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Becki Schreiber Oral History

Becki Schreiber has worked in many different food and nutrition management arenas that include schools, restaurants, hospitals, long term care, and businesses. She has also taught at the college level.

She received a Bachelor's degree in Food, Nutrition and Institution Administration from the University of Maryland and a Master of Adult and Occupational Education from the University of New Hampshire.

Becki has worked or consulted in over 40 kitchens and in one large edible school garden during her 40-year career. She was Director of School Nutrition for 15 years in the state of Maine, becoming a passionate advocate for child nutrition.

Following retirement, Becki began working as a consultant trainer for the Institute of Child Nutrition.

JB: I'm Jeffrey Boyce and it is January 13, 2016, and I'm here at the Institute of Child Nutrition with Becki Schreiber. Did I get that right Becki?

BS: Yes you did get that right.

JB: Welcome, and thanks for taking the time to talk with me today.

BS: Thank you. I'm honored to be here quite frankly.

JB: Could we begin by you telling me a little bit about yourself, where you were born and where you grew up?

BS: Well let's see. I'm officially a Navy brat. My dad came out of the Naval Academy, so I moved around quite a bit. I was born in Texas, but moved around quite a bit, and lived in Washington, D.C., primarily, lived in New York just a little tiny bit, and then my husband and I escaped to the great state of Maine, where

we lived for thirty years, raised our kids. And now I am semi-retired. I live in Wilmington, North Carolina, by the ocean.

JB: Ok, well you did get around.

BS: I did.

JB: What is your earliest recollection of child nutrition programs? Was there a lunch or breakfast program in your elementary school?

BS: Well, that's a pretty common question that everyone asks in this arena, and my recollection is not much, because I went to parochial schools from kindergarten to eighth grade, and they did not have a school lunch. The only thing I remember is my mother packed my lunch. I remember a lot of tuna fish sandwiches, and an apple of course. And I'm sure they sold milk – I'm assuming they did. What I do remember is, I guess their big a-la-carte money maker was ice cream sandwiches. And I remember that was really quite a treat. I remember vividly not wanting that ice cream sandwich to end. When I attended high school it was a public high school, and honestly, even though I went to the cafeteria to eat, I never got involved with going into the kitchen through the serving line, so honestly I have no idea. I don't have a recollection.

JB: Ok. After high school where did you study? Where did you go to college?

BS: Well, I started at East Carolina, but I ended up in the University of Maryland. I have a bachelor of science in food, nutrition, and institution administration. Later on in life I was working in long-term care and I had hired some diet techs to be directors, and I was so impressed with them that I decided to go back to school and get my diet tech registration, and so I then got an associate's and sat for that exam. And then I got the fever while I was doing this, all while I was having kids by the way, and decided to go to graduate school. And I went to the University of New Hampshire and got a master's in adult and occupational education, along with my registration as an RD, and that was back when I was about fifty years old.

JB: Was the first thing you said a diet tech?

BS: Yes. My first credential was a diet tech, which is like a two-year – instead of being a registered dietitian you're diet tech registered.

JB: Ok. And then you went on and eventually got the RD?

BS: That's correct, while in grad school I did.

JB: Tell me about your career path. What did you do right out of college?

BS: Well that's funny. When I was first studying in under grad I decided I wanted to go into social work because I was one of those who wanted to join the Peace Corps and save the world. But my father convinced me at the time, that I would make no money whatsoever, that I shouldn't be a social worker. So I studied home economics because back in the day the reason you went to college was to make sure that you met an intelligent man and would have smart babies. But I really took to the nutrition. I was fascinated with that subject, and the anatomy and physiology. So while I was in college I got a summer job as a diet aid in a hospital. And it was quite an awakening. Well I guess I did a good job, because while I was in college they hired me as an assistant director, which really meant that I was the supervisor on weekends and in the evening times. And that was my first take into food service. Actually by the time I left there I decided that I never wanted to go into supervision at all. I never wanted to be a manager. It felt like quite a headache, but that was my first introduction to food service. Throughout my career – I counted one time – I have worked in about forty kitchens in my lifetime, and whether I've been the cook, or whether I designed the kitchen, or whether I've consulted for them, or whether I was the manager there, but I thought about in the forty years I've actually worked in forty kitchens. And I started out of course in the hospital.

