

Reflections from the Past: The FCS Educator with the Longest Tenure – Stella McKinstry

Jan Scholl (PA) and Stella McKinstry (WY), NEAFCS 75th Anniversary Committee Members

Currently retired, Stella McKinstry may very well be the Extension Family and Consumer Science Educator with the longest Extension career, spanning 60 years, primarily in Sublette County in Pinedale, Wyoming. My first introduction to Stella in the 1980s was standing at the top of the stairs on a school bus in Farson, Wyoming — one might call it a wide spot in the road — with a quart-sized ice cream cone in her hand to advertise a local commodity to weary Extension professionals traveling to the Extension Annual Conference in Jackson Hole. Her zest for life is an inspiration to me and many Family Consumer Science Educators.

Stella was born to Linda and Harold McKinstry. Her mother, from Massachusetts, met her father while teaching in Washington DC. Her homestead is now part of Grand Teton National Park. Stella had a brother, Neal (died in 2007) and a sister, Jeanne (died in 2001). Her mother (who graduated from Framingham University in a home economics program) had connections to Extension work, as Stella has related to me that she once took rising bread on a city bus to a food demonstration site in Denver. Asked by a man, what was under the cloth, she replied "dough" (the man thought she had money)! Colorado had almost landed her instead of Wyoming. "The reason I came to Wyoming instead of Colorado is that the starting salary here was \$2,100, and down there was \$1,800 a year," she said. "That was a good wage. That \$300 made the difference."

But, Wyoming received its money's worth many times over. She was involved in many administrations but says she never was tempted to leave CES. "It is a satisfying job. I liked it all the time. You never work a day in your life if you enjoy it," she said. "I flirted with teaching, but chose to educate through the Extension Service." Stella graduated from high school and Colorado State University in Fort Collins with a degree in Home Economics. Stella was an agent-at large in Albany, Niobrara, Fremont, Lincoln, Natrona, Goshen counties during 1946, her first year on the job; then she worked until 1952 in Platte County before moving back to her home county, Sublette County.

In many ways, her life was different from most women at the time. "There weren't too many women who had cars at that point. People couldn't figure out how a single woman could have a car and be independent. My first car cost \$600. It was a four-door Ford — a cute little car." She also had the opportunity to travel to Australia, New Zealand, Jerusalem, Virgin Islands, Belgium, Holland, France, Germany and Switzerland. She has been to Canada and Alaska, the Mediterranean, South America, Italy, Spain, and Portugal.

In 1961, Stella received a Masters degree in Extension from Washington State University in Pullman, WA. The title of her thesis was, "A study of attitudes toward the responsibility of the county extension worker in the 4-H program and the social and developmental needs of youth" which may be loaned from the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, MD.

Stella attended many NEAFCS Conferences and was the NEAFCS, Second Vice President 1956-57 and Chairman of Exhibits in 1983. She remarked, "At that time we had over 300 exhibits and the majority of them were companies featuring their products with special prices on appliances, like Hoover still does . . . not many were as educational as we have now."

Stella will be 85 this year and is still very active! She is involved in Big Brothers and Sisters, Medicare Hospice, PEO, VFW Auxiliary, gives programs at senior centers and homemaker clubs, and state Food Manager's meetings. Playing pinochle, taking part in the senior TV WII bowling league, traveling and reading are still in her busy schedule. She is involved on the 75th Annual Session committee and personally I am excited whenever I see her! She is interested in everybody and everything. For those of us who sometimes get discouraged about lack of resources, she has truly been an inspiration to me!

