutions Magazine (only SFS Director), Outstanding Civilian Service Medal, Golden Star FAME Award, and many others. Beverly has provided training and technical assistance for numerous school districts and organizations. Her professional affiliations include the School Nutrition Association and the Virginia School Nutrition Association; she served as President of each. She is also a member of the American Dietetic Association and served as School Nutrition Chair.

Beverly is a consultant trainer for the National Food Service Management Institute.

MJ: Today is April 20, 2004 and we are here at the National Food Service Management Institute, interviewing Ms. Beverly Lowe. Thank you Beverly for joining us today and being a part of this oral history project.

BL: It's a wonderful project.

MJ: Would you tell us about your educational background and how that prepared you for the child nutrition profession?

BL: I went to college as a high school home economics graduate. I enrolled in general home economics at James Madison University. It was one of the three choices. The other two were teaching or dietetics. My second semester I decided dietetics was where I wanted to be. Fortunately for me, my counselor placed me in classes that would take me that route because I was taking the full-year chemistry and biology rather than the semesters as required for the general degree.

After graduation I decided I was going to get my R.D. I enrolled in the dietetic internship at the State University of Iowa. No one from our school had ever applied there. This program placed us in the College of Medicine. It was a great opportunity. Not only did they train us in clinical, but we had management skills that we used in the large production kitchens in the hospitals. And as a teaching hospital we were exposed to many opportunities. It was there I realized I was a good fit as an administrative dietitian. I originally thought I would pursue research work. A laboratory wasn't where I wanted to be; I needed to be with real people. One of my learning experiences was a small school on campus. I had the

opportunity to do the food service for that campus school. I guess that was my first taste of school meals. After my internship I was hired by the Richmond Public Schools as a manager. Richmond was the district where I received my public school education. I was a manager-in-training my first year. They opened a brand new high school and assigned me to that building as home base. When a manager was out I had the opportunity to substitute. I was also on call for special events. This was my first exposure to catering. It was during that first year I learned how to operate a cafeteria. I actually did the financials for the manager I worked under that entire year. I had worked for almost one whole month before I knew we were supposed to do daily records. Oh, I was so busy in setting up the staff and meshing the people together in production that I had no idea. That was one of the small details they forgot to tell me in the job interview. I did everything by hand. No computers, in fact we had one of those big calculators that had like ten or fifteen keys across and you pulled the handle down and up. I learned how to multiply on that thing! The trick was to move the keys over several spaces, add some zeros, and clunk it three or four times and it did the multiplication for you. I like to say the dark ages, but it was pretty historic.

MJ: About what time period would this have been?

BL: It was in the sixties. It was an interesting experience, because every time I left home base to substitute at various schools I carried a little notebook in my uniform pocket, which was starched by the way, it wasn't permanent press. I would jot down some of the things that people did that I thought would be good to use when I got to manage my own cafeteria. I took those ideas with me. The managers were active in the state association and they introduced me to the state conference my first year. I met my husband that same conference weekend, which was located in Hampton, Virginia. Incidentally, I ended up as the director of that district years later. While I was there for the meeting, my grandmother, who always stayed for a week's vacation at the beach located very near to the meeting hotel, joined me for the weekend. We were invited out to a function, and that's the weekend I met the man I married.

MJ: That's wonderful.

BL: So, when I tell people I met my husband at my first conference of school food service they look at me like 'Yeah, right', particularly when he was a Navy man.

MJ: So that's how you've become involved in child nutrition then.

BL: Yes, right from the beginning.

MJ: Okay, could you tell us a little more about your career?

BL: I liked the Richmond schools, and my time as a manger. I started out at the one building as the assistant. My assignment the next year was as manager of Chandler Junior High. Before I completed that first year on my own the manager of the high school where I trained resigned to have a family. I was transferred back there to close out the year and was reassigned there permanently. I was the youngest manager in the district, with the largest school. There were eighteen hundred students enrolled in five grades, 8-12. This high school had its own computer, which occupied one whole big air-conditioned room. We did all the report cards by computer for this building set up for testing in the future for the whole district.

