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Vivian Pilant

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Interviewee: Vivian Pilant
Interviewer: Virginia Webb
Interview Date: September 20, 2004

VW: My name is Virginia Webb and I am here to interview Dr. Vivian Pilant. We are at the offices of the South Carolina Department of Education in Columbia, South Carolina. Vivian, can you tell us what your earliest recollection of Child Nutrition Programs or School Lunch Programs would be?

VP: Sure. It was the first grade. (laughs) And the National School Lunch Act had been passed. This was 1947 – 1948, because I was born in 1941. So I was a first grader and we had a wonderful School Lunch Program. We had, I think, lunch was a dollar a week, it was like 20 cents a day. And almost every body ate except for some of the poor farm children who didn't have cash, so they would bring food from home. And I remember things like they would have biscuit with fatback on it, or something like that. And, but we all had a wonderful time. We loved school lunch. Fridays were always a special day because that was the day that we would have hamburgers and French fries except what they were then is not like what we have now. It was more like little cut up potatoes that had been passed through a frying pan. But it was still something that we liked.

VW: How did you become involved in the child nutrition profession?

VP: This is kind of a, I guess, a long story, but I'm going to make it short...

VW: We don't mind if you make it longer.

VP: Always in high school I was very interested in music. And I was going to be the world's greatest flute player. And somewhere along the line, marriage happened. And I was married and was in a college town where we had a college and since I hadn't started college I began at the University of Tennessee at Martin. They didn't have a school of music that I could major in, so I decided, I guess I'll do home economics which is something my mother had always been very interested in. I had never taken the first course in home economics because my mother was so strong in it, that I felt I didn't need it. I felt it was more important to get the science because I needed the chemistry and the hard core subjects. And in a sense I am glad that I did that, but at the same time I might have missed some things not having home economics. But I was very interested in food and making good meals. Even as a child I was interested in that when we first, my sister and I first began to do meals for the family. My mother and daddy had just bought a hardware store and they gave us the challenge of having supper every night ready for the family, this family of six, four children and mother and daddy of course. So my sister would do these wonderful elaborate Southern dinners. You know, fried chicken and creamed potatoes or rice, and green peas or, you know just a real nice meal. And then it would come my time and I would be playing outside, you know, skating, or doing something athletic, and I would dash in at the last minute. And my daddy was very frugal and he had bought a whole case of cream corn and a whole case of green peas, and that was in the pantry, so when it came, oh, and a whole case of tuna fish. So every night it

was my time to cook supper, I would rush in and open up two cans of tuna fish, pop them on a saucer, turn them upside down and drain them and plop them on a saucer. Then I would get two cans of green peas and two cans of creamed corn, and I would just heat them up. After about the third time, I began to get bored. Now nobody ever said a word about, you know, "are we having the same old thing again?" And so I started doctoring it up and so that is when I became interested, began to get interested in cooking. So. The home economics part of it, I guess I did get a little more interested later on. But when I finally did wind up in the college, I did take the home economics and the ones that I loved the most were the foods and nutrition. The sewing I had learned. I taught myself. I did learn some things. But the child development courses were wonderful. I never will forget how wonderful they were. By that time I had one child. I learned all the things I hadn't, all the things I'd done wrong. So maybe I should have had home economics before I had the children. Any way. So getting started in School Food Service was interesting because when I finally finished my four year degree we had just gotten the vocational home economics curriculum at the University of Tennessee at Martin and every thing that we had was modeled exactly like the one at Knoxville so that any course I took at the University of Tennessee at Martin would transfer to Knoxville. And so I had, I took as many food courses as I could, which was not very many, and mine was more of a general home economics with a vocational focus in the end. When I got out there was, if I was going to work I was either going to have to be a home economics teacher or maybe work for a, an electrical co-op, or work in I guess something that would have to do with consumers and family use, family services. But then all of a sudden there was this school lunch program that was being looking, they were beginning to look for someone to head up a county in west Tennessee and there were two women who were very instrumental in trying to get this established in west Tennessee. One of them was Louise Sublette and she was a good friend of one of the professors there at University of Tennessee at Martin. And they knew my interest in food and all that I'd had with home economics and they felt that I would be a really good candidate for this new position that they hoped to create. And this new position was one that was being created in several counties in Tennessee and probably some in other counties in other states. But it was the result of the Title 1 program of 1965. That program was designed to help the disadvantaged children of America in learning disabilities or education or in some cases, in cases of just pure lack of food or hunger. And so our whole, my whole role was to help implement the nutrition part of the Title 1 program in Weakley (sp?) county schools. And my job, and I knew about the job six months before the job was finally open, came open. And it was like I had to wait for like six or seven months before the job could open up. And I didn't have any other job. So I waited patiently, and got the job. And it was February 1966 and I was the brand new school lunchroom director. My title was Director Of School Food Services And Nutrition Education. Because we were very concerned about nutrition education. And some of the very earliest experiences were that because I was not the only one who was new to my position and there had never been a food service supervisor or director in that county, they had several who were also new at the same time and they brought us together monthly to give us the basic grounding that we needed. And I never will forget Louise Sublette saying, "You may not have had the experience in School Food Services but you had a good college background I know in all the basic subjects and you will do well." And I guess she was right.

VW: Yes. Absolutely.

VP: So that is how I got started in School Lunch. I could give you a history of why that happened if you wanted at another point, but it primarily came out of the Southern States Work Conferences where every summer the food service directors would get together with the superintendents and they would for two weeks out of the summer months they would work on developing standards and what kinds of things we should be doing in education and School Food Service was a vital part of that. And it was at that conference that they carved out what would they do if they had access to some of the Title 1 funding. Primarily what we were doing with school lunches, we started the school breakfast program before there was a school breakfast program. We had children identified in our schools in west Tennessee and in Weakley (sp?) county that had what I guess you would call them economically disadvantaged children which means that not they were needy. We didn't have a school lunch program then, we had special funding that was targeted to schools where they had more of the poor children but nothing specifically like we have today where you have your free and reduced priced meals. It was not until 1970 that that happened. So what we did is we tried to provide free meals, lunches and breakfasts to these children in those schools and it was pre-integration for that particular county. We integrated the fall of 1966 so in February they were segregated. And I went to one-room schoolhouses or two-room schoolhouses and I did diet recalls of children to find out what they had had to eat. The public health nutritionist had trained me into doing that and I had gone and done a home visit when she demonstrated how to do it and then let me do it myself. But it was very very interesting was we were asking the children what they had eat before they came to school that day and then of course after they got to school any thing that they'd had to eat or what they brought from home. And so we basically documented that there really was a need and there was some of the children that maybe hadn't gotten any thing to eat or had been with a grandmother the night before and so they ate whatever was in the house. But it was very obvious very clear to me quickly that this was a very needed program and that we fulfilled a very needed service for children.

VW: There were hungry children.