JB: Was that in New Hampshire?

BS: No. That was back in Maryland, around Washington, D.C. And then I worked in restaurants. I've washed a lot of dishes and I've waited on a lot of tables while I was in college. And then I got hired by Marriott. I worked for Marriott for quite a long time.

JB: What were you doing for them?

BS: Well, I was hired as the food standards manager for the Farrell's Ice Cream Parlour, of which I was in charge of thirty-three restaurants on the East Coast, I was the one that was doing the training and also doing the auditing, making sure the restaurants were in compliance. The problem with that job – just a little side note – is that because I was checking out the food standards of this ice cream parlour I was always having ice cream sundaes. Early on in my career I gained quite a bit of weight and had to realize that 'Nope, this is not going to work out so well.' So I quickly became very disciplined that even though I could pretty much have free food throughout my lifetime, being in the food business, I learned not to eat quite so much. I got that under control earlier in my career. And while I was working at the Marriott I worked in a hospital, and the vice-president came along and was talking to me about long-term care, and I said, "No, I never, ever want to work in a nursing home." Well, then he came along and gave me an offer I couldn't refuse. And I ended up working in long-term care, which was really nice. It was a real nice window into serving elderly populations, and I did enjoy that.

JB: Are there special dietary or nutrition challenges or requirements for the elderly?

BS: Well, in some ways they're easier, although they can be challenging. In some ways I don't think they're quite as picky as children are in this generation. Most folks at that age are of the generation that they're very grateful to have the food that they have been raised with. That was really quite lovely I think.

JB: It must have been rewarding also.

BS: It was very rewarding. And when you think of folks that live in long-term care, that's one of the arenas that has a bad image, and honestly there are a lot of very caring people that work in long-term care. And the residents, they're not dead yet. They really can be quite lively, interested, intelligent, and they have a lot of information to share, so it was quite rewarding. Would you like to hear a little story that happened to me when I worked there? I just thought of it.

JB: Sure.

BS: It was in Washington, D.C., and I had three assistant managers. I was the director. It was a three hundred bed facility. One hundred of the residents lived in what you would think of as a nursing home, but about two hundred residents would come down to the central dining room for their meals three times a day. And unlike Washington we had three feet of snow descend on the wee hours of a Monday morning. And as I set the scene, one of my assistant managers who was the opening manager at six was on vacation or whatever in New York. And the other two lived at quite a commute to get into the facility. So being the good director I was, and having that what we call professional integrity, I put my boots on and said, "Well, I've got to get to work. I have to be there even though things are closed." So I went out to my car. I was very young. I had a little, old Volkswagen which was much shorter than the snow at this point. First I called the police and said, "You need to get me. I need to serve breakfast to the folks." And they said, "Well honey, all the police are in the ditch. Everyone can't get there." Anyway, long story short, I ended up hiking in with some fellow with a four-wheeler from the 7-11 store. And we actually picked up the administrator on the way because he was doing the same thing. We hiked in to the facility and I ended up living there for three days and did not leave. Communication outside of the facility was difficult because all of the telephone lines were down, and of course this is before cellphones. But what was one of the nicest experiences was that I had a lot of eighty year olds and eighty-five year old residents helping me to serve them meals and set the tables. And I had a couple of teenage kids that made it in who became instant supervisors. And they were quite taken with themselves because they really did come through. But it was a three day adventure and it was really quite something. It was something to remember always.

JB: Quite a story.

BS: Yes.

JB: So after the long-term care experience where did you go from there?