MJ: So this would have been in the eighties or the seventies?

BL: Late sixties, early seventies. My next school lunch job was in Chesterfield County, a 252 square mile county system to the south of Richmond. It was during this experience I was exposed to nutrition education. I was the Assistant Director/Nutrition Specialist. We were in the early stages of centralization. I centralized the food purchasing and created the centralized menu. The first half of my day I taught nutrition education in the classroom, focusing on kindergarten, first, and second grade. By the time I had been there several years I had reached

all of the lower grade levels with nutrition education experiences. We had to create our own material. We didn't have the selection from an array of wonderful materials that are available today. Many of our resources came from the Dairy Council, the gas company, extension service, and other community resources. We were a learning site (rotation) for the Medical College of Virginia dietetic interns and used them to assist in nutrition education.

My next job was as the director of school nutrition for the thirty-three Hampton City centralized schools. This required a household move 75 miles away. I was there nineteen exciting years. We had no financial problems the whole nineteen years I was there. It was a wonderful experience working with a great team. Staff worked hard, didn't mind coming to work, went the extra mile, and deserved the recognitions they received. We were known for our catering. In fact, I had my own key to the coliseum kitchen because we did so much catering there for the community and the city. We were the official caterer for the city as well as the school district. We had beautiful silver, linens, and award winning food presentations on display. We increased staff talent by sending them to culinary school to learn from notable chefs. I had one lady who produced great ice carvings. They began as a 50 pound plus block of ice and emerged as baskets, swans etc. How many school lunch people do you know participated in the state

culinary arts competition and tied with a military chef for first place as best in show? The greatest compliment my staff received was from a pastry chef who trained/coached them on the art of making bread baskets and fancy breads. His quote about one of the Hampton Schools culinary arts competition displays, "It's a shame when the students outshine their teacher."

MJ: Well, that's what I was just thinking.

BL: I knew many chefs and competent professionals from another organization where I took an active participation role. Members of the Food Service Executives Association provided food and service to all areas. Begun in 1901, it is now known as the International Foodservice Executives Association. It began as a Stewards and Caterers Association and emerged to a cross section of the industry membership. I eventually was national president, the first female president, and their fiftieth. president .It was mainly composed of men and was a true good old boys society. I became active because I needed some financial information, and we didn't have much available to us in those days. I wanted to know how the for profits did their work and how I could apply this to school meals. For example, how did they purchase more economically, how did they manage their employees, what fringe benefits they provided, how to cost menus, meals per labor hour and more? A lot of the things that I learned in the basics I got from

other organizations. I attended the training sessions they provided and learned well. I'm still active in that association.

When I left Hampton I went back to Richmond City Schools, where I had my first job and where I was a student. My mother, my two brothers, and I all graduated from the same high school, having been taught by the same chemistry teacher.

My mother was her first year student and my brother had her the year she retired. With our mobile society today, you don't see that kind of history. In fact, when I was the director for Richmond schools, I donated a cafeteria table to the middle school that my mother attended. The school has never been closed and is still operating under the original name, Binford Jr. High. In the cafeteria redesign they were short one table. I purchased that table in her honor. Actually, she had just passed away that year, so it made it even more special.

Richmond schools are rich in history and opportunities. I don't know how many directors have had the same opportunity as I, to redesign a middle school that they attended as a student, and the middle school they had their first full time manager position.

Both East End Jr. High and Chandler Jr. High had been closed some years earlier and reopened during my tenure as director. I have a student picture of me on the front steps of East End and had the honor to reopen both schools and redesign

the kitchens. Richmond was a troubled district and needed money to survive. Marketing, image enhancement, and customer service were my forte, and of course I had to draw on financial management skills to generate money. We increased our breakfast program from 2,500 a day to 7,000 a day in one year. For those efforts we were the regional USDA Best Practices winner and the nationally USDA recognized winner for Breakfast Program Outreach during my second year in Richmond.

