

ARKANSAS EXTENSION HOMEMAKERS COUNCIL
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Official transcript of:

Connie Avonne Petty

Member Pisgah Extension Homemakers Club of Pike County

Original recording made 4 October 2011

at Delight, Arkansas

Recorded, transcribed and edited by:

Jeanette Deaton

Pike County Extension Homemakers Council President





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Oral History Program

Jeanette Deaton, Pike County Extension Homemakers Council President

4 October 2011

This is an audio recording of Connie Avonne Petty. This interview is part of an Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council Oral History Program, and Avonne is answering questions asked by Pike County Extension Homemakers Council President, Jeanette Deaton.

Questions and comments by Jeanette are in boldface type; Avonne's responses and comments are in lightface type.

I am Jeanette Deaton. This is the interview with Avonne Petty for the Arkansas Extension Homemakers Council's Oral History Program. This is being done on October 4, 2011, at Jeanette's home, 142 Bowen Road, Delight, Arkansas, in Pike County.

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.

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Yes

First, I'd like you to give your complete legal name and spell it for me, and then tell me the city and county in which you presently reside.

My name is Connie Avonne Petty. It's C-o-n-n-i-e A-v-o-n-n-e P-e-t-t-y, and

I live near Delight, Arkansas, in Pike County.

Avonne, 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. What, what has been your association with the Extension Homemakers program?

I belonged to the Manchester EH [Extension Homemakers] Club in Clark County for a few months in 1965. We moved to Pike County in December of that year and I joined the Pisgah EHC [Extension Homemakers Club] Club in February of 1996—1966. I had a new baby and the ladies made me feel very welcome.

So you were just a homemaker? Yes?

Yes. . . yes.

And you continued, how long did you continue in this same Pisgah Club that made . . . ?

Forty-five years, and I am still in the club.

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

Oh, I don't remember. I know the ladies over in Manchester invited me to come, and I really liked it, so I really tried to find a—a club out here that I could join out here.

OK. So, how long did you say that you've been associated with the program?

Over 45 years.

OK. What was the first club with which you were associated and what year?

Well, that was the Manchester club—back in 1965.

In [19]65. OK. And you are presently a—a club member?

Uh-huh.

In Pike County? [*unclear words*]

I still belong to the Pisgah EH Club, located near Delight in Pike County in the Southwest District of Arkansas. Our club was organized in 1932 and has been meeting since that time. Uh, One of the charter members admonished me to keep the club going, and so I've tried to. We don't have many members, but we are still working, and we're pretty active.

Do you have any special remembrances of that first meeting or that first club?

I remember meeting at Tot Watt's house. At that time we met at different homes each month. Tot always had the February meeting and decorated her—her tables and all for Valentine's Day. I was impressed at how much the ladies were doing in their lives and community. For years, December was my meeting. And now we meet in a church community room where we have room for our projects that we do.

OK. And can you talk about some of those projects?

Oh, we're—we've been making baby diapers for, out of T-shirts for a orphanage in Zambia. We've made little dresses for the orphanage. We've made booby pillows. We've made little blankets. We're making little blankets now for the DHS [Department of Human Services] for children who are taken out of the home—little quilts and things like that. We've made 'em for the children's hospital [Arkansas Children's Hospital at Little Rock] and a lot other different things.

OK. Do you have any special remembrances of that first meeting or that first club?

[*Whisper. Laughs*] We met at Tot's.

Met at Tot's. OK. So, why did you join?

Oh, I joined to learn new things that would make me a better homemaker and to get better acquainted with my neighbors. Since I had moved out here, I was completely new and didn't know anyone; and I was a young bride with a new baby and had so much to learn, and they really made me feel welcome.

So, why did you continue that membership?

Oh, for the fellowship and new ideas. Our world is changing so much—rapidly, and we need help keeping up with new technology and research-based information. I joined to learn things.

So, how involved did you become?

Ohhh, I have filled the role of several officers in my club. I have never been the club president, but served as county Council president in 1974 and have been scrapbook chairman and am now the Council reporter on the—on the county level, and I'm reporter for our club now.

OK. Have you attended state Council meetings?

I only attended one state meeting, and I did enjoy it, but I work part-time with the county 4-H program. And we have several 4-H summer programs that I just can't find time in June to—to go.

So, in what year? Do you remember what year it was that you attended?

