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Carol W. Shanklin Oral History

Carol W. Shanklin, PhD, RD, is professor in the Department of Hotel, Restaurant, Institution Management & Dietetics and Dean of Graduate School at Kansas State University. Carol teaches graduate courses and mentors graduate students' research in the areas of environmental issues, food safety, customer satisfaction, and dietetics and hospitality education. She has collaborated with several graduate students on research projects in child nutrition. Carol has authored or co-authored several articles in the Journal of Child Nutrition Management and the Journal of the American Dietetics Association. She has been active in the School Nutrition Association, the American Dietetics Association, and other professional organizations. She currently serves as Professional Interest Delegate for Research and a member of the research committee for ADA and is on the Advisory Committee for College and University Personnel for SNA. She recently was awarded the University of Delaware Michael D. Olsen Research Achievement Award and in 2001 received the Medallion Award from the American Dietetics Association.

MH: This is Friday, July 24, 2009, and I am here at the NFSMI Archives. I am Melba Hollingsworth and I am the Education and Training Specialist at NFSMI. I am here with Dr. Carol Shanklin from Kansas State University. Would you tell me just a little bit about yourself and where you grew up?

CS: I'm glad to do that Melba. I grew up in west Tennessee, a little town called Dyer, Tennessee, which is about 150 miles from Oxford, Mississippi. I was one of three daughters in my family. We lived in a rural area so we had a lot of experience growing up in growing our own fruits and vegetables. When we got old enough for 4-H we learned about food preservation, so I've been doing things with food for a long time and appreciate that training that my parents provided me. We attended elementary school in our town. We rode the bus because we lived out in the country. We attended elementary school and high school there and throughout this time I was active in 4-H, and in high school also Beta Club and Future Homemakers of America.

MH: What is your earliest recollection of child nutrition programs? Was there a school lunch or breakfast program at your school?

CS: Yes. Back when I was in school we started in first grade. We didn't have kindergarten then. So I remember being in first grade and one of the fun parts was always lunchtime. The ladies in the lunchroom were just fantastic. You could tell they loved their job and they loved the kids. And they were always good about encouraging us to try some of everything. Some of my favorite foods I remember were their homemade rolls, and they did really good on their spaghetti and meat dishes. But again, I can still close my eyes and smell those fresh rolls coming from the oven that they served us. And the friendly smiles; by lunchtime we were pretty hungry, and if we had had a rough morning they were always there to make our day go better.

MH: Tell us about your educational background. What schools did you attend and what degrees did you earn?

CS: OK. For my bachelor's degree I attended the University of Tennessee – Martin, and earned a bachelor's degree in Home Economics Education, which meant I student taught in a town close to my hometown called Trenton, Tennessee. And from my student teaching experience I knew I loved teaching, but also knew that I liked motivated students, and sometimes they weren't quite as motivated as I

wanted in my high school, so I thought, “Okay, if I want to teach, what can I do?”

So with the encouragement of my mentor, Dr. Ann Cook, I attended graduate school in Knoxville, where I had an opportunity to be the graduate teaching assistant, and earned my master’s degree in Food Systems Management. And then the faculty convinced me that I really needed to stay in higher education, so I stayed on for my PhD in Food Systems Administration and Home Economics. From there I went into my academic career and research in school food service.

MH: Where have you been working from that point?

CS: One of the things they did real good at Tennessee is they encouraged us to look at professional credentials, so while I was working on my master’s I met all the requirements to become a Registered Dietitian. Those that I did not have as an undergraduate I took during graduate school, and at that point you could do a TA as part of the experience. But then they had us do public health experience, so I went out into the rural areas to get some public health experience, and then we worked in various healthcare centers. Right after I got my PhD I took my registration exam for an RD so that helped me to look at academic careers for myself. So from Tennessee I went to Texas Tech University and I was there a year

and a half teaching because they offered me a position in January since we had our son that fall after I graduated in August. So I went to Texas Tech and I taught Food Purchasing and courses for the Dietetic students. And then from there I went to Texas Woman's University, where I spent thirteen wonderful years and worked with a lot of outstanding graduate students, including you Melba, and several who really got me involved in child nutrition research. And from Texas Woman's University, then I went to Kansas State University to work with graduate students, be grad program director, and then I got involved in graduate administration and through the years have continued work in mentoring graduate students, even now as Dean of the Graduate School, which I've been in that position since this January.