MJ: Well, so you were in Richmond, then, for how many years? There in Richmond City Schools?

BL: Six. I retired there. They had an early retirement plan with a great package I couldn't ignore. I had joined forces in a consulting business with two past ASFSA presidents, Gene White and Thelma Becker. They both preceded me as national president. My years as ASFSA president were '89-'90.

MJ: Did you do some consulting? Are you doing some consulting with NFSMI?

BL: Yes, I was, when I was active in the district, I was on the NFSMI Advisory Board, all except the first year it was created, representing the directors and supervisors. I was on the original Hands-On Team Task Force and continue to

support Technical Assistance when needed. I am one of the Institutes' training consultants and on the Team Nutrition resource team. I advocate everything the Institute does. I travel with their material no matter who I'm training or what I'm doing. You can't find anything equal to the Institute training anywhere in the United States. I tell them I'm their informal ambassador.

MJ: I know they're happy to have you as an ambassador. In your opinion, how has the child nutrition profession changed over the years?

BL: A lot. Not only have the personnel changed, but the regulations have changed. Some of the starchiness from the meals program is no longer there. It is a friendlier program. I can remember my first years as cafeteria manager when we bought everything fresh. We snapped green beans, we picked greens, we had fresh sweet potatoes, and bought Boston butts to make our own barbeque. You can now purchase great barbeque ready to heat and serve. The production part has changed because of processing and taste. The food industry has improved on its end products and we have taken advantage. The USDA Commodity Program has improved/changed through the years so that we are hiring staff to mostly heat and serve.

There are still a number of districts that make bread. Bread was our signature food in the Hampton district. We never had a bread contract. We made all breads

including loaf bread for sandwiches, dinner rolls, hot dog and hamburger buns. At one time we made foot long hot dog buns. The caring about children, the emphasis on customer courtesy, the smiles and gentle voices have not changed. We haven't lost our touch in making customers feel good. The computer age has been the catalyst in changing the school meals programs. We can work smarter and know the results of our efforts much faster. Everything was done manually and you had to know how to multiply yourself, you didn't have calculators to do it for you. We were as smart in scheduling people then as we do now.

BL: The recipes have changed in format to reflect nutrition information and healthier preparation. We had food-buying guides in my early days. The upgrading and changes have strengthened the programs. We had guidance on purchasing but not as detailed as today. The work ethic, I think, is not as it was before. I don't think people feel like they need to work as hard or put in as much time as they did when times were very tight. Society has changed, the customers have changed too; they're more self-gratifying and culturally aware.

MJ: Would you tell us about your time as ASFSA President?

BL: My theme was, "Sailing into the 90's with Program Excellence". Focus Five was accomplished through inviting a group including state leaders, industry, and other administrators to meet and assist in identifying our vision and to develop a

program of work. Annually the state affiliates followed the theme and program of work at the local level. The national president would select plans that were not accomplished, add some new ones, and continue to support ones started by the previous president.

We focused on being ambassadors for the program. We did a lot of media work and held press conferences. I remember the press conference to address the revised Dietary Guidelines. Over 80 percent of the press hadn't even seen the document and thought it was something new. They had been revised several times before the press took notice. We received media training from a contracted professional, and extended this service to state affiliates. We also moved the headquarters from Colorado to Virginia. I had nothing to do with the location selection. It was decided before I became president. Most of our staff did not want to move. The staff that did move with us caravanned by auto from Colorado to Virginia.

We mended some USDA fences through round table discussions and shared ideas /points of view. Somewhere personalities had gotten in the way of progress. One very helpful and positive from USDA was the development of video training for local SFAs. I enjoyed my participation in this project. I know they are being used today. Recently I had a school nutrition professional say, "I feel like I know

you. I saw you on the cashier training.” And my reply is, “You must have one of those old ones where I was wearing the mauve colored suit.” Shirley Watkins preceded me and convinced me to continue the focus on training. She is THE CHAMPION of training for all staff.