BS: So after the long-term care experience, which I will say helped me out quite a bit with schools because of the menu cycling, etc., my husband and I moved to New York. We had gotten married and we moved to New York and I went back

into the hospital division because Marriott had a place for me. But then I ended up in the business and industry division, which meant I worked at like Xerox Corporation in the executive dining rooms. And that was a lot of fun, but it wasn't quite the Peace Corps. I was looking at caviar omelets for the VIPs, and it just wasn't it for me. But I did get a lot of business experience that way with that. But then my husband and I decided to escape to Maine. He had a career opportunity and we ended up in Maine. First we went to the northern part, which that's a whole other conversation. And after two years we came down to a town called Yarmouth, Maine, right outside of Portland, and by that time I did have kids so I stayed home a little bit and did a little business with my husband until they were about five years old. And then I decided to go to work. We needed some money, and there was a long-term care company, and they had five homes in the state of Maine – very reputable organization, wonderful owners, very caring and real advocates for the elderly. And they were building a fifth home. It was about a three hundred bed facility. And the owner – I went to talk to him because my husband knew him, because he was in healthcare. And I went to talk to him, not thinking that I really wanted the job. The facility was being built and the kitchen was literally still in sawdust, and they were just putting some equipment in, and he asked me, "Can you just take care of that thing? Can you just do that nutrition program for me?" Well anyway, I must have had a moment or something, and I agreed that I would do it. And so I had the opportunity to develop this brand new department from the ground up. And of course I wasn't working for Marriott anymore. I was really on my own and it was quite a learning experience, very challenging, but I had the opportunity to build a program from the ground up my way, and that was really a great experience. And then I stepped out and I was the administrator for all the homes for the nutrition programs. And that was really nice. I really enjoyed that.

JB: What were some of your duties in that position? Did you do the menu planning, training?

BS: I did everything actually, because first of all the owner and the administrators didn't really know anything about food and nutrition. One of my favorite parts about that job was I realized – that's when I learned about diet techs and that's

when I started going back to school, because I wanted to keep up with the folks that I was working with, and I was very impressed by their knowledge. But one of the joys of that position was not only again the elderly, because they can really be a wonderful population to befriend and talk with and learn from, but I enjoyed the teamwork experience that I had. I was able to work with these fine directors and assistant directors, and we all did things like form committees. We had a recipe committee and we had a sanitation committee and we had all kinds of different things that we were working on, purchasing committee, and each one of those directors and assistant directors and their staff worked on these for the benefit of everyone. And I could see that they really enjoyed it because it was very empowering for them to be recognized that they had something to bring to the table to contribute. And that was one of my favorite times. I really enjoyed that very much.

JB: Did you pull people from each of the five homes for the committees, or how did that work?

BS: Yes I did. And actually it was the first time they ever really met each other. Before that they didn't work together. So it was almost as if we were our own little food service company serving the elderly homes. So it was really a great experience.

JB: What would a recipe committee do?

BS: Well, oh my goodness, have you got an hour?

JB: As long as you want.

BS: Recipe committee – well I think first of all it was a lot of testing, and of course they had to design the recipe card. Back then we didn't have computers like we do now, so they would have to decide on logo, and what exactly did you need in a recipe, and what kinds of quantities were you going to include, and just how good is it? And of course there was a lot of competition to get your recipe submitted to this recipe committee, because everybody wanted their mac & cheese to be the one selected. So actually it was one of the respected committees within the group. And that was interesting because everyone swears by their own recipe,

that theirs is better than anything. I had children by then. They were almost middle school I would say. This was back in around 1990. And I decided that I – I had sort of given up the Peace Corps, thinking I'll save that for when I'm retired.

JB: It's a great experience. I'm an RPCV[Returned Peace Corps Volunteer].

BS: Are you really? Oh my goodness.

JB: Ukraine 1998 – 2000.