VP: There were hungry children. There sure was. And it seemed to me like some of the schools would have the targeted money for low-income children. They would try to take care of the neediest of the needy. And for those children they did try to give them a free meal and for others they would charge a fee for their meal and they still were not serving every body. But when we started the new program, every body ate. That was such a tremendous difference. And we even had children bringing their brothers and sisters from home and our participation, not participation but the average day attendance increased over a hundred percent so we brought them to school to eat, or they would come to school to eat.

VW: Well, you've kind of touched on this, but can you tell us about individuals who served as your mentors, who were influential in directing you in this field?

VP: Well, without out a question, Louise Sublette. Do you want to pause it?

VW: Was there someone a mentor who was influential in directing you in child nutrition?

VP: Well, there's no question about that. That was Louise Sublette who was my, who was a state supervisor of School Food Services. And she had part of west Tennessee and I was the part that she had. She and Mary Louise, what was Mary Louise's last name? (pause)

VW: That's alright, you can think of it later. It will come to you.

VP: Okay. But Louise, Louise, there were the two of them that worked together. Mary Louise was from little bit further south. Louise lived in Jackson, Tennessee, and I lived in Martin which was due north from there.

VW: And you mentioned she knew your professor?

VP: Yes.

VW: and that was how you made that connection?

VP: She was very good friends with Mary Ida Flowers (sp?) who was professor of foods at University of Tennessee at Martin.

VW: And did you stay in touch with her?

VP: I always, if I ever got ready to make a life change, Louise was always there. If I got ready to interview for a job or needed a reference, Louise was always there. If I wanted to make a life change, Louise was always there. She on more than one occasion came to my rescue and helped me make some good decisions in life. One was to go to graduate school.

VW: That leads into my next question. Would you tell us a little about your educational background and how that prepared you for child nutrition programs?

VP: Well, I have mentioned pretty well the experience of home economics at the University of Tennessee at Martin. After I became Director of School Food Service and Nutrition, the University of Tennessee in Knoxville started offering some short courses. And I made a beeline for Knoxville for these short courses. One of them was quantity food purchasing, and since I had never done any quantity food purchasing and we didn't have that in the curriculum at the University of Tennessee at Martin because it was so small. And I took it and I went back to Martin and I began to do some centralized purchasing and it was interesting. And I made some big decisions about what kinds of things schools should be having. We did centralized menus which had never been done in that county. So we did centralized menus and centralized purchasing. Well it took well in

those schools that were doing a good job and in those that weren't doing such a good job they still wanted to do things their same old way. But it was an interesting process.

VW: And, then your short courses, did they...?

VP: Well, I did take some other short courses and along the way. I don't remember exactly. One was a National School Lunch Program and it was a special subjects course and it was really fascinating because we actually went over the National School Lunch Act and read from the regulations themselves so that was very beneficial and it was a good adjunct to what I was already learning through these once a month meetings that we had with the west Tennessee supervisors. I think we also in the state of Tennessee, the state director at that time was Lawrence Bartlett and we had state supervisors meetings where we would go to Nashville or Knoxville or Memphis or some place and we had people from all over the state would come together. I really learned a lot from those, too, and they were very fascinating. I think the first time I ever had capers, we had gone to Knoxville to a supervisors meeting and as a special treat they put us on the bus and carried us up to Gatlinburg, and that was back when Gatlinburg was really a nice little village and had some really nice eating places. We had this one salad, on this old restaurant and it was pretty, probably one of the best ones known at the time, and they had capers on the salad. Louise Sublette had wanted to make sure we all knew what they were.

VW: From there obviously you went on and got your masters.

VP: After two and a half years there, I had a family situation that made me realize that I needed to do something else. I got a scholarship and went to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, this time, and this was like going to the big city. I got a graduate assistantship and that was very very interesting that process, too, but I was accepted, I got the graduate assistantship, I got the scholarship, and I carried my two children and my husband to Knoxville with me. I did a little visit. This was in the spring of '68, did a visit at the University of Tennessee at the Human Ecology it is called now, back then it was Home Economics. The head of the department asked me, well have you got your housing all settled and situated? And I said, well I applied for university housing for married students but they wrote me a letter back and said that because my husband wasn't the one enrolled that I wasn't eligible for married student housing. And so this department head got on the phone to Dean Odom who was the dean of the college. She said, Dean Odom wants to see you in her office right now. So I went down to her office and she said, we have a problem with this. This was the Civil Rights law of 1964 that was passed and this should not be happening. So she calls up the vice president of the university that was in charge of housing, and she describes to him that she has a graduate student sitting here and that she had been told, and just what I had told her, that she is not eligible for married student housing. And she said, oh, that has changed now. Oh. And this changed when? And she is to come over there right now and make applications? Well, needless to say after she got off the phone, she said I want you to go back home and write a letter immediately to them and explain the situation and how we got to this point and right now you have to go over there immediately and sign up and get in your own home, married

student housing. And I did and the rest is history. We got in the student. But you don't realize how much home economics and the people who have been in the field for all these years have fought for women's rights and any body whose come along since then is sort of a Johnny-come-lately. We were the original ones.

VW: So then you...

VP: I spent two years working on my master's degree. This was in food science, primarily in institution management with minors in food science and nutrition. So I had courses in all of those subjects and I absolutely loved it. I thought I had, I thought it was the most wonderful place, being in a big university. Because I had been in a small university and it is a different environment and a different atmosphere. And so I spent, the second year I was there I actually worked for another project that was a seafood project, I believe it was a national seafood fisheries project where we were developing school lunch recipes for school lunch using fish. I was very involved in that and we got, was involved in helping test for those recipes, and then taking them out on-site. First of all developing the recipes and then taking them out into the schools and actually trying them on the students and that was a real adventure. So 1970 comes along and I've graduated and I am looking, I really wanted to work in a large city because I had been exposed to some very interesting people, Gertrude Applebaum was number one. I had met her when I was a supervisor probably in 1966, 67, and was fascinated by her. But she was invited to come to the University of Tennessee as part of a program that USDA sponsored on trying to improve the management of the School Lunch Program, the school meal programs. I guess it was the National School Lunch Program, no, Child Nutrition, that is what it was then. And we had such an illustrious board that came in to help plan this. And I was just a graduate student. I got to wait on them and provide the coffee and make sure they had every thing they wanted to eat. And that was my privilege because that was my subject, because that is where I had come from. And that is when I first met Josephine Martin who was the, I believe she was the state director of Georgia at the time. I was so impressed meeting Josephine Martin. They had some one from the Washington office, USDA in Washington, and I was part of the meeting waiting tables, or waiting on them while they made their big plans for having this conference. And then as a graduate assistant I was able to help get the whole conferences underway. They did two, one the first year and one the second year. But Gertrude Applebaum came and made this wonderful presentation about centralization. Of course, I had courses on design and facility design. I was just so enthralled with what all she had taught, that I wanted to go to a major city. I wanted to be like one of those people that had worked in these big places and done these wonderful things. So when I first started interviewing for jobs, and I could have gone any where and Memphis was one of the places that I had an opportunity. They had a position for I believe a director or maybe an assistant director. And I remember calling Louise and she wrote me a resume, I mean wrote me a reference. And but the ones in Florida were having a little bit, you know, like Florida was like a wonderful place to go. And on a spring break we went down to Florida. And I say "we". By that time I was divorced and had a new man in my life for a period of that time. But we went down to Jacksonville and thought it was a wonderful city. We went to St. Augustine. I thought this would be a great place to live. It is not that far from Tennessee, but it was Florida. I

