

ARKANSAS EXTENSION HOMEMAKERS COUNCIL

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Official transcript of:

Loretta Marie Johnston

Member of Garland County Extension Homemakers Council

Original recording made 12 August 2011

at Hot Springs, Arkansas

Recorded, transcribed and edited by:

Janie Woods

Garland County Extension Homemakers Council Publicity Chairman





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Oral History Program

Janie Woods, Garland County Extension Homemakers Council Publicity
Chairman

12 August 2011

This is an audio recording of Loretta Marie Johnston, member of Garland County Extension Homemakers Council. This interview is part of an Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council Oral History Program, and Loretta is answering questions asked by Garland County Publicity Chairman, Janie M. Woods.

Questions and comments by Janie are in boldface type; Loretta's responses and comments are in lightface type.

I am Janie Woods, and I am interviewing Loretta Marie Johnston. This interview is being held at my home in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in Garland County, on August the 12, 2011.

The audio recordings and transcript of this interview will be donated to the David and Barbara Pryor Center for [Arkansas] Oral and Visual History at the University of Arkansas.

The recording, transcript, and any other related materials will be deposited and preserved forever in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, and the copyright will belong solely to the University of Arkansas.

Would you please state your name?

Loretta Marie Johnston.

And spell your name.

L-O-R-E-T-T-A—M-A-R-I-E—J-O-H-N-S-T-O-N.

And indicate that you are willing to give the Pryor Center permission to make the audio file and transcript available to others.

Yes.

My name is Janie Woods, and today I am interviewing Loretta M. Johnston for the Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council Oral History Program. It is August the 12, 2011, and we are at my home in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

This is going to be a very informal interview. I want you to share your memories of your involvement with the Extension Homemakers Program—the good times and the challenges.

First, I'd like you to give your complete legal name.

Loretta Marie Johnston.

And the city and county in which you presently reside.

Hot Springs, Arkansas—Garland County.

Also, tell me when and where you were born.

I was born in Stillwater, Oklahoma, and moved to Arkansas when my husband accepted a job. That was in 1958.

And where, when were you born?

November the 26, 1937.

And he accepted a job in Arkansas, and what was he gonna [going to] be doing?

He was, would be a district forester [Interviewee's Edit: assistant district forester] for Dierks Lumber Company.

OK. What has been your association with the Extension Homemakers Program? In other words, have you been a member of a club or have you been a professional?

I've been a member.

OK. How did you learn about the Extension Homemakers Program?

Well, actually, Extension Homemakers, or Home Demonstration, has been part of my life. I grew up in Oklahoma as a 4-H girl. My mother and grandmother were both Home Demonstration members, and I visited the club, so it's just always been a part of my life.

How long have you personally been associated with the program as a member?

I've been an active member for 48 years.

What were the first club or clubs with which you were associated, and what were the years associated with those?

Well, when we moved to Arkansas in 1958, we moved to several different forestry headquarters—Grannis, Arkansas, Winthrop, DeQueen. At each of those locations I visited clubs, but I never did really join and become active because I had a small son, and we moved so often. I just—it just wasn't convenient. And one time, after Kurt [Interviewee's Edit: my son] was born, I went to visit a club, and they were all older ladies, and I could tell they were very uncomfortable with having a little, less-than-a-year-old baby at their meetings. So, I just decided it wasn't time to get involved in it, at that time. [Pause] Then we moved to DeQueen, and then we moved to Daisy, Arkansas, and my next-door neighbor was a member of the Kirby Home Demonstration Club; and so she invited me and I—that was the time for me to get active, and it was a way of meeting the ladies in the community and getting involved in—'cause [because] it was a small community and I just was very active . . .

And what year was that?

That was in 1964.

And it was still called Home Demonstration then?

Home Demonstration Club. And I believe it was changed to Extension Homemakers in [19]66.

OK, and then you moved to Hot Springs. When?

Moved to Hot Springs in 1970 and . . .

And what club did you become associated with then?

Well, I went to the Courthouse [Editors Note: The Extension Office was located in the Garland County Courthouse in 1970.] to see about a club, and they told me that all the clubs had a limited membership and suggested that I organize another club, so I got ladies in the area that I lived, and they asked friends, and we ended up with about 15 ladies. And they met at my home and we organized the Lakeshore EH Club, which existed for 40 years, until we had to disband.

And when did you disband that club?

In ninete—2010.

And so, you are presently a club member, though. So what club are you with now?

When Lakeshore disbanded, I—I tried to figure out which club I would join, 'cause I—they all were—I knew ladies in all the clubs, but I'd always kinda [kind of] wanted to get into quilting more, so I joined the Crazy Quilters, and I've been a member of their club since 2010. I really—I was not gonna drop being an EH club member—I was gonna stay with it [*laughs*].

So you're in Crazy Quilters—and what county and district is Crazy Quilters in?