Oh, it's been about five years ago. [*Sniff*]

And what kind of remembrances do you have of that event?

Ohhh. Well, we had a good time. I remember that. They had lots of crafts that I enjoyed. And the speakers were really well—really good. [*Sniff*]

How has Extension Homemakers touched your life?

Oh, I really enjoy my EHC work. The people I've met are the very best. I've had so many EHC friends through the years have made an impact on my life. When I moved to Delight, the EHC members were doing many, many things. They were the "movers and shakers" of their communities and county, and I just started getting involved along with them. I thought, "If they can make and do these things, I can learn to do them, also." They were always willing to pass their knowledge on to me. I learned to speak up and articulate my feelings and ideas to make my community a better place to live. We had one former state EHC officer became my mentor and greatly influenced my life in a lot of different ways.

Would you like to talk about this person, and why she influenced your life, and how?

Well, she just really encouraged me to do things that I would have—make me step outside my box and do things that I probably wouldn't have done.

Such as—give us some examples.

[Laughs] Well, I think, maybe my job [laughs] for one thing, doing more with the kids; and she really encouraged me to really do that, and that's probably one of the reasons I'm still working because of the kids, and that she got me so involved with them and how important it was that someone take the time to do these things with the kids.

OK. What—what's been your favorite event or activity with EHC?

Oh, my favorite event is our monthly club meetings. We have few members, but the fellowship time is so important to all of us. We have a productive meeting, and then we all go eat lunch together at a restaurant. This is our time to catch up with news of our neighbors, which I don't usually get to do, and it's also the one day of the month that I do something for me. It's just, it's my—go ahead, I'm sorry.

What—what are some of those productive things that you do in a meeting?

We sew, and we do, we get our Council—we get our fair booths together. We

[*sighs*] decide a whole lot of things that we're gonna [going to] do in our project work; and, also, like the cemetery dinner, we have to make our plans for our club projects that we are going to do during the month.

OK. What's been your least favorite event or activity?

My least favorite is losing fellow club members to age and death. We are a very close-knit group.

OK. Is there any particular ones that you would like to pay tribute to?

Oh, oh, there's been so many over the years, I just really can't. There's been some great, great leaders in our County EHC that are—have really been wonderful ladies in over 45 years. I would hate to say just some one in particular.

What changes have you experienced in the Extension Homemakers organization?

Well, there are fewer opportunities, I think, to learn—to learn new things. The home economist used to work closer with the clubs, and we had a demonstration each month. She would hold leader training sessions, and a member would bring back a demonstration. We learned to raise more food in our gardens, can and freeze the produce, make crafts and other items to improve our homes; we learned about new appliances and new ideas, a lot of different things like that. So, now our lessons are usually something to read, usually health-related. Things change with the times, and I know that there're budget constraints.

OK. Has Extension Homemakers taught you anything about people?

Well, that everyone has different abilities and talents. We all have our ways of doing and learning things. Our club is very active. We don't have tea party meetings; we work. We try to accomplish some form of community service every month during our meeting time. Our projects are varied, and we have taken a leadership role in the county EHC community service projects. We also help out with various other projects in the Delight area.

OK, are—are any other—any other memories, experiences or thoughts that you would like to share?

Well, I think, the most important thing about EHC is the love. Women need this close time with their “sisters.” And we are a very close-knit group; and, I think, that is extremely important in this day and time that we have someone, especially people that don’t have family close by. They need their sisters to—just to—just to be close to.

Anything else that you would like to share?

In January of 1970, my baby girl was born a month earlier than expected. She was only a week old on club meeting day, so I didn’t try to attend. The group surprised me by moving the meeting to my house. They had planned a shower for me but got to include the baby. My children always attended club meetings, and the ladies never seemed to mind. After she started school, my daughter would beg to stay home on club meeting day. When I was Council president, my daughter had to attend. Some of the ladies would bring her things to—to play with. Her favorite was paper dolls from a dear lady at Glenwood. My children learned social skills and discipline by attending the meetings and met people from all over the county. I think, not just the Delight group, but we do know people from a lot of the whole area. I would have never been able meet and love people from Glenwood like I have the ladies in my EHC group. It is a shame so many mothers have to work outside the home and do not have time to learn the skills taught through Extension Homemakers Club work.

Thank you for all your contributions to Extension Homemakers and for sharing your time and your memories with us.

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