BS: Oh, I'm envious, all my respect, all my respect. So after I had gone to school and decided that I wanted to get my two-year diet tech, that was great, but I really got the fever. I love academia, because for me it really frames the knowledge for me, and it helps me figure it out before I can dive in. And it helps me not feel quite so overwhelmed about all the things that I should possibly know, so I enjoyed going to classes. And all my life I have been asked, "Well, are you the registered dietitian?" And I would say, "No, I'm not." And then I'd feel like well, doesn't my opinion count? Because you know, I'd been in healthcare for so long, and I may have hired the registered dietitians to work in our facilities for us as consultants, but no, I was never the registered dietitian. So probably for prestige reasons, but several others, I decided to leave the long-term care industry and go back to graduate school. And there was a wonderful program at the University of New Hampshire. There was a great professor, Dr. Janson-Sand. Colette Janson-Sand was a phenomenal mentor for me. And so I commuted to the University of New Hampshire from Yarmouth, Maine. It only took me an hour and fifteen minutes, counting the walk across campus to go to classes. And I did that for several years. They had a wonderful program, masters of adult ant occupational training, which is something that I enjoy doing is training. And while I was doing that I became a faculty member at the community college, teaching nutrition to the diet tech students, while I was doing that. And also I had an opportunity to teach at UNH because I got some grad assistantships too. So I did that, and then I did an internship to become a registered dietitian. While I was in graduate school I decided, you know what, if I'm going to focus on doing some good I would prefer to work with the younger generation, and to invest my energy into helping the younger generation be a healthy one. And my children

were also in middle school and I kept thinking well if I work in schools this would be better for me as a mother, because I was a full-time mother even though I was doing all these other gazillion things. I always thought that that came first, so that's what I decided to do. I wanted to be working in schools, and while I was at the end of my UNH experience I got my resume together and I went into the superintendent of our local school district and said, "By the way, if you're ever looking for anyone this is what I would like to do." And he said, "Well that's great. We're not looking for anyone." And then about six months later they were. And I'm very fortunate. I ended up working for a school district and I was there for fifteen years.

JB: In Maine.

BS: In Maine. And it was the same school district as my children. I lived in this community where I worked. I could bicycle to work or walk to work if I really wanted to. I quit hearing the news on the radio because my commute was so short.

JB: Tell me about your position there. Were you in the same position all fifteen years?

BS: Yes. I worked as a director of school nutrition.

JB: How many schools did you have?

BS: There were only four schools. The school district was probably one of the best school districts in the state. There were a lot of professionals that would move there. It was just outside of Portland and it was a wonderful community. People were excited about the schools. They were there for their children. They really wanted to invest in the next generation. It was a low free and reduced district. I believe when I started there, it was only five percent free and reduced, which is I think oftentimes unheard of. But when I left, because of economic times and of course because we tried to get as much participation as we could, it was up to about ten or twelve percent by the time I left. I have to say that working in school nutrition – this was my favorite job of all time. I felt like I was coming home. It was quite a meaningful job, very challenging. People say that, you know you've

heard that, “Oh well, when I retire I’m going to go work in school lunch.” They have NO IDEA!

JB: Do you remember what a full priced meal was at that time?

BS: Let’s see, I believe that when I started there a full priced meal was two dollars. And we brought it up to – by the time I left it was three dollars. And like I said, we had a lot of full paying members. We had quite some experienced consumers in our town, so we didn’t have the same kind of competition that many other districts had that had high free and reduced.

JB: Anything special about Maine regarding child nutrition, special dishes, of food likes or dislikes, or anything like that?

BS: Well, if you were serving the elderly, going back to them, you have to have baked beans and hotdogs on Saturday. If you don’t you’re in trouble. And you always have to have fish on Friday. But the children weren’t quite that picky, although we did honor the fish on Friday at option. Of course you know we’re famous for lobster up in there. I did have a few children that would ask me over the years, “Mrs. Schreiber, when I graduate will you serve lobster?” Of course I would always promise the world to them, but honestly I did not come through. I think one of my favorite things about working there also was, I said forty kitchens, and then I should add one very large edible schoolyard.

JB: Oh, you had a school garden?