Crazy Quilters Club is in—Garland County and in Ouachita District.

And do you have any special remembrances—other than the fact that the ladies didn't look too kindly on you bringing a small baby to your meeting—of maybe—of that meeting or some of the meetings in, maybe—Daisy, Arkansas?

Well, when I lived at Daisy—the—most of the county workshops and things were in Murfreesboro, and that was the county seat. And I became very active and was elected County president in 1970, which I moved to Hot Springs, so I never did get to serve there. But I'd been club officers, all the county officers there in—and that was Pike County.

And you have continued your membership all these years. Why have you done that?

[Pause] Well, I feel like that the Extension programs and the—have provided an education for me through workshops and projects and being a lead—a leader, county officer I've gained leadership abilities, and I just became involved—in everything. I'm just—I—sometimes I think I'm a product of the Extension Service. [*Laughs*]

So, you said that you had done a lot of the different leadership positions. Can you tell me about the offices and committee chairmanships and special responsibilities that you've held, maybe on the local, the county, the district, and the state—and even national level?

I have been, I think, every office in the club two or three times and prob—and I've served two terms as the Garland County President, plus county program leader . . .

Which programs have you been leaders of?

Well, clothing, resource management. I've been publicity chairman . . .

And have you been a leader in the district?

Yes, I was citizenship chairman for a few years, and then I became in—in 1987, I was elected Arkansas Extension Homemakers State President, and that brought a lot of challenges and it was very rewarding to give back to my—to the Extension Homemaker program 'cause I felt like I learned so much, and it was kind of a payback time. But it really was, I felt, like an honor. And, and representing the Extension Homemakers, I was able to attend national meetings and international meetings and traveled a lot, got to see a lot of counties—I mean, a lot of states—and—that I probably would never have got to do otherwise. [*Unclear words*] It gave me a lot of opportun—opportunities.

I think you have—may have a unique place in Arkansas Extension Homemaker presidency, because you served how many years?

I served three years. At that time we were reorganizing, and in order for the rotation to work part of the officers had to serve a three-year term. So, I had the opportunity to serve three years. And, and I'm still active as a member of the Past Presidents Organization, at this time, so it keeps me involved on the state level. And I've attended national meetings and become very involved in that. In fact, I—this past month, I attended the national organization, NVON, and was the Arkansas voting delegate.

And what does the NVON stand for?

[*Laughs*]

[Pause in recording]

We are back after a short pause.

The national organization, NVON, is the National Volunteer Outreach Network. And they are—involves eight state—states. This organization began after the previous national organization—there was problems, and Arkansas withdrew from them, and then later these eight states organized a nat—another national organization. And their goals and purposes are more in line with what we've always had with the Extension Homemakers.

Let's see. We've talked about you attending State Council Meetings.

In what year do you think, maybe, you attended your first State Council Meeting?

I attended in 1966, and the meeting was at the University of Arkansas, and what I remember most about it—that—attending that meeting—it was a big decision because I'd never been away from my husband and son any length of time, but I went and, I guess I caught the bug because I don't think I've missed but two or three State Meetings since then. My husband and son did fine without me, and, so, it kinda became a mini-vacation away from planning meals and washing dishes [*laughs*] and meeting new friends. It's always fun to go back each year and see old friends that you've made through the years.

Do you have any really special remembrances of the State Meetings?

One of the things that I remember off the top of my head is that Garland—when—after I moved to Hot Springs—Garland County group was always a large number of ladies that attended, and one night of the meeting we would have a get-together—kind of a pajama party. And we were laughing and telling jokes and just having so much fun. And one of our ladies said, "I've never seen a group have so much fun without havin' [*having*] a drink or two." And we thought that was really funny and—and, but just sharing the different sessions that everybody had gone to.

We always had an evaluation sheet, and it was the group as a whole would make decisions how—what they liked, and what they didn't like. And it was just a fun time. We always had snacks and, and one of the things about state meetings was visiting all the different universities all over Arkansas. It was an opportunity to see what the campuses were like, and we always carried our sheets and pillows and our own bedding and it was just a fun time to—and some colleges' dormitories were better than others. But, all in all, it was a—a big opportunity to visit all over the state.

And where are most of the State Meetings being held now?

Now, they are in Hot Springs, Arkansas, at the Convention Center. And I don't—we've probably been doing that about 10 years—something like that. And I had a concern at the time, when we switched. I didn't feel like the ladies

would probably go because of the extra expense. But I have been proven wrong. We have an attendance of six fifty to seven hundred ladies every year [Editor's Note: A few men also attend.]. And I think they enjoy not having to take their bedding [*laughs*]. And it's a good place to sleep.

How has Extension Homemakers touched your life?

I think the Extension Homemakers has—gave me opportunities that I would not have had otherwise—the friendships I have made over the years [pause]—and—the educational part has been the real key to bein' [being] involved because every meeting we have—there's always something to learn. We've had county workshop and—all—every—aspect of homemaking and it's just been a—a part of my life.

