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## Judy Hendrix

Judy Hendrix

Institute of Child Nutrition

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## Judy Hendrix Oral History

After college Judy Hendrix taught home economics, science, and geography at different times before getting into the child nutrition field. Hendrix then worked as a school nutrition director for one year before becoming an area consultant for school nutrition with the Georgia Department of Education. After working as an area consultant in various Georgia locations for a number of years, Hendrix returned as a food service director for a large school district, where she worked for a further four years before retirement.

AH: I'm Annette Bomar Hopgood, and I was the state agency director in Georgia from 1979-2006, and we're here today in Savannah, Georgia, at the Georgia School Nutrition Association Conference, and we're going to be interviewing some of the people that had significant roles in the Georgia School Nutrition Program. I'm here in Savannah this afternoon with Judy Hendrix. Some of you may know her as Judy Chismark. Judy, tell us a little bit about yourself and where you grew up.

JH: I was raised on a farm in a small South Georgia town called Metter.

AH: Everything's better in Metter?

JH: That's right. Even the football team has a flag that they carry on the field that says that. I had two sisters and that's really what I did growing up is living on the farm.

AH: Tell me about your earliest recollections of school lunch or school meals. What was going to school like in Metter?

JH: I remember I was just a real finicky eater growing up. I would go to the table and just not eat. In fact, my mother carried me to the doctor because I wouldn't eat.

AH: That's how you stayed thin.

JH: He said, "Leave her alone. She'll eat when she gets hungry." I remember I would go to the cafeteria and eat just one little thing and somebody told my mother about it so she just started sending a lunch with me for a long time, so I did not eat in the cafeteria. And then in high school I started back eating, and I remember enjoying the food once I got to high school.

AH: Were you at Metter?

JH: Yes.

AH: Tell me a little bit about what you did after high school. What's your education background?

JH: After high school I went to Georgia Southern College in Statesboro and when I finished there I started teaching Home Economics in the Atlanta area. And then I worked on my master's and got my master's at the University of Georgia in Education.

AH: About what year was that? I'm trying to figure out how old you are.

JH: Old! I think around 1972.

AH: So you were sort of wrapping up yours about the same time that I was too.

JH: Yes.

AH: How did you become involved in child nutrition?

JH: I was going to move back to South Georgia and was looking for a job. I was really getting tired of teaching and wanted to do something else, and I was teaching in Covington then, and someone told me that I needed to talk to Becky Alexander to get to the school nutrition program – because I really did not realize that degreed people worked in school nutrition at the time, and so I talked to Becky and Becky suggested I talk to Jeanette Thomas, who was the area consultant in South Georgia. So I called Jeanette and she said she would keep me in mind, but there was nothing available at the time. So I moved back to South Georgia and kept holding out, hoping that something would come up before school started, and nothing did, so I took a job in Treutlen County teaching Science and Geography to slow learners. It was not in a very good position to be in and I was very frustrated so at the end of that year I went to the superintendent and I said, “Please find me something else to do. This is not working out for me.” So in the meantime Jeanette Thomas had been to the school system and had reclaimed several thousand dollars on some things they were not doing correctly there.

AH: Now Jeanette worked with the State Department of Education as an area consultant.

JH: Yes. She was the area consultant there. So she convinced him to hire a director and she called me and kind of put the superintendent and I together -

AH: But they had not had a director at all – a new position.

JH: Not at all, and she convinced him that if he would increase the sale price to students a nickel, and the money they would save by doing things correctly, that they could afford to hire me. And so I started working there and I worked there for one year, and then Jeanette decided to transfer to the Athens office and her job became available. I was happy being the director there, but it was just three schools, and I didn't really see that I would enjoy being that a long period of time, so I decided to apply for the position and got it – I don't think there were many people applying then. [Laughter]

AH: This was the time really as positions were emerging, not necessarily at the state, but the local level, so a lot of people did not know, like you did not know, that there were places for people to go in school nutrition. So how long were you there and what was that like? That was as a state area consultant in Swainsboro?

JH: Um-hum. And I had, I think, when I first started, they had like twenty-three counties, and I think when I ended up there were like forty-three because positions kept changing and territory kept switching around and -

AH: And there were more directors also.

JH: Yes, there were more directors. I really loved being an area consultant. It was a good job. There were very few school nutrition certified directors at the time, and I tried to work with school systems and get the superintendents to hire directors. I was successful in a lot of places. And then somewhere in that time the State Department started an Incentive Program for school nutrition directors. If the superintendent would hire them then there would be a little bit amount of money there as an incentive to hire the director. And so we were able – I think when I left the Swainsboro office all of my systems had certified directors.

AH: That's great. There were and are some school districts that are not required to have a certified director that took advantage of that board rule. So what was a typical day of an area consultant? Not a day – what was a typical week or month like in the life of an area consultant? What kinds of things did you do, because I know you did some things differently from other consultants also?