BS: I did. I affectionately refer to it as the farm. It was really large. I guess it was after I had been there about ten years. Let’s see, I retired from there I think 2013, and I’d been there fifteen years, so I think it was about 2008. Now this was a very educated community. The wellness policy came about; it was the first time the wellness policy came out, so there was a committee, and I had parents in the room. And I’m pretty good at just keeping my head down and trying to do my job, and not get involved with too much politicking or anything about that. So I kind of just stayed out of the way and tried to do the best thing we could. And the wellness policy happened, and all of a sudden I was sitting at the table with my superintendent and my business manager and parents and teacher

representatives, and they all wanted to know, well, what is the school nutrition about? Well boom, that was my cue, and I took the opportunity through that committee to educate them, who educated others, to say well, this is what we do. I was able to take an inventory. Wait a minute. What have we changed in the last five years since I've been here? And it was really an awakening, and it was also very impressive for the superintendents and the parents to get on board with like well, I guess you all are not the old school lunch and just checking off meals. As you know, school lunch has changed dramatically over the years. And I remember in that wellness policy getting quite a lot of support for whatever I wanted to do in terms of health and in terms of nutrition. So I read this book from Alice Waters – I think that's who it is in Berkeley -

JB: Chez Panisse.

BS: - and their edible schoolyard. Well I got my danders up a little bit and I thought you know what, whatever they can do in Berkeley we can do it in Maine better, give or take a few growing seasons, because it was a little challenging. So I met up with four women that were parents, that were actually in the school system, of different ages, and they were master gardeners out of the Cooperative Extension Program. And we all met together one day and that's when the dream started. We walked the properties of the schools and we came up with a wonderful solution. There was some land on the elementary school campus. And long story short we ended up inventing, creating, designing, managing a pretty significant – I think it was at least 6,000 square feet. I keep thinking it was almost a quarter of an acre, but it couldn't possibly have been, but it was a very large garden. And it was organic, and these women and myself – I don't even want to tell you how many hours I put into this. I thought I had lost my mind at one point and thought I have become a farmer. That's it. I'm not even a dietitian anymore. I'm just a farmer. But I was very committed to this.

JB: What were some of the crops that you grew?

BS: Well first of all it was lovely. I have some drawings of it. One of the master gardeners was also a second language teacher and she was a very good artist, and she made sure that when we designed it we put a pathway going through the

garden, a grassed pathway. And also there was a round area where we ended up putting benches. And in that garden we grew everything from carrots to cucumbers – what’s that edible flower that you can grow?

JB: Nasturtiums?

BS: Yes. We grew those a few years and had the first graders eat them. That was fun. But we had everything from – it was primarily tomatoes and carrots and onions and cabbages, we did a lot of cabbage. Now we have a short growing season in Maine so it was a little challenging. We were harvesting by October and one year we harvested in November, the day before a huge snowstorm. So we just barely got it out of the ground. But we had a variety. One of the things that I had to do was make sure that we had enough of a yield that we could use. I had to explain to master gardeners that even though they wanted to grow fifty things because they were really excited, I said, “I have a thousand kids to feed in this school, so one cucumber’s not going to do it. So if we’re going to grow cucumbers, we’re going to have to grow cucumbers.”

JB: Lots of them.

BS: Yes. So there was a lot of planning involved.

JB: Who did the actual labor? Did the students work in the garden?

BS: We involved everyone in the community quite honestly. I had started this group up at the high school called SNAC – Student Nutrition Advisory Council – and through them and the student council I was able to start a garden following at the high school. And these high school students would come down and do some work. We got some grants to have a summer apprentice, which would have to be a junior in high school, and they would come down. We got the summer camp kids to come help. Girl Scouts came in. Eventually teachers took over some of the plots, which was wonderful, themselves, and said, “We will just take over one plot.” We had divided it up. One year I had a gentleman that was working on his Eagle Scout project and so he ended up building four very large compost bins, one for each one of the schools. We had the Rotary Club help us out. There was a community garden in town and those folks came over and helped us. You name it,

they worked. We had a lot of Special Ed kids that the teachers would like to bring them over each day. The Gifted and Talented also had projects going on. You name it, they were there. Sometimes the third grade would sponsor something and they would do it.

JB: Sounds like great community outreach.

BS: It was wonderful. It was really wonderful. I think it was one of my favorite experiences in my career.

JB: What was a typical day like while you were a director, or is there such a thing?