MJ: Could you explain the training modules?

BL: In addition to the USDA training program videos, Tyson Foods funded training for CEUs for the certification program. ‘Now You’re Talking’ was one of the three topics and was comprised of a video, a workbook, and a completion card stating you successfully completed the course, earned the certificate and certification credits. The last one was on how to properly store, reheat, and serve reprocessed food. Those training modules were great and are still relevant, although the uniforms and graphics need to be modernized.

MJ: Well now, Virginia [Webb] did want me to ask you something. She said when you were president they still picked the presidents up at the airport in limos.

BL: Oh my, yes, and I have a great limo story. It has to do with the national conference in New Orleans. I had such support from my great Hampton team that I just HAD to bring nineteen or twenty from Hampton, including office and kitchen employees and most of the managers. We raised money and they all came. This was the one when we had a cool spell in July. It was just a pleasant weather

experience. Let me tell you my limousine story. We had a boat-launching event down on the waterfront and arrived by limousine. Our next event was a Zartic-sponsored big party featuring Dolly Parton as the entertainment. When the limo took us to this party I sent my driver back to pick up my staff at the Sheraton. A little put out, the limousine driver said, "You want me to do what?" I explained the ladies were expecting him to pick them up at the Sheraton and to please go. After a little more grumbling, he provided a memorable ride for my supportive staff. You know he had to make more than one trip too! They never forgot that. Sometimes it's those unexpected little things you do that have lasting memories. The conference program used to target interest sessions then. Now they are called tracts. There were somewhere in the neighborhood of 150 interest sessions. During general sessions we had the see through podium as we do today - without the prompter though - and me with a yellow legal pad with brief notes. It now is ultra polished and professional with the monitor and everything scripted out. Our general speaker, Dr. Bob Arnot, placed his computer on the podium to use for his notes. His presentation was a speech, not a Power Point presentation. We have come a long way. This is a good change.

MJ: Well, let's see. You touched on this a little bit, but could you talk a little bit more about how ASFSA has changed?

BL: When we moved headquarters we went from owning two buildings in Colorado, renting one for revenues, to renting a building in Alexandria. I happened to have been on the committee that was part of the decision. I had no idea I would be president during the move. One of the best things we did was to move it to Washington because it placed us where the regulations and congressional action are. Being closer to our lobbyist Marshall Matz was another plus. We had our first open house at the new headquarters during LAC with formal invitations and a beautiful quality reception provided by Fairfax County Schools Director Dot Pannell and her staff. Penny McConnell, a current director, was her assistant.

We were just beginning to market our program and promoting a positive image of who we are and what we do. We did our first AASBO, American Association of School Business Officials, breakfast at their annual conference. We invited ourselves to present at a Kellogg's sponsored breakfast which we arranged and presented our marketing and who we are program. We knew we needed to have a link there as we were not talking the same story. Additionally, management companies were being interviewed by school business officials because they didn't fully understand what support the local program director does to support the education of children.

MJ: So, in thinking about how the ASFSA has changed over the years, could you talk a little bit about the magazine?

BL: The magazine has changed. When I was a high school cafeteria manager I submitted an article for publication. It had to do with the nutrition education I provided in the high school classrooms. I still have the magazine and the article, you know, as bragging rights. The *School Food and Nutrition Journal* magazine, used to be called the *School Lunch Journal*. It had a lot of information in there about ways to market your menu. Today's publication contains a lot of additional information, more color, graphics, and themed issues. Some articles are shorter but give you just the information you need. The editor, Patty Fitzgerald, does a super great job.

MJ: Well what's the issue, the one where you have your article in it? Do you know?

BL: It was in the sixties. I have it somewhere. I don't think you would have it down here probably.

MJ: What types of honors and awards have you received over the years? Can you talk a little bit about those?