had an opportunity for a couple of jobs in Florida. One of them turned out to be in Jacksonville. It was a really a wonderful sounding job. It was going to be one of several coordinators working with a director. I took the job and started to work. I left Tennessee, finished in June of 1970, and moved to Florida and started working for Florida that summer, might have been August 1970 and was there for five years working as coordinator of School Food Services there in Jacksonville, Duval county Florida. And I really, working in a large city, all I can say is this, working in a large district you have more things that can go wrong faster than you can in a small district. I mean, it is just like your problems are confounded or is a cube root from what every thing you are doing. So you have you know more things you can learn I guess in a system like that. What shocked me though was that the equipment and some of the practices in that district were, had been some things that had been put in place in the 1920s and the 1930s even before the School Lunch Program was established at the national level and we were further ahead in some of my little rural western Tennessee as far as equipment and using the old equipment and things than Jacksonville was at the time, so that was an awakening, and at the same time it was adventuresome because we got a new director and I was able to learn some old things as well as some new things.

VW: So by then you had your undergraduate degree and your master's so Jacksonville was really your second job in child nutrition. What happened after that with your career and the different positions?

VP: Well, one of the things, and any body that's worked with School Food Service in any sized district at all, it is a constant over and over again the same things, almost I felt like I was in a rat race, and I wasn't the director. I was a coordinator and we had an assistant director. It seemed like we were always putting out fires and there may be some innovative things that we could do and I was really learning a lot and was able to use some of the things I'd learned about test tasting, menu planning, food cost controls, and I really learned very valuable things while I was there. And also Jacksonville integrated the same time I was there so they were doing some cross city bussing and they had breakfast programs in all their elementary schools, in their city schools where all the poor children were but then when bussing happened, they bussed them out to the suburbs and I was seeing these children who had been having school breakfast that had no breakfast. And of course my first orientation had been feed the hungry children, you know. Make sure they have breakfast and lunch. And my husband at the time was working at an office of economic opportunity, I don't what their official title was. But I just said to him one day I said, you know it is really a shame that these suburban schools don't have breakfast for these children that are bussed all the way from the inner city. And he said you know there is a meeting that we're having with the school superintendents on a regular basis. Maybe I should say something to them. And I said, don't tell any body that I said any thing about it. So low and behold, he did mention it, and I want you to know that within about a month they had breakfast in those suburban schools. So I felt like I had contributed some small part to the children in Jacksonville to getting some breakfast that hadn't been getting it before. But any way it was a good learning round. I am glad that I learned what I did. I am glad I was involved there but it was time to move on, and I started looking for. I wanted to move up to a little bit higher level, as far as working the state agency level

because I had always loved what Louise Sublette had done. I wanted to be like Louise Sublette, I guess, I don't know. I started trying to find out what it would, what I could do about going to Florida, to Georgia, Tennessee. Every where I went it was like, oh, you'd have to take a cut in salary, you know, to go work at the state agency level because the certain jobs weren't there. Finally the State Director of Tennessee, Lawrence Bartlett, whom I had been knowing since I first started in School Food Services, he said, "I heard that South Carolina has got a couple of positions. They have reorganized and they may have something." And he gave me the name of the director at that time. His name was David Matthews. And he said, "call him and see what they might have." And I called him and then the rest is history and they did have a position. I did not have to take a cut in salary to come. I didn't know that South Carolina had an income tax and Florida doesn't, so you know some of it got eaten up right away. I moved to South Carolina in 1975 and I have been here ever since, and this is 2004. So that is a pretty long history. And I have been in School Food Services in South Carolina all these years except for two years and I worked in the Department of Health with the WIC program. I started off as a state consultant, and we called ourselves a state supervisor and there were three of us at the time. Basically what we did we had the state divided up into three, three ways, and we went out and worked with the school food service programs in those counties and I really enjoyed that because it was like coming into South Carolina and in some ways, that progressiveness I thought we had been in Tennessee, went to Florida we were backward in some other ways but we did have some things in Florida that we didn't have in Tennessee. We had unions. We had civil service. We had all kinds of things. We had cost control to the extreme in a sense, so we had learned to do a lot with less labor. When I came to South Carolina, I remember going to one school and it was like they had somebody, they had people lined up at the serving counter, and every body had one thing that they were serving on the plate. So if they had four things to serve, they had four people lined up and they were standing there shoulder to shoulder. And each one was serving one thing. And in Jacksonville we had one or two people serving all the things, and they were like (gestures) moving and flowing and these people were like little stiff soldiers doing their one little thing, and it was really funny. And I realized that we had a lot of things different in South Carolina.

VW: So you worked as a consultant for a few years?

VP: I was actually here for two years. They had, the man that hired me David Matthews died after, after, two months after I was here. And it was like, it was so tragic because he was, every body loved him and he was probably, the two months I worked with him was probably the most helpful from the stand point that he was a real humanistic, a real human being, and it was worth knowing that you could be a human and be a boss at the same time. So I learned a tremendous amount from him and it was reinforcing to me to have someone like him as my boss. But after he died they appointed someone who had been working their Title I of all things, not from the stand point that I'd been working in Title I but in some other ways, and he was very focused on regulations and doing just what the regs said, and wasn't very interested in nutrition education. I, this was after a year, year-and-a-half, I found out there was a position open in the WIC program that was whole, total focus was on nutrition education and they were looking for somebody who

had, was a registered dietician, and I had gotten my R.D. in Jacksonville, by working under someone who had been an R.D., who was an R.D., and passed the exam, first time. So I had the R.D. behind my name and no body even knew what it meant. You know, what does this R.D. behind your name mean? So any way I got a chance to use my R.D., and I went to the WIC program for two years, and it was wonderful because it was like the WIC program was just beginning to expand into all the counties of South Carolina and so I was part of that expansion into all 46 counties. And I met a nurse last week that I had not seen in years, and she came up and introduced herself, "You remember when you came to my county, you were helping us get the WIC program initiated in my county." And today, you know, everybody thinks WIC has been here forever and it is a good thing just like school lunch has been here forever and can't imagine it not being here. So I did that for two years. And then one day I just happened by accident found out that the director who came after David Matthews had been promoted to a deputy superintendent. They had a new state superintendent and he had been promoted to deputy. And then they were looking, and I heard that they were looking for a director of school food services. I immediately went to the phone and called the person who was here when I left, it was the deputy superintendent Mr. Burnett, and I said I heard you have a position open but you've probably already got someone in mind for it. And he said "well as far as I'm concerned, I'm wide open." And I never will forget I like to doodle when I talk on the phone, and I had drawn some little eyeglasses and I put the words in "wide open" like he could see that it was wide open. Any way. I applied for the position, never heard a word. And there was some other big characters who had applied for this job, that I heard through the grapevine had applied for it, and later on I found out that nobody else had ever heard any thing. And all of a sudden one day they called me and asked me if I would come for an interview. And evidently I was like the only one they had, or if they had someone else they didn't, I didn't know about it. No body knew any thing except I just got called one day and came in for the interview and got the job. So I started working in May of 1979.