MH: Would you repeat again how you became involved in child nutrition?

CS: Yes. One of the things that was required of all graduate students at Texas Woman's University was they had to do a thesis. We taught graduate courses both in Dallas and at the Denton campus. So several of my graduates at the Dallas campus were in child nutrition, Arlington, Dallas School District, Birdville School District, and so they wanted to do research projects that were meaningful to

them. And then I had a whole group of Louisiana students that came to either work on their master's or their PhD, as well as some from Mississippi. And so because of their interest in doing research that would impact and help them grow professionally we started a whole series of research related to child nutrition programs; things like solid waste management, waste characterizations in schools, both in Louisiana and Texas, and then I did some later in Kansas. And we did nutrition related projects. We looked at competencies required for professionals; a whole variety of things from the management part of child nutrition programs and nutrition education. So that's how I got involved in that and I had an individual there who – I actually had two food service directors there who were well-known because they were leaders in the state of Texas and got involved in committees. One was Melba Jean Ryan, and she was school food service director for many years in Irving Independent School District, and so when I wanted to learn more about child nutrition, touring facilities to learn so that I would have an understanding of what was going on from an operations perspective, Melba Jean would let me go and observe and work with her. And then Barbara Clark in Arlington Independent School District was the second person that, again, sort of took me under their wing for mentoring to learn about child nutrition. And then of course I had all my mentors who were graduate

students who kept me abreast of what they were doing in their school districts while they were learning research and how to apply research, then I was learning about their day-to-day operations, the challenges they had. So I'd say initially Melba Jean Ryan and Barbara Clark, but then all the students, Melba, Nadine, all the ones that I worked with, all taught me a lot about child nutrition, and then the state department folks also were very good and involved in Texas and Kansas state school food service associations, helped me get a good idea of the complexity of the programs, but how much people enjoy what they do as child nutrition professionals.

MH: So all those positions that you held and all those folks that you worked with really indoctrinated you into child nutrition programs.

CS: Right. And I guess one thing I'd like to add that I forgot to here that I think has had a big impact on me to be asked to do that is when they were exploring the feasibility of having the National Food Service Management Institute, Dr. Jerry Cater, who was at the Department of Education in Mississippi at the time, requested that I work with them in preparing a feasibility study for the National Food Service Management Institute. And this was the summer I was getting ready

to move from TWU to K-State, and I said, “Well, I’ll have to have someone to work with me.” And so Dr. Nina Cross was a doctoral student at that time, so we teamed up and worked together to write the feasibility study that was submitted to the Mississippi Department of Education, so I feel I even learned more about child nutrition. I feel that that was a special opportunity that I was given that has made a difference in the Institute today; and seeing some of the things that Nina and I dreamed about come to fruition, that’s been a highlight of my career as well.

MH: Is there anything different about Kansas in regard to child nutrition programs?

CS: The biggest difference, like many states we have three or four major metropolitan areas, but most of the schools we work with in Kansas are rural schools. They really struggle to be able to have the resources they need to do all the things they want to do to achieve the child nutrition goals. I work with the state department there in training and education. We’ve done research just to help them explore ‘How can we make this work together?’ and then through the efforts of others that have worked within the state they’ve developed co-ops and

things like that to help them. They are very small districts; they don't have the buying capacity and some of those things, so those are some real challenges. They are also finding that they are getting more and more students eligible for free and reduced meals because of the economy. So they are struggling to be able to financially afford this, at the same time meeting the demands and needs of a wider range of students that they are trying to serve. We've had an influx of immigrants from Mexico and different areas to western Kansas to help provide the labor force for our beef industry. So I think they've found a challenge language-wise in being able to recruit; personnel issues are another big area that rural districts are struggling with today.

MH: What has been a typical day during your career, or is there a typical day?

CS: There's really not a typical day. I never know what opportunities or challenges are going to face me because the thing the Graduate School is responsible for is we've got to be responsive to the needs of the 4,000-plus graduate students that we work with. So we never know what problems will be coming from a faculty perspective or a student perspective. And then of course you have your students working on their research, so you never know what questions they're going to be

coming to you with. So I'd say there's not really a typical day, but that keeps the job exciting as well.