JH: Mostly I guess I felt really strongly that the school nutrition directors really need a lot of guidance to do a good job, and I didn't think our program in Georgia would succeed unless the directors knew what they were doing. So I spent a lot of time, especially with new directors, on working with them and trying to get them to buy into the philosophy of the program and to really just know what we're all about and everything.

AH: To know the why behind what they're doing.

JH: Yes. My typical day – a big part was on the phone, because we did not have email or anything technologically. So I spent a lot of time on the phone talking to the directors, and then visiting them. Of course we still had reviews; we still did the CRE reviews. I think when I started they were called Administrative Reviews and then they became CREs. I did not do the SMIs when I was in the Swainsboro office. They were not in place then. We had a Food Service Equipment Assistance Program and I would visit school systems, because it was just a little amount of money and everybody wanted it, so I had to go help determine which ones needed it the most. We had area consultant meetings with the directors quarterly, and we had staff meetings with the state staff to go over the new rules and regulations and how they would be implemented in the local school system.

AH: You mentioned earlier that one of your first exposures was being asked to teach Training in Depth course. You did a lot of work in your area to coordinate the training programs throughout the area. What did that involve?

JH: A lot of school systems I had in South Georgia were small, like three or four schools, so the director did not want to spend her time teaching three people or four people. So we talked to Emanuel County, there in Swainsboro, and asked them to help host it, and we asked several people to teach it, and then they could all bus and everybody could come in and get the courses they needed together. That worked out real well for them.

AH: Now you stayed at Swainsboro office until when?

JH: I'm not sure of the dates, but it was probably about seventeen or eighteen years.

AH: And then from there you went?

JH: I transferred to the Gainesville office.

AH: Still as an area consultant?

JH: Still as an area consultant.

AH: How did you find that different? Everybody says North Georgia is so different than South Georgia. How did you find that different?

JH: I found that the directors were more closed-mouthed, reserved - maybe that they did not trust me. Maybe in South Georgia, they came in and I was there with them, and then when I got to North Georgia some of them would say, "Now don't tell anybody that I'm asking this question, but so and so and so and so." And it's

like, "What difference does it make?" They were just real shy and more protective I guess, more than South Georgia.

AH: I was trying to remember who they would have had as area consultant prior to your being there.

JH: I think it had been vacant for a while.

AH: So that's probably one reason they didn't really just take up so quickly.

JH: Yes. I think Laura Fair was there and then it was vacant for maybe a year, a year and a half, and Gretchen was there I think, and then it was vacant again.

AH: So it was not as stable as what you had had in Swainsboro and working with those people there.

JH: Yes.

AH: So, what happened after you worked there?

JH: I was there for a couple of years and then Glenda Thompson, who was the food service director in Hall County called, and she says, "I want you to apply for my job." And I said, "No. I'm happy where I am." And she told me what the salary was and I said, "Oh! Let me think about it just a little bit!"

AH: Because there was a big difference, in the larger schools districts especially, like Hall County was, and the salaries of the state agency people.



JH: Yes. And so after I thought about it – I was getting tired of packing a suitcase and traveling, going to different meetings and helping different consultants do reviews and everything, and every time I would plan on doing something personally, then it would be the time that I was going to be out of town, so I thought, ‘Well, you know, I would have a more stable life I guess.’

AH: More control over your schedule.

JH: Yes. And I thought about that and then I thought about the money, so I just thought, ‘Well, why not?’

AH: So you did.

JH: So I applied for the job and I got it, and I was there four years and then retired.

AH: I could list a thousand things, but what were the significant differences that you found challenging between what you were doing as an area consultant with the state and a local director in Hall County?

JH: I found a little bit more pressure I think at the local, and that was probably something I put on myself, because I felt like since I had worked for the state I didn’t want to mess up.

AH: You didn’t want the state to have a bad reputation.

JH: I was like 'She should know better.' So I guess I was a little bit more cautious in the things I did there, but it was a rewarding job.

AH: That was a large school district.

JH: It was like thirty-two schools I think.

AH: And did you have help?

JH: I had a coordinator. Rochelle Stubbs was the coordinator when I first started there.

AH: And it was a highly centralized district, because all of that work had been done before you went there.

JH: They did not have computers as far as meal counting systems, so I implemented all those when I was there, and I was able to help bring the net worth – I think it had less than a half a month when I got there – and I was able to bring that up to I think maybe two months operating when I left.

AH: Now who replaced you in Hall County?

JH: Cookie Palmer, and I had worked with her in Burke County when I was in South Georgia. Her family wanted to move back north to North Georgia, so that worked out.

AH: You had a good relationship there.

JH: Yes.

AH: All of these years you served in several offices in different positions. What would you categorize as the biggest challenges that you had first with the state, and then with the school district?

JH: The one they both have in common is you never got everything done that you wanted to get done. Like with the state there was so many things that you could do, but you just didn't have time to get it all done, and that's the same thing with the local – there were just a lot of things that you would have liked to have done, but never could.