VW: As the director.

VP: As the director. And I knew some of the people who were here because they were here when I had been here, and I had some new folks. And I've said, the rest is history. And I've had a ball ever since and still am.

VW: Well, what are some of the things that make South Carolina a unique state so far as child nutrition programs go?

VP: Well, I think probably, if you go back to the history of South Carolina and one reason why South Carolina was even a consideration for me was that it has been part of the southern, tradition of southern heritage of providing food for the families or providing food for the children. This state in 1943 the state legislature established the office that I am now the director of. And they had started off as two people and I think now we have 17 or 18. And they initiated the program in South Carolina, they originally were using donated commodities out of the WPA program, workers, whatever the title for that. Any way. WPA program in the 30s started and the schools were getting donated commodities

already from the USDA, but during the early 1940s when they had, when World War II began, they had more and more of their resources being tied up, you know for the war effort, and in order, because they didn't have the commodities they actually had a war powers act, and under the War Powers Act they were providing cash for states, that would any body that was providing school lunches, that would provide school lunches in schools. And so in 1943 South Carolina established their position, and their goal was to try to get as many school lunch programs started in South Carolina as possible. And two years before the National School Lunch Act was passed South Carolina served more school lunches than any other state in the country. And I think the next year they got tied, or beat out a little bit by the state of New York. You know, New York City itself has got more or as many children as we've got statewide so I think that was pretty good. But the other thing, too, is that we had they encouraged supervisors at each of the, each of the school districts to help support the program and provide the program assistance.

VW: It seems like you have a real strong breakfast program and breakfast commitment. Can you tell me a little bit about...

VP: That didn't, that was interesting because every body was so, such a believer in school lunch and they would do any thing to get the program started and we had a lot of help from the government. But a lot of that is communities you know wanting the program for their children. And they would do things like canning in the summer or whatever they had to do to provide food for the children. And then in the 1970s, I guess you know 1960s when they had the first breakfast pilots but School Breakfasts became a permanent program in 1975 which is the year that I moved to South Carolina. And there was a lot of interest in the community, in the black community particularly to try to get breakfast programs initiated and one of the biggest efforts in South Carolina was the year that I came here, one of the state legislators had gotten attached to the budget proviso that all schools would be required to have the school breakfast program, and it got passed without any discussion and no body knew what had happened. Well, it was a huge furor. I cannot tell you how upset people were because they were, you know the breakfast was available as far as the federal government was concerned to all of the schools but now they were going to be required to have all of the breakfast programs. I guess it was, some people said it was probably the death of David Matthews because he fought it so much. He even went to the attorney general to try to get him to interpret it to see if it was truly required that they have it. And the attorney general came back and said, yes, the law says that you will have it but it would die at the end, all budget provisos end at the end of the year and if the budget proviso is not renewed then that would be the end of it. So every body waited it out. They signed up and applied for the program then didn't start the program, or some of them would actually start the program and they would try to feed all of the children like they were doing for lunch sending them through the cafeteria. So it was really met with some interesting results and as soon as the year was over some of them immediately dropped it but others kept it. That was what was interesting. Some of those who had never had breakfast in the schools took the initiative and did it. But there was, it was so interesting because we were looking at how do we get breakfast supported and we had school food service people who fought it as much as some of the communities. So after I became the director in the early 80s and I began looking at what

other people, other states were doing. And all of the other states were surpassing South Carolina as far as numbers of children and numbers of schools that were on the program. We began to do, we had a public relations campaign and we talked about breakfast. We did some wonderful videos on breakfast at school and how much fun it was. We had some cute little pictures of, people nationwide were so intrigued with what we were doing. There was one little boy who was saying, now what is it that you like about breakfast? And he said, "I guess it's the grits." And grinned like that. Other people were thinking maybe we can use this in our states, and then when he comes out and says "it's the grits" and they realize that well we can't use this for us, we will have to do our own thing. But it really was it kind of took off in a sense. And then the school board got interested in it, and other people began to get interested in it. And the schools were dragging their feet like "oh, no, we've been there. We don't want to do that." And Food Research Action Center was really trying to get some interest in it and they were really helpful in getting some information and publicity out about it. We invited them to come in and help talk about how good breakfast as school was. We kept working on it and we kept working on it and working on it. I would have to go back and document on how we would write about breakfast at school, and how great it is and how beneficial it is for kids and we even did focus groups with parents trying to determine what would make it acceptable to parents, and we learned some valuable things from that and in doing our video we did that. So we finally took the numbers and every opportunity I had to speak before a public group or whatever, I would make the comment, you know we've got good school lunches, but we really need to do more with breakfast. We've got a lot of children, we've got a high percentage of free or reduced price children but we're not, they are not getting, they don't have access to breakfast in their school. Finally I was able to present it at a committee that had been formed by the state legislature to look at hunger needs in South Carolina. And I was there representing about what was going on with school breakfast, how many programs we had, and the fact that we could have them in all schools and that there was no limit on how many children could have breakfast. And just basically gave them the basic information. And then I showed them about we compared with other states in the southeast, North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and we were lagging behind all the other states. And finally one of the people who was at that meeting was approached by a reporter who was very intrigued about this, school lunches have not good quality, that they had heard some, been bad press on how bad school lunches were as far as fat and too much fat and too much French fries. They were wanting to do a story similar to that. And they approached a nutritionist with the extension service and she said, let me tell you, if you really want to write a story, you need to write a story about the school breakfast program. That is something that has really got some valuable information and you ought to do a story on the breakfast. Well, the reporter called me, and I had already sent him a whole packet of information about lunch and breakfast. So when he called me, his name was Steve, I said, "Steve, do you remember the packet that I gave you when we had that meeting?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Open it up," and I walked him through it, step by step, about where we were compared to other states. And he began to ask the question, "Well, why don't principals want the school breakfast program?" and I said, "Steve, I think it might be a good idea for you to ask some of them, because I don't know that I can speak for them." He said, "Well, who's got the program?" And I said, "Well, this school district's got it, and that school district doesn't.