BL: I am a Golden Star FAME Award winner. This award has really brought positive attention to the Association and individuals at the local level. FAME was a California state association awards program recognizing the directors in California. Shirley Watkins was responsible for the move to bring it to the national association. I was present at that meeting when she met with the sponsors. Originally it was not part of the Industry Seminar which is now called Child Nutrition Industry Conference, CNIC. Another award I have received is The Ivy Award. At this interview, I am the only school nutrition director to receive (1982) The Ivy Award presented annually by the Restaurants and Institution Magazine.

BL: I also have an award from the Department of the Army – the Outstanding Civilian Service Medal. This was as a result of working on the memorandum of understanding for all of the services under the Food Services Executives Association's Excellence in Military Foodservice awards program. I was the first female president of the association. To accomplish the signing, I flew to the Pentagon and landed on the helipad on the top of the building. In those days as a dignitary you were afforded certain privileges. At the Pentagon we went to see the Department of the Navy Chief of Naval Operations, and the Department of the Army, Logistics. When I went out as president of the association I had done so

many things with them that they surprised me with the award. I had no clue I was getting it. It's in a big frame, and is an honest to goodness medal. You know what the men wear. It has a red, white, and blue ribbon and little medal medallion hanging from the ribbon.. There is a matching rosette for the lapel. Military personnel know the significance of the award and recognize the ribbon. One time a guy asked me if I was wearing my husband's award. My reply was, "No, this one's mine." I get to wear it on military occasions. It's really an honor to be a recipient. I also traveled for the Army, and the Navy, and Coast Guard reviewing food service worldwide. The International Food Services Executives, IFSEA, supports military excellence in food service worldwide. They have a number of award programs that excel and award plaques, silver bowls, and scholarships for Culinary Institute of America and other schools. I traveled twice with the Army. The first time I went I was gone forty-four days. I had one weekend at home during that time. I used a lot of vacation time to go, but it was a lifetime experience.

I made appointments with the school lunch people in charge of the schools on post. Then I visited the school lunch program while reviewing Army food service. I tried to link up local contacts with the military to support nutrition related activities. .They display the calories and the nutrition profile on a little card, and

as a result of that I was asked to speak on nutrition to a military group meeting at Fort Lee, Virginia. I also was filmed at Fort Lee as a promo for the Philip A.

Connelly Awards, which is the name of the military award for the Army. I had my boss (Superintendent) with me when they showed it at the national meeting. I

did not tell him I was on the video, and my nerves were a mess. A couple years

later I received the Outstanding Civilian Service Award. I continue to conduct day

trip reviews for the Navy and Coast Guard in my area of the state. I have no

knowledge of the preliminary findings. What it did for the school district food

services was a way to apply some of the review standards there. This was very

valuable as an internal review.

MJ: I understand. What keeps you involved with the profession? What keeps you going?

BL: Well, I like to tell everyone that I'm at the stage now where I need to give

back to a profession that supported me very well and has given me a lot of

opportunities. I particularly like to focus on things that are going to help the

kitchen staff.

MJ: What are those?

BL: Healthy Edge is the nutrition part of the certification for ASFSA. That's another thing that's changed for ASFSA is the certification program. I was in the charter class. This has changed to match school nutrition and SFNS certified. That has to do with directors being certified and you take a test like ADA does. That's a good change. People recognize the credentials. I'm a Certified Food Executive of the International Food Service Executives.

I like to provide child nutrition training and assist in what meets the needs of my audience. I try to identify the needs, job responsibilities, and tailor accordingly. If I am training managers and there are no directors in the group then I tailor the material to managers' needs. If I am training directors then I tailor the presentation to their needs. Healthy Edge is the SNA ten-hour nutrition-based course that meets nutrition requirements for certification. It was developed the year after I was president, and the original video was filmed in my district. The script has been modified to meet the new revised Dietary Guidelines. In the latest rewrite the script links the competencies to Keys to Excellence.

MJ: Is there anything else you'd like to add.

BL: I think that about covers it.

MJ: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.