BS: You know, someone asked me that, and honestly I am stumped. I can't tell you what a typical day is. I do know that I always started my day with my employees, and made sure I greeted them. I learned that from a Marriott friend of mine – a mentor – be sure to say Good Morning to all of your employees before you start. And over the years my typical day would change, because in the beginning I was the one that was placing all of the milk orders, bread orders. Folks didn't know how to place orders in any of the schools. It was a little crazy. So I did a lot of apron on, hands on experiences. My first office was practically on a serving line at the middle school. And I said, "I have to get off this. I can't think in here." So I moved to the elementary school. We gutted a small storeroom, and I shared it with the manager down there. And then we renovated at the high school. We had a brand new kitchen, we designed a kitchen up there and I actually was promoted to get finally my own office. And if I have any advice to give to a school nutrition director, make sure you find a space, whether it's your office all the time or just some of the time, make sure you get a space where you can have a confidential conversation with folks. But my typical day really changed. My managers grew significantly while I was there, and they learned to place orders and actually make decisions themselves, so I didn't have to make all the decisions all day long.

JB: Were you active in the state association, the Maine Child Nutrition Association?

BS: I was. I was on the board for quite a while and actually that's how I found out about the Institute, because eventually, while volunteering on that board, I became the education chair. I think it was just because they needed somebody and I was a newbie and they said, "Oh, let's just pick Becki. She's a newbie." And because my master's is in training I thought it was something I would really enjoy, and so I was the person that was heading up the team to figure out what kind of training we needed in Maine, and so that's how I found the Institute at the time. And we had some folks come up to Maine several times to do some trainings, and they were so incredible, and that's how I learned about the Institute.

JB: Good to hear.

BS: I had a lot of respect, I did.

JB: What were some of the biggest changes you saw in child nutrition over those fifteen years?

BS: It's kind of like you see the pendulum swinging to me. Maybe I've been around a long time, and even though I've been in food service for forty years, I've really only been in school nutrition for fifteen, eighteen if you count my retirement years. What I remember specifically is that before my day food was old-fashioned. I can speak for my own district. I'm not sure it was very good. It was a little mystery meat-ish. We all know that there was quite an image that came with the school cafeteria. And what I saw change was that because all of a sudden the money was not there, and it was not funded very well, a lot of schools really relied on a-la-carte for their revenue. And so by the time I got into the schools there was a lot of junk. Sorry to say it like that, but I think there was a lot of junk. But in terms of junk, fortunately we have had so advocacy and some legislation, and now you see the pendulum going the other way, and our meals are starting to get healthy. Some of us got rid of the junk on our own, but some of us are getting rid of the junk because now they have to. And I think the biggest changes - it's just healthier and healthier. And I think it's the best deal in town. It's just a great meal, and so healthy that I think we can eat better at school than we can oftentimes at home, and certainly better than what's across the street.

JB: Did you do much scratch cooking in your district?

BS: Actually we did, but when I came in I realized that just like we've lost a generation of gardeners we have also lost a generation of cooks, and I found that challenging because I realized, stepping back, that my staff didn't know how to cook. And I think oftentimes school nutrition attracts women that may not think they have skills to do something specifically outside of what they've done at home, so those that like to cook will often say, "Well, I can cook. Let me work in the school nutrition." But even those folks that came to work in school nutrition quickly ended up heating up the chicken patties. And I think that after so many years of that, many of the staff in the kitchen didn't know how to cook. And it is a slow, but I think worthwhile, process for us to get back to what I say as a dietitian, eat a variety of foods. It's a pretty routine statement you hear RDs say. But I'm a firm believer that we need to get back to eating a variety of real foods and safe foods. And I think that honestly is where we are going with the school nutrition now and I'm proud of that. I think it's quite a lot of work and it takes more labor and it takes some education and training for our staff. I think someone asked me about what are the challenges. I think that would be one of them, and I think that money is one of the biggest challenges, that we should fund the program for what we want. We all talk about healthy food but I think we should also be reimbursed for what it's really worth.

JB: What would you consider your most significant contribution to child nutrition over those years?

BS: Well, you know, I'll give you a story about the garden. I'll give you just a few stories if that's alright.

JB: Sure.