Do you have any special people that you'd like to tell me about?

Well, Susan Neeper, the agent in Garland County when I moved here. I remem—the first time I met her was at 4-H camp. And we were—I was new to the county, and she was new, and we were room buddies and that kinda started. Over the years, we were room buddies for a lots of meetings and had lots of late night talks. But she was very special in my life. And just the ladies in my county. I've al—I've never lived close to my family, so the—the club members really are my family. And [long pause] I've made some friends over the state that—one lady in particular is Pauline Myrick from Star City. She and I started out as 4-H leaders and attended seminars and camps, and she and I have just become friends over the years. We stay together at the State Meeting, and we've traveled to a lot of the national meetings and things together. I told her recently she was like the sister I never had.

You mentioned somethin' [something] about 4-H, and I think that you've been involved with the 4-H Foundation.

Yes, I'm a member of the Garland County 4-H Foundation and also was on the State 4-H Foundation Board for about 15 years. Before I—besides bein' an Extension Homemaker, I was also a 4-H leader and for about 25 years. So, 4-H and Extension Homemakers—the Cooperative Extension Program has just provided a lot of workshops and opportunities to serve in my community and do

volunteer work through their projects.

If you had to pick your favorite event or activity, out of all these things that you've done over the years, can you name one or two?

Well, one of the things, I was the arts and crafts chairman for about 10 years, and cleaning up the buildings after the county fair to get ready for the arts and crafts fair was a real challenge—and—[unclear word] . . .

And this was for the Garland County Arts and Crafts Fair?

Yes.

In Hot Springs, Arkansas.

Yes. The buildings—after a while, we were able to—we had the funds to hire someone to clean up the buildings, but I think that's probably one of the lesser things that I enjoyed. And 'course [of course], there's always the job of setting up and cleaning up after workshops and meetings and—but that just goes along with the territory [laughs].

So those are some of the harder times. Do you have a time that you enjoyed especially?

[Pause] Club meetings is probably the most enjoyable—just meeting with the ladies and having our lesson and the fellowship and the—over the years you get to know everybody very personal, and you get involved in each other's lives, and it's just like a—a family.

[Pause] What changes have you experienced in the Extension Homemakers organization through all these years?

Well, one of the things that I think about is our—our agent, Family Consumer Science Agent is not as—she's more—plays the role of assistant. Back when it was Home Demonstration, the agent went to every club meeting—usually gave the program or the lesson. But, now, our membership is able to plan their own programs with the assistance of the agent and also, on the state level we do not

have the specialists that we used to have, and they—at one time, they did a lot of workshops like clothing workshops, food and nutrition, but you don't have that now. And some change has been good, some—is not good. But just the whole Cooperative, the Extension Program has changed over the years with the—and with the Extension Homemakers—the name change . . .

What did the name change—it [Editor's Note: "It" refers to the name of the organization.] changed from Home Demonstration to Extension Homemakers, and then it had a [Editor's Note: another] change for a while, and what was that?

Family Community Education. [Editor's Note: The name of the organization was changed to Arkansas Association for Family and Community Education] and then when Arkansas withdrew from the National, they took back the name Arkansas Extension Homemakers]

[Pause] Has Extension Homemakers taught you anything about people?

Yes. [Laughs] You have all types of personalities in the membership. Being in a leadership role, it has taught me how to work with people so that—for the betterment of our organization. It's just—sometimes there are difficult people to deal with, but there's usually a way. And through the workshops and seminars and things on leadership that has made it possible for me to work with people that I probably otherwise could not have tolerated [laughs].

Do you have any other memories or experiences or thoughts that we haven't touched on that you'd like to share with us?

Well, I think bein' a member of the Extension Homemakers has given me a view of the world, because we are a worldwide [*unclear words*] organization because of our club, our county, our state. And then we have the national organization. And, then, we are also a part of Country Women's Council and the Associated Country Women of the World. And we recently had the Associated Country Women of the World meeting here in Ar—Hot Springs. And that was just a real exciting time. They meet in different countries every three years, and it'll probably be 20 years before they ever meet in USA again. And I was in charge of the Country Store, which was a fund-raiser to help USA

pay expenses. And that was very exciting—had some wonderful workers. I could not have done it by myself, without all my workers. But it was a very eye-opening experience, dealing with ladies from all over the world—they trying to figure out the money they owed us because they had come through different countries and had different monies. Sometimes, they would just hold their hand out and tell us to take what we needed to pay for their item they had bought. But I think that's one of the biggest things for me is it's just gave me a view of the whole world through the eyes of the—the organizations.

Well, thank you for all of the contributions that you have made to Extension Homemakers and for sharing your time and memories with me and with the people that will listen to this interview. And I appreciate this and hope that you enjoy many more years in your organization.

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