So why don't you..." and I just told him which school districts had it and which ones didn't and then, where they were in which parts of the state. So he calls them up. He calls one of them up and the superintendent says, "oh, well, I know they would do better in social studies if they had something to eat, but it is just too much of a headache." He got quoted. And I was expecting to find it in the food section but it was on the front page. And he went to another district, and they said, "Oh, well, we worked that out. We just started the buses a few minutes early you know and they come in and they have their breakfast before they go to class. It has not been a problem at all. We're glad we're doing this; we can't imagine not doing it." So he did a synopsis of that of the districts surrounding, and all of sudden it was like our struggle was over except that from then on it was like we were getting information the school board association passed a resolution where a mandate for school breakfast in all schools. By this time it was in the 80s, no, no, 90s.

VW: It didn't happen overnight.

VP: No, no. This took years. And part of it I guess, I went back and looked at some of our newsletters that we were putting out, and we kept talking about breakfasts, and it is so good for you and all the reasons why. Then there was this little bit of a hope for one year that maybe we were going to get something to happen, and then finally, it was, it's happened! We've got a breakfast mandate! So we have got the history to show it. But it wasn't easy and what I think really made a difference was is that public opinion at some point was changed and influenced. And I think one of, as a result of that story, and I don't know if it was the same day that that story was in the paper or if it was a day or two later, but a little cartoonist for the paper, it was the State paper in Columbia, South Carolina. He had drawn a picture of a woman with an African headband on outside of a hut, it was a straw hut, with a little child sitting out at the foot, foot of the house with a bowl and she said she said, "Eat your porridge, there are starving children in South Carolina!" (laughs) And it was okay. All of a sudden breakfast was the thing to do. I mean how could you not want to be for breakfast? It was a "no-brainer." So we did get the mandate passed and I will say that it did help tremendously as far as getting breakfast was concerned. And we are probably in the top ten of the states. We are number one as far as having a mandate in this school board but when it comes to actually reaching the children who have the greatest need which would be your free and reduced price students, we are still only getting over fifty percent of them, fifty-two or fifty-three percent. Some other states have already moved up the ladder to fifty-four or fifty-six percent by different ways. Most of them are Southern states, the exceptions are any way. I don't know what Oregon's got going on for them but they did a good job with breakfast. So any way the breakfast story has been one that we are constantly revisiting. We are now in the process of thinking what's the next step? You know you can do universal and I was very, I guess I could say I was amused at one of, an article that was actually in a research publication that talked about how breakfast was, was doubled in size because they started offering universal breakfast. And I read a statistic it seems like they went from 40 to 80, and I was thinking this is not news, this is not good. To me what is good news is when you go from 125 to 700 and we've got schools doing that now. So we are in a race, guess you could say a race, to see how many more we can add, but you know there is a tremendous resistance

and it is almost like the same thing as getting breakfast started originally. Now the resistance is moving it into the classroom, making it convenient to the children. It is working. We've even got high schools that are doing it in the classroom and you wouldn't, you would think that only those schools that have a high free and reduced price participation would do it, but there's revenue from the government to feed every child. You just get less reimbursement for the paid child than you do for the free or reduced priced. We had one high school manager who said, "I wonder why no body is doing this in the high school?" She said "I think my students would like this." And she goes back to her school and goes to her principal and gives her the information that we were providing. Here again we were out being the ones promoting this. She takes it to her school principal and says, "think about this; I think I would like to do this." And the principal the next day gave her a little note and she said, "do it, make it happen." She's now got out of 1500 students and she's got 24 percent free or reduced, 24 percent, but out of 1500 students per day she is feeding at least 800. Or at the, between 6 and 800 depending on what she serves and it's absolutely wonderful what she's doing and how she's doing. We've documented it on video and we are hoping to make it part of a promotion that we are doing trying to promote breakfast in the class rooms. But as the cameraman who was following these children when they came to the cafeteria to pick the food up and carry it to the classroom, and they were doing this as you were taking role or doing whatever you do with the first part of the period of the day. And then when they were finished with it they put it back outside the door with the garbage in a little garbage can and a roster of who ate that day. And the cameraman said, this is a no-brainer. I mean every body should be doing this. So breakfast I guess is the thing that I would like to see, if I had a legacy, you know, what did you do for South Carolina, it would be that we at least made breakfast something that was part of every child's school day.

VW: Well, I know that you can tell us some things about other issues. You've touched on Title I, the "Contract on America," and I know...

VP: I think it's "Contract..."

VW: "... for America." Sorry. "Contract for America." Can you describe some of your congressional testimonies? I know you have been to Congress at some times over the years.

VP: Just, just a brief little thing on the Congressional. My introduction into the public policy and legislation with the American School Food Service Association came about after I became state director and I had listened to some of the tapes from some of their meetings back when I was in Jacksonville. Our director had gone to one of those meetings and brought back the tapes. I listened to every one of them, I was so impressed. Some of the congressmen had talked to the group and so I learned a lot about what that group was all about. So I was, went to the first meeting and I actually got invited to become a member of the PP&L committee. And introduced Senator Hollings one year and that is when I became known, oh, she does real good in front of people. So I got involved in it. And the first time I was invited to come speak to a congressional hearing was by Lynn Parker of the Food Research Action Center because we were, we had been

working together on, I guess on school breakfast, but also on Food and Nutrition Education Training Fund. We were trying to get more funding for nutrition education training, and she invited me to come to Washington to testify so my first testimony the very first time was trying to get more funds for nutrition education. All my subsequent testimonies were as part of the Public Policy and Legislation, I was the chairman for two years and then I became the vice president, president elect and then president of the American School Food Service Association. So it was the other four times, I testified a total of five, were as a result of the Public Policy and Legislation or as president of the ASFSA. And they were some interesting times. I guess the most interesting one, I guess the one that was probably I felt was the most impactful was the one before the senate committee testifying about block grants for school meals and why that was not a good idea. And I remember I had been, I was in a meeting in Chicago, it was a major cities meeting for the School Food Service Association and we were in Chicago and the hearing was at the, during that meeting, and I flew from Chicago to Washington, left my husband in a penthouse by himself, at least I think he was by himself (laughs). Then flew back, you know, the next day back to Chicago to finish that meeting and so I flew to Washington and I practiced, I never will forget, I usually don't practice in front of mirrors but I did for that particular thing, and I had my script and Marshall Matz and Gene White had worked on that very hard together, and then they sat down with me and we talked about what was important to emphasize and I guess I was prepared for that one. And Luger for his credit never would give in for doing any thing, for having a block grant. He refused to go with a block grant. And I like to think that my influence in that testimony may have helped armor him with what he needed to fight it. And we had some very good inform, testimony in there and I was able to relay in there. Because they asked some spontaneous questions and being able to answer those was very critical, very key, and we had a lot of information that may not have been in the testimony that we talked about and one was Jane Wynne(sp?) from Florida had talked about when we had school lunch was not an entitlement, you had so much funds given every year that was for the poor children to eat, the low income children, but you would run out of money at the end of the year and so you would start them off on a free lunch program and come February you had to write a letter to tell them that you no longer had any more funds to provide the school meals so just talking about it, being able to relay that, why you had to have it, why does it have to be an entitlement, it is because schools cannot afford to go on a limb and take a risk and say we are going to provide you meals all year and then at the end of it say, "oh, sorry about that, we ran out of money." I mean, you just can't do that. So I guess that was the most important one that I did, not that the others were not important, but that particular one was one that I felt had a big impact maybe.