BS: One was about the children and why I was there – my Peace Corps experience through child nutrition – is an experience I had with third-graders out in the garden harvesting carrots one day. I, one by one, had taken each classroom and explained to them I needed help harvesting the carrots. And they were very excited about that – and most of those kids thought carrots came from the

grocery store. And they thought they were all one specific shape, all very uniform. Food education to me is pretty important, particularly for this generation coming up, because they don't have a garden out back or they didn't come from a farming environment. I remember it was a lesson in diversity quite frankly. I had explained to the kids that not all carrots look alike. It's just like you and your faces and your hair and your color of your skin. You're all different. And that's the way carrots are too. But they're even funny about it. They have two legs and three legs, or maybe they're short and fat or maybe they're long and skinny, but they're all going to be different. Well they looked at me like I was an alien; I didn't know what I was talking about, because the only carrots they had seen were in the grocery store. So lo and behold I go to the act and say, "On the count of three everybody pull their carrot up." Well, the expressions. If I heard one 'WHOA' I must have heard fifty. It was a spiritual experience quite frankly, and it was one I will always remember, because what it said to me was, "Yea, I think we're doing the right thing." I think this is what we need more of. We need our children to know where food comes from, so that they cannot only be healthy, but they can be wise consumers. I think my other very fond memory is probably one of the most joys in my career, and that was my employees. I had a thing for the primarily women that worked in the departments that I worked in. And I found there were many that – I would like to think that I worked through empowerment. It was really gratifying to watch my employees grow and learn and become empowered and make decisions and start to believe in themselves more. That to me was I think one of the things that really kept me going in a tough job and a tough business. I had a really fun experience. I had a most fun time when I had been there for a couple of years and I had gone to my first School Nutrition Association Annual Meeting that year in St. Louis, which was great because I'm very academic. I sign up for all those workshops. While I was there though I noticed that thousands of employees were there, the staff, and I thought, "Well, where are my employees? They're not here, and this would be so great for them so they could see the big picture, and wouldn't they have fun." So I came home and I was very pumped up about it. And I went to the superintendent and said, "Listen", you know it's always good to have data, you always want to keep the data, and I explained to him what percent we were spending on training, which was not

much at the time, and I said, “When is the last time that my employees really had some training?” So he agreed and I put in a proposal and the school board agreed to pay the registration for the next annual conference, which was going to be in Nashville, which was kind of a big draw for my employees. So I presented this to my employees at the time, and they all got very excited. And so what they did was we raised money. They all raised money to go.

JB: Bake sales?

BS: They had garage sales, raised money, they saved their money, and we only got a few hotel rooms.

JB: Camping out?

BS: Yes, everybody camped out. There were probably five to a room, but they all ended up going to Nashville with me. It was quite a trip. And while we were on the plane, I thought about it, and I had one very nervous employee. She’s never been on a plane in her life. And I can count on one hand; probably five of them had never left their children at home alone. So this was HUGE. Well that trip, needless to say the conference was great, they had a great time, and there was a lot of bonding with my team, and by the time we got back to Maine they were my team. We were a team. And I think they got the big picture. And what was really wonderful for me was just to watch them as human beings be able to grow.

JB: That’s wonderful.

BS: Yes, it was.

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

BS: Well, first it’s hard work, and it’s not a lot of money, so let’s be clear about that, but you’ll get rewarded in many other ways. I think my advice would be to remember the essence of why you’re there. There’s a lot of form filling out and you go to meetings and it’s all about how to get the regulations done, but the real reason you are there is for the children in the next generation, and don’t forget it. The other advice, without a doubt, is to always thank your employees and give

them the credit. And don't let a day go by without thanking them. You may not be able to go up to physically each one of them, but be sure you thank them and always give them the credit, because as a director you can't accomplish anything without the human beings and the team that works in the kitchens for you.

JB: Anything else you'd like to add?

BS: I don't think so. I think I'm good. I'm very grateful to be here and I feel a little honored to be interviewed.

JB: Well we're honored to have you participate.

BS: I've had a great career and my other advice is get as much training as you can. It really helps.

JB: Well thank you for sharing with me.

BS: Thank you very much.