MH: Four thousand?

CS: Four thousand graduate students, yes.

MH: What are some of your biggest challenges you are facing?

CS: Just like the child nutrition professionals, having enough resources to do what you need to do for the students. The economy has added to that, but I think that's always a big challenge for higher education – having the means to have fellowships, professional development, travel funds – things like that to support the students so that they have a broad range of educational experiences. So I think that's my biggest challenge now, looking for different sources of revenue to help support graduate education at K-State.

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

CS: I think it's become more demanding. A lot of new challenges, I think they've been positive once they were implemented, but they were real challenges for the child nutrition professionals. The new menu systems that were introduced several years ago, nutrient-based menu planning and things, that was a big challenge for those who had not really sat down and looked at what was the nutrient value of the meals they were serving. But again, they are true professionals, and so they worked with the state department and consultants that really helped them get started on that. And I think that having the requirement for HACCP was another challenge, but I think that's a good one. Today they are all looking at environmental issues they are having to deal with, whether it's water, energy, the cost of those, the availability of those, as well as solid waste. That continues to be, I think, a greater emphasis than it has been, especially the waste management aspect, than it may have been in the past. Again, the quality of the food that they're able to afford to purchase, and the budget; and for different sized districts the availability of motivated and trained staff; individuals they can train to do a good job. We have a different mix of individuals. Schools are losing their long-term child nutrition workforce that have been there. Like the people that I interacted with from elementary through middle school; that was their job, that was the thing that they did for twenty, twenty-five years. The tenure in many of

our positions other than the directors, and some of those, they're not as long-term. They see those as temporary because many of them are part-time. And so there's not, I think, the commitment among the staff, the production and service staff, that we probably saw when you first got started in child nutrition, and today that makes directors wonder, "Am I even going to have enough people to be able to prepare and serve the food today?" So I think those two challenges will continue to be there because of how we have to staff to make our budgets work for us.

MH: So what do you think is your most significant contribution to the field?

CS: I think my graduate students were, and the research we've done together, and the publications that are available that help advance child nutrition as a career field. So I think the opportunity to mentor and engage students, either those who are currently employed as directors or assistant directors, supervisors, to help them do their research in an area that they have a passion for, and then subsequently the publications both in journals, in trade journals and in presentations at the child nutrition association meetings, state meetings. I think that's one of the things, and then I'd go back to being able to be a small part of

the initiation of the National Food Service Management Institute, both here and the research division at Southern Miss. I think those are things that I'm proud of. And then just being able to continue today teaching and training for the National Food Service Management Institute, the state of Kansas; I just love child nutrition professionals. They're like little sponges; they love to learn and want to do a good job. And so I think those things will always be memories for me when I look back to my career and what I've done.

MH: Do you have any special memories that come to mind when you think back over your years in the profession?

CS: I had the opportunity to be the college personnel representative when they were on the section board, and the leaders in the field – Gene White – all the former presidents – Sue Gregg from Kansas, Donna Keizer, that I worked with in the Manhattan School District - those individuals, the networking, the support they gave me as representative, and then knowing that they could call me if they had questions about what's going on in research – those special connections with the leaders in the field, the former graduate students, it's just one of those things, those people connections that link us back to the children that we are serving,

makes it a special part of an academic career that many people don't look at. And then just being able to introduce Dietetics and Hospitality students to opportunities in child nutrition; those things, I think, are important because it keeps the field growing and dynamic.

MH: So what advice would you give someone who is considering child nutrition as a profession today?

CS: I would, one, have them do some shadowing of directors so they can learn about that, and realize they have a challenging career, and why they love what they do. Get them interacting with the students so they can see the reason we have a child nutrition program. I would encourage them to get credentials, child nutrition association, in addition to their academic credentials, and just get involved, even volunteering. Students can even work part-time during the lunch hour and things to get engaged early. And then if they're in their internship or their supervised practice for the coordinated programs, ask to do their management and community rotations in child nutrition programs.

MH: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

CS: I think I'm happy with what I've done. I feel like I've made a little difference in child nutrition and as long as I am working with graduate students and people are interested, I want to stay engaged in child nutrition activities.

MH: Thank you for coming in today.

CS: Thank you for asking me.