VW: Can you tell us about changes that you have seen in child nutrition profession, in the profession over the years?

VP: We started off most of the people that I related to working in the schools, you know they had been housewives and mothers and they got into, so many of them got into it from wanting to be close to their child at school or being somebody needing some help and they were there and asked would they think about working for the school cafeterias and I think that we had this core of people and they were dedicated. They really truly

cared about what they were doing. And we still have people today coming into School Food Service that care, they want to be there with the children and like being with children. But I had one woman very laughingly tell me, she said, you know, and this was more recently, like the last two or three years. And she said, “you know, I really want to work in the school cafeteria and I came and applied for a job and interviewed,” and she says, “they forgot to ask me one question.” I said, “what was that?” She said, “can you cook?” She says “I never cook, my husband does all the cooking, but I can do a lot. I can do, I know how to cook turkeys now.” And I think that what we are seeing is that a lot of people don’t know how to cook any more and you know we don’t have that, people know how to cook and can come in and pick up and learn it. So we are maybe back to where we were in the beginning is we need to start bringing in people to help learn how to cook. You know.

VW: What are the... ?

VP: But the other thing, too, is that what we are doing has changed drastically. I remember the huge arguments about, well, mashed potatoes from fresh potatoes they’ve got Vitamin C in them but if you bring in these little granules, these instant mashed potatoes, they don’t taste right, they don’t have Vitamin C. They are just not the same. And how we have begun to accept those. I was at a point where I could not stand an instant mashed potato either, but today I think I might even prefer an instant mashed potatoes because they’ve improved the quality of them so much that they really are good. They are even making them now where they are trying to make them seem like they are lumpy potatoes so they will look like homemade. (Laughs) It has just been fascinating is seeing those kinds of changes and I think we are seeing more manufactured foods that are ready to heat and eat, not ready to cook, but ready to heat and eat. I think we have seen a huge revolution in that and trying to find products that are, have got the bread built into the entrée, for example. I’m going to name one that’s kind of interesting is chicken rings. When you look at it, you think they are onion rings, but they are chicken meat that’s, and I am not sure how they make them. We won’t discuss that today. But the children found them very acceptable. But the breading that is on them counts for a serving of bread. And I know from my days back at UT when we were in to food technology, I know that the breading of food products is a science. And you know it is amazing what they can do with breading of food products, so I’ve seen some of that evolution. The other thing is pizza. First pizza I ever had was probably in the ‘50s and I just thought it was the most fascinating food. And I found those little Chef Boy-ar-dee pizzas in the grocery store and learned to cook them when I was a teenager. And I just thought they were uptown. And finally we got into school lunch. Of course you never had any thing like that until the mid-70s, early 70s, the American School Food Service Association had this wonderful campaign that they did every year, and they had one that was going for five years and I think it had circus animals. And one of the things they had was a wonderful brochure on the food at school and they were talking about the school pizza. It was school made pizza and they had a recipe for it and the school lunch recipes came out, the new recipes came out in the early ‘70s and they had a recipe for making a school lunch pizza. And when you roll the dough out in an eighteen-and-a-half-inch bun pan and then you put the sauce on it and then you put your pizza... whatever sauce, or whatever sauce and meat and then

the cheese on top of that and then you baked it and then you cut it in a certain way so you would have the serving would be two-ounces of meat or meat alternate. And by that time I was in Jacksonville, Florida, and I taught, I taught some seasoned School Food Service cafeteria workers how to make pizza. They had a recipe that they were using looked like a deep deep pizza, didn't even look like a pizza, didn't act like or taste like one. So I introduced this new pizza for everybody. And I never will forget, I was struggling with the dough. I was used to doing little doughs at home but not, nobody makes dough, pie dough, any more do they? But any way they had this huge pan and were rolling this dough, and I was trying to do it, and this woman says, "let me do that." And she gets it out cause they had been used to making pies and things, she had it out there in no time. And I thought, "whew, I'm home free. They know how to do it." I'd just tell them "do it like you do a pie crust." You know, except it is a yeast dough and it has the yeast, the rising stuff in it. And put it in there and then make it. So I knew I was home free. And then seeing the revolution from that pizza over to, and I think Heinz was the first one that did it, there was a Heinz pizza, and they said and I never will forget, and by that time I had moved to South Carolina and you could buy frozen pizza that was for schools and it was cut same way that we were cutting it. And schools were serving it and I remember children saying, "this is just like Pizza Hut." So that was a huge change. We went from making your own to the frozen pizza, and the pizza companies were absolutely fascinating. I actually got to go speak to the frozen pizza manufacturers one year. They wanted Shirley Watkins but she couldn't go, so I got to go speak to them. And so I knew there was a whole industry and they have really changed the market on pizza. They've now, you can buy wedges, you can buy all kinds of things and they are more nutritious than they ever were, have been before. And so seeing those kinds of things change has been fascinating to see, the evolution of pizza in schools. It has gotten to the point now that I don't even want to taste a pizza. It has got to be really special for me to have a pizza because I've seen it so much, so many times, and tasted it, but it is still a very stable food in School Food Services and it is very nutritious, too.

VW: What do you think has been your most significant contribution to the Child Nutrition field?

VP: I don't really know. I don't really know, I mean, I think breakfast has been one of the things but I think probably "saving the Child Nutrition Program" back from the, when they wanted to change it into a block grant program. That was probably the most recent big challenge and I really have some concerns that that might come back as being an issue. And I think that we live on the assumption that we are always going to have the School Lunch Program, but we are always going to have the School Breakfast Program. Let's get the School Breakfast Program there, first. We think of it as the norm and I know when they first began to challenge the fact that maybe we don't need it, we need to block grant school meals, the public came out and were so supportive of the school meal program and it really was reinforcing to me to see that. And I know, at the time all of this was going on, and I was so, I was really like so alarmed. And in my own life at the time I was going through a battle with breast cancer and I had been diagnosed right before I became president of the ASFSA. And I was going through all of this and I said, the cancer is trying to kill me and now Congress is trying to kill my program. And my