AH: We talked about that today, because resources are limited as to what you can do

JH: As far as the differences I think it's more a little bit, as far as implementing programs, when you're at the local you decide to do something and you see it through and you see the results right quick. When you were at state you were never able to see the result immediately. You would suggest it to a director and hope it got done, but then you never knew whether it was carried through or not.

AH: Much more gratifying to be in control of all of the aspects of the project or initiative.

JH: Yes.

AH: Who were some of the people that influenced you or that you remember the most or helped you most when you were going through your career? Who were the people that you depended on pretty heavily?

JH: There were really four major people, but one person that was very helpful with the state was Charlotte Tuck when I first started with the state. I had only worked a year, so there was a lot -

AH: She was the Administrative Assistant in the state office and had been there for many years.

JH: And she pulled me through. I'm sure she got tired of my telephone calls, because I called her about every day or every other day.

AH: And she helped you with the logistics of getting the work done.

JH: Yes. And there was a lot I knew about the program, but I didn't know how the state wanted it done, so I was constantly calling her, and she was always so nice.

AH: Charlotte did not know how to not be nice.

JH: I guess the four people that have impressed me the more that I have enjoyed knowing were my supervisors. The first one when I was in Treutlen County was my superintendent, and from him I learned about local politics. That's how you operate. At that time the superintendents were elected, and you did this based on local politics, and you did this based on local politics, and so it was easier when I got to work with different directors and they were so frustrated with local politics, I felt like I could ease them a little bit with how to work around it. It's there. You can't get around it.

AH: Admit it and deal with it.

JH: Yes. The second person that I worked under was Dr. Josephine Martin, and of course she is very impressive, but two things that stand out in my mind with her is that if she wanted something she would go for it, constantly. There were two things with the - the newspaper printed an article about her when she was fighting - I guess it was competitive foods - and she had that comment about 'Well, you won't let Playboy in the library, so why let junk food into the cafeteria?' I remember that being in the newspaper because she was fighting that, and I also heard she had fought the state superintendent to make sure we could use state funds for school nutrition.

AH: That required a constitutional amendment which she was involved in with the state association.

JH: She would just fight real hard for what she believed in. And the next person is you. Annette, you are very visionary, and I've always been impressed with the things you saw that Georgia needed that other states took them several years to get to. You could always know what we needed and I've always been impressed with that with you.

AH: But we always had people like yourself and our local directors who were willing to do whatever needed to be done, so it made it a lot easier to be able to realize that, because you knew there were people there who could see the same things and take up and go forward with it.

JH: The fourth one is my last superintendent, Dr. Dennis Fordham, and he was the one that would always say, "Just do what's right." He was an elected superintendent, not appointed, and I admired him for that. "It doesn't matter. If this is what's right, this is what we do." And I always appreciated that with him.

AH: I worked a little bit with Dennis when I was in Douglas County in the local school system there. One of the things that you mentioned was the incentive program, and we have so many directors that came in back in the early 80s and now they're retiring and there are going to be a lot of vacancies and a need to recruit people. What would you tell young people coming out of college, or if you had to go to Georgia Southern and talk to people about the profession, how would you entice them into being attracted into the child nutrition program as a career? What would you say about it?

JH: I would say it's a wonderful career. As I said earlier I taught Home Economics and I went to some of the state meetings with Home Economics, and the participants were always very protective of their territory. They didn't want to share. They wanted to shine on what they had done, but they didn't want to share it with each other. And when I got to the school nutrition program it was the opposite and it was just wonderful. It was kind of like coming home because everybody – if you've got something that you need, here, you can borrow mine. It's always been such a sharing – like a big family is how it's always felt to me.

AH: Not competitive, but real collaborative.

JH: Yes.

AH: Are there memorable stories that you'd like to talk about?

JH: There are a couple of things I remember a couple of directors telling me – one of them is that they started the pre-K program and there was a little child that after lunch she would always save some food, like she would put two chicken nuggets in her hands and hold them, and they would try to take them away from her and she wouldn't let them, and she'd cry. And they finally figured out that

that's the only food that she would get that night. She'd take her food and take it home.

AH: She'd take her handfuls and take it home with her. It gives you cold chills doesn't it?

JH: Yes. And then the other thing is principals telling me that a lot of children they had didn't have any food until Monday morning; that when they left on Friday they didn't have anything to eat. And so it was a worthwhile vocation.

AH: I know the people in southeast Georgia and northeast Georgia especially appreciated all that you did for them. You, of all the consultants, probably had one of the best relationships with the people that you worked with, and truly everyone recognized that you were very approachable and they were willing to share with you the things that were problematic for them, even if it meant telling you they were not doing something the right way.

We're just glad that you were able to spend some time today for the interview and wish you a lot of success in your retirement, and your home in Bluffton, SC close to the beach.

JH: Thank you.