mother says “don’t take it personally.” But I think the same battle and the same struggle I was having with one area of trying to be a survivor and I think that you might say that the School Lunch Program is a survivor of some of those real drastic cuts and block grants that’s happened. And we weren’t able to save all of the School Child Nutrition Programs. We’ve still got cuts in other areas. When I came back from our legislative action conference the year that the block grants, we were fighting the block grants, and Congress had just changed their attack, their approach right before we got there because they had realized that they were losing the, they were losing the ground on their Contract On America because of the School Lunch Program because they were saying, “not School Lunch.” We had countered it so well and I think that’s probably another thing that I did because I was a state director and I knew what was happening before it actually happened. We were able to send out information to all of our state directors, state associations, and state legislative chairs to tell them what was being proposed and what did that mean to them. And basically I remember writing the letter suggesting that if you as a state director have been muzzled because, if you have been told that you cannot say anything or will not say anything, then get the information to your president or your legislative chairman and get the information out. That’s what we did. We got the information out there. Otherwise it wouldn’t have been a news story. We got the story out and then people started coming up from the grassroots saying “No, this is the School Lunch Program! You can’t cut this!” And, I got back from the convention, I mean from the legislative action conference, and I turned on the t.v. and Trent Lott was on one of those Sunday morning talk programs, and he had this little chart up there and he was saying, we are not cutting school lunch, we are increasing school lunch. But what he wasn’t saying was what they were doing to the Child and Adult Care Feeding Program and some of the other issues and it was like School Lunch Program wasn’t getting cut but they had their ways of doing it. And I was so alarmed at that, and at how deceitful it was what they were actually doing, and I thought that this was, was not good. And the very next day, on a Monday, our superintendent had been asked to come to the state capitol here in Columbia to be there for a, one of the, I think it was Lindsey Graham, in fact Lindsey Graham is still around, he is now senator. But he came to the state house capitol and guess what? He had that same chart that the senator from Mississippi had on ABC the day before. “we’re not cutting School Lunch, we are increasing School Lunch.” And I thought it’s a plot, they are out to get us. [pause in tape] So any way. Here was this chart, the same chart that I saw the day before. And I don’t know if it was, I think was a newspaper print or it might have been a t.v.. I think it was a t.v. was also there that day. And all they got of me was the back of me and it was the back of me where I had my arms folded like that [stands up, turns around and demonstrates body posture] and it was like very obvious that this person wasn’t buying this at all. Fortunately I didn’t have to be on t.v., it was like the back of me and it was like “uh-huh! I don’t think so.” So that was a, I guess a real challenge, but also made me be very aware of what is really being done with politics today and I think that you know they have a script really. And I remember that year when our delegation went around to our congressmen and senators, they had been told what to say and what to do. I know because I knew what their, after the first time and I heard what their, what they were doing and I knew how to respond back to it. So we think that every thing is spontaneous and every body is going to listen to you and it is not the case. It is like you are marching, you’ve got your marching orders. Well, they

have their marching orders and they have to stay with the party line and I just think that's tragic that we have moved to that. But I think unfortunately that is where we are with politics today and that is why I am so concerned is that we've got to stay diligent, vigilant with our programs and not assume that they will always be here. And that we will always have the support for them.

VW: What keeps you involved in the profession?

VP: I can't quit. I am really, I am really, it is an avocation for me. It is like what I do. And being the world's greatest flute player is no longer a goal of mine. And in a sense, maybe I am a Pied Piper trying to get the School Lunch in there. I did get my PhD and it was just awarded in August of 2004. But I went out into the schools to do research and I became very alarmed at how other foods being offered at school are interfering or really competing with the School Lunch Program. Every body knows that is happening but to really see it and understand what is happening compared to what it was before is very alarming and you know I think we really need to start focusing more on the nutrition aspect of our programs and one of the goals that I would have here for us for this office, we already have a mission statement trying to work for quality programs for all children but trying to make sure that the foods and beverages that we offer do meet some nutritional standards and that we limit those that are going to be interfering with the child consuming what he needs to consume and I will give you an example is the whole issue of what children drinking with his meals. You would think that it is going to be milk and all the national studies that go back and look at what children have had to eat on, Haynes study, will show that children who eat lunch at school or eat school meals have a better nutritional quality the entire day. Well, that may have been back when they were doing it, but when I go into schools and they are offering for sale other items for drink other than milk and the children are leaving the milk and it is offer versus serve which is required in high school but is an option in elementary and middle, and so many of the schools are allowing those children to buy something else and to drink that instead of milk. And it is the very age when they are needing more calcium and so we've just got some major problems that I don't think most of the people are even aware of. So it is almost like I can't quit yet. There is messages and things we've got to do. Any way. For the research for my PhD I did do the calcium intake of middle school and it was through out the state of South Carolina and it was a random sample. But I did diet recalls for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders at least one class per school. And I looked at what the calcium consumption was and I was concerned because it was lower than what other studies have shown. And I think we are beginning to see the encroachment of other foods, other beverages coming in in place of the milk. It actually replaces milk. So I am seeing that and I am also discovered that those children who ate breakfast, and here we go we get the breakfast thread back again. Children who ate breakfast whether it was at home or at school had at least 300 more milligrams per day than those, of calcium per day than those children who skipped breakfast. So. And we were generous in what we called breakfast. We called breakfast any thing that had any nutrient, any nutritional value at all, caloric value. But that is alarming. I think that as we are talking about promoting breakfast in the classroom we have to be careful that we are making sure that we are providing a quality breakfast that is going to have the nutritional quality there, and here again with offer

versus serve, if you've got milk, juice and then two other items there, chicken biscuit with biscuit being part of it and chicken being the other, if they have an option of refusing, how many of those children are going to refuse the milk? Or refuse the juice? So we've got to some how or another build up some, some kind of program to try to get children to drink more milk, or feel like it is a good thing to do. And we know from other longitudinal studies that the older they get the less milk they consume. So that's a mission I guess you might say that I am on. I always have a mission. Or something to promote and school meals are a good answer for a lot of these problems we are having.

VW: Do you have any other memorable stories that have come to mind that you would like to talk about?

VP: Well, that is a good one, because I don't really... there is probably a ton of them. But no.

VW: It is thinking about them while we are sitting here.

VP: Um-hmm.

VW: Is there any thing else that you would like to talk about?

VP: Well, let's go back to the, you know talking about cost accounting. This was in Jacksonville and really looking at costs and looking at what, why breakfast was more expensive in one school than it was in another. And I had this one school that consistently had five or six cents more per meal for breakfast and lunch was high, too, so I went to see why was their food costs higher. And I went just to observe, to see why just by looking. I walked in the kitchen door, and I saw this big glob of dough rising in the garbage can. And I went over to the manager and I said who did the rolls today, because they had rolls on the menu. And she said, oh that was so-and-so. So I went over and I said I noticed that you had some dough in the garbage can. Why did you...? "oh, well the recipe was for 500 and we are only serving 300 so I just threw away what I didn't need." So there was Clue No. 1! And then the other one is that we hadn't specifically said what they were supposed to serve for breakfast and in that particular school they were using all items that were already pre-done and pre-cooked and all you had to do was heat 'em and serve them and they were not doing any preparation at all on site, and so there was your other food cost because they were, there was already the food costs was built in, yet they had the labor to do, you know, other things, so. I guess the puffy dough, like the dough boy rising out of the garbage can was, you know, a funny anecdote. Oh, and there was one other thing. We had one. We used to get these purple plums that children really didn't like, but we got them any way. They were part of the commodity program. And I guess it was better than dried prunes. Dried plums they call them now. But there was this one cafeteria in Jacksonville that had these big pots, stock kettles, and they were taking the juice from those purple plums and putting them in the stock pot, and they were making wine. I wasn't the coordinator that discovered it, but the one that did, said she walked, barged in there one day and uncovered 'em and said what in the world is this? (laughs)

VW: A little fermentation on site.

VP: I guess you find a little bit of every thing.

VW: Well, any last thoughts?

VP: Well, there's probably a lot of things we haven't talked about that we should have talked about. I didn't talk a lot about being president of the American School Food Services Association.

VW: Well, tell us, tell us some things about that.

VP: Uh. I guess the one thing that was so interesting that made it different when I was president, of course every body had their themes and moving into quality this and quality that here. And so I had quality programs for all children. And I think for this year, this next year will be the first year we won't have themes for each president or each year. And I thought that themes for each president was kind of interesting because you could remember the president by the, what her theme was. But that year was, I had been diagnosed with breast cancer right before I was going to be installed as president. And I had gone through my first round, actually eight sessions of chemotherapy, and I had lost my hair after three weeks. So I had on this wig, and when I was going to buy the wig I went into this little wig shop to find, to buy a wig, and I went to the wig that I thought looked like my hair and the woman said, "Oh, no, no, no, no, that won't look good on you." And I left almost in tears because she was trying to put on one that I did not like at all, I didn't think looked presidential. So I went to my hairdresser and she said "I know somebody that does wigs, and he would be very good." So forget the hundred dollar wig, I went and got a \$400 wig. But it was done like I wanted it. He helped pick it out and he made it look more like my hair than what it, it was before I lost my hair which was the other thing was to go do it before you lose your hair so you could match it pretty much. So when I was installed as president I was bald-headed but had on my presidential wig and I thought I looked very nice in all the pictures of me with my wig on. And I went through additional chemotherapy later that fall and lost all my hair again and I thought this is going to be forever before I get my hair back. Well, finally in the spring, and I was going to some of the state conferences and I was went to Virginia which I actually know some people in Virginia and I didn't wear my wig because it was real short and you know I thought it looked really nice. But nobody knew me! (laughs) Not a soul knew who I was. And I thought well, you know maybe, maybe I should put, I don't know what I'm going to do. So I went to another state... in fact the first state I went to was South Dakota, flew from Washington to South Dakota, and in South Dakota they didn't know who I was but it was a small state and I didn't know that many people so I didn't worry about it so when I went to Virginia where I knew a lot of people and they didn't know who I was. So I said, "I've got to do something." So I had about two months to figure out what to do, and of course I was going without my wig and so I consulted with several people, and finally what I decided to do was that I would wear my wig the first general session and then I would make some statement about it was a celebration about people winning awards and every thing and I closed that session out by saying, "this has been a

year of celebration and I want to add to the celebration,” and mentioned that I had been going through this breast cancer and was hopefully “cured” (makes gesture with hands like quotes), and I said “I have a question for you tomorrow. Will you know me tomorrow?” and that was the way we ended it. And every one was whispering, “what’s she talking about, what’s she talking about?” So the next morning I walked out on the stage with my little short curly hair and the whole audience, the whole room just rose up and were, what do you call it, standing ovation, because I was out there with my curly little hair. And it, the woman who I had introduced, I was out there to introduce the speaker, the general session speaker, she was so taken aback by it, she said, “no, no, come over here before you leave the stage.” And she said, “I just wanted to say, this is the first time I have ever seen any body introduce whose hair got a standing ovation.” (laughs) It made it a kind of special little thing about the whole conference.

VW: And as president you traveled to a lot of different states?

VP: Yeah. We usually go to about one-fourth of the states and I think that year I had a couple of, cause of, one period of time where I was going through bone marrow transplant that I had three weeks that I was off, actually took three weeks off in my life. Because I couldn’t be exposed to other people, might get germs. And, uh, in fact that was a problem from day one because the first time I had the chemotherapy and they were going through this the one thing we want to make sure you do, is do this, do this, do this, do this, and avoid crowds. And I said wait a minute, I can’t do that. And they said we want you to be normal. We want you to do every thing you always do, but just avoid crowds. And I said, I can’t do that. And so they started giving me this nuprigen(sp?) which would help build my white cells back after they would give me the chemotherapy so I could be around crowds but when I went through the other, the bone marrow transplant, you had to be away from crowds because there was, you didn’t have any immune system at all until it got built back up, so. So I had people who would, who did it for me. And they went to the American Dietetic Association for me that year and they went to a couple of states. But other than that I was able to get out to some of them, and it was fun.

VW: It sounded like you were traveling a lot.

VP: Yeah. And they tried to protect me. I know, you think, the director tried to protect me, and I went to, when I was having the radiation I had six weeks of radiation on the side that I had the tumor, they had, I would be there every morning at 7:30, every morning Monday through Friday. And I went to one day, on a Monday I went to a meeting, I mean I went to them and had the radiation and then I drove to Atlanta for a USDA meeting and they had people from Washington there and they were trying to schedule a meeting where we could discuss something real serious about this school meals being changed, and they were changing what schools were going to be required to do, and they were saying you are going to be at the meeting aren’t you, tomorrow, or Wednesday, whatever it was. I said well yes I had planned to be but I was told it was going to be not very important. Oh this is a very important meeting. So I went back and I made my plane reservations and called and said to the directors I am coming to the

meeting. So that morning on a Wednesday or whatever day it was I went in and had my radiation, got on a plane and flew to Washington, went to the meeting, came back home, next morning 8:30 I was back in radiation. So it was like you can do, you can commute any where if you have to. You know.

VW: Well,

VP: But, it was like, it wasn't going to stop me from doing what I needed to do.

VW: Well, it is a tribute to your commitment to Child Nutrition.

VP: Any body, it just gets in your blood and you just can't think of doing any thing else. I wouldn't even dream of doing any thing else. The two years I was with the WIC program, I was constantly seeing now how does this compare with what we do in School Lunch and I was learning and I learned some very valuable things from them, like Public Health is very good at working in teams and I think it has helped me come back and look at you don't just do things by yourself you've got to get other people involved and you get expertise of different disciplines working together instead of every body with the same skills trying to figure it out alone. So I think it was very valuable and I don't regret doing it at all. And I was exposed to a lot of basic child nutrition because it was part of the program.

VW: Well, any other stories that have come to mind? You could probably go on and on.

VP: I think that's probably some of the major things.

VW: Okay. Well, I want to thank you for your time this afternoon and I guess we will close the interview.