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Interview with Jane Morgan

Jane Morgan

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Harris Carmichael

This is Mrs. ~~Wesley~~ ~~Scorner~~ from Mississippi and I am interviewing Mrs. C. D. Morgan, Jane Morgan, of Amite County about her Homemaker activities through the years that she has been a homemaker. Now Jane, how long have you been a homemaker?

You might say all my life because I went to homemaker clubs when I was growing up but I have actually been a member about 42 years. As a child I would go to meetings and they just had so much fun. They would can meat, talk about the various things of life like quilting, things that then was their way of life. This cousin of mine would go about the neighborhood canning beef for people and they would all meet and she would have such a good time that I thought right then that when I grow up I'm going to help people learn the ways of life like she did. I guess that's the reason I have continued in my club work. Her sister had most of the meetings at her house. They would quilt quilts, they would make mattresses, stuff the pillows, make mops out of shucks which was their way of cleaning floors, even make peanut butter. I remember Uncle Hugh grinded the peanuts up in the sausage mill and they would put a little salt in there and they used the little tiny peanuts because they had more oil in them and make peanut butter. Neighbors would bring some of theirs in to make peanut butter.

So it was these kinds of things that really influenced me to be a club member. They were so happy in doing it. We lived on a farm and everybody grew their things that they ate. Maybe we would kill a beef this week and another one would kill one next week and they would pail it out around the neighbors. What we didn't use fresh we would can. We even canned chickens

because then we didn't have any refrigeration. We even dug a hole out in the ground and put sawdust in it with a block of ice. That was our refrigeration. Of course when the club women got together and talked about these things, it helped everyone.

Along about what time was this in years? Was that say soon after World War I?

I'd say this was in the '30s because I became a club member about '38. This was before that.

What are some of your earliest things that you did as a homemaker when you joined the club after you had married or whenever it was that you joined a homemaker club?

When I first joined we more or less, it was cooking or sewing, that type of thing was what we did more than anything else. That's what homemakers were interested in was cooking and sewing. We didn't have outside activities like we do today. So we wanted to know how to sew better and make hats or anything. We made everything then at home. We cooked new recipes. I remember one time making cottage cheese. Of course we all had our own milk cows then and we would put the clabber in cheese cloth and let it drip out and that's how we would make cottage cheese. The likes of such as that like making ^{the} hominy. ~~corn~~. We made those things back then. We didn't go to the store and buy them. We made them. We raised the corn.

Do you remember how this hominy was made from the corn?

I don't know whether I could make it today or not but I remember taking the ashes from the fireplace and taking them out in this barrel and letting the lye drip out of them. That lye was what we made our hominy corn out of. We would put it on the corn and let it soak and it would eat the husk off the

corn. Then you would have to wash it and wash it and wash it some more. It was good. So many things like that we learned how to do when I was coming along.

This corn that you made into the hominy, then that was served for the family.

Oh yes. We grew the corn and then made it into hominy and we would eat it.

Was any of this type of thing canned?

Yes, if you made more than you were going to use then you canned it. You could open it up later and eat it.

What about some of the other activities? You mentioned outside activities like we do today. What are some of the outside activities that you are involved in today?

Well, meeting with groups and teaching them to cane chairs, for instance. Several years ago there were chairs being wasted, antique chairs being thrown away because they didn't have a bottom in them and I thought if anybody could put a bottom in it then I could certainly learn how. So I went to work in learning how and for the last 5 years I have been swamped with chairs to do. That is an outside activity. Really we have always had out church activities that we've been to. Of course they're different now because we used to walk to church. We lived about a mile from the church as we do right now and we wouldn't think about walking today. But then we walked, with a group of people. Even at night we would walk to BYTU which was a young people's organization. It's BTU now I believe. Anyway we would walk and have the most fun in the world. That was our form of recreation. Then we would play games, parlor games or games that a group of people would play. Now you seem to get

in a car and drive to town to the drive in or something like that for your recreation. But we didn't do that then. We didn't go to town everyday then like we do now. Just last week my husband, we were snowed in for about a week, and my husband realized he said, "Do you know we haven't been to town in 8 days?" That's very odd now but back then we didn't go but about once a month. Then of course we've always had reading material in our home in yesteryears as today. Of course we've always had good magazines like the Progressive Farmer and things like this and the seed catalog and Sears Roebuck catalog. This was the way that we learned about other things that were for sale. Of course today we have our reading material, we have our radios and TVs, we take vacations and things of this sort but back then we didn't.

What is the difference in your transportation now than say 35 years ago when you were a young married woman?

Now we have most every family has two or three vehicles but then you did real well to have a T model sitting out in from of the house or in the garage. Of course I can remember in earlier years when my parents used a buggy and my granddaddy used a wagon to go into town to buy merchandise for the hands on the place and thought nothing about it where now we can get in the pickup truck and go and buy feed for the family. So transportation has really changed. Now every family member that is old enough has a vehicle to drive. Then that was unheard of.

I would like for you to go into a little more detail about the caning of chairs that you said you got interested in about 5 years ago. What type of caning is this?

We do all types. We do the rush caning, the freewoven caning, just the cane like porch rockers and then the 7 step caning. I teach classes at the Extension offices throughout the district. I've had them in nearly every surrounding county and even in Washington ^{Parrish} ~~Lowry~~ in Louisiana. I had several workshops down there. I'm trying to show people they really can preserve these antique chairs and I'd really rather teach them to do it than I had do it for them but I usually stay with 3 or 4 chairs. Right now I have 3 at my house to do and I usually keep a line in front of me to do. At Christmas I said I wasn't going to do any during December because I thought I ought to have a little time off and here comes a grandmother who wanted a chair for her granddaughter, an antique family chair that she wanted done for her granddaughter for Christmas. Well I obliged her. Then another person wanted 3 stools to give for Christmas presents and I couldn't let her down. I had to do it. But there is such a demand for it and I have done some beautiful chairs. I wouldn't take anything for learning how and showing other people how.

Where did you learn how to do this caning of chairs?

Well, that's a big question. My neighbor had this old cowhide bottom chair that was sitting out rotting, ruining for the lack of a bottom. We started discussing the chair caning and we decided to have it in our county as one of our projects that we were going to learn how to cane. Somebody knew somebody that had done a little bit of it or something so we decided we would meet and we did. But they knew very little about it and we kept on and I talked to anybody that I knew that did chairs. First thing you know I could do it. The first one I did I vowed I'd never do another 7 step one, but it got easier and easier and easier to do as I learned more about it. You know you always learn so much teaching other people. It helps you more than it does them I think.

So I learned how through trial and error and now I can do a pretty good job.

Do you get paid for doing this for other people?

Oh yes. I couldn't afford to do it for nothing because there is such a big demand. Of course I say when I was learning my sister-in-law had a chair and I didn't even own a chair to be caned. Now I do though. At that particular time my sister-in-law had a chair and she said you can learn on my and I was delighted and that was the first chair that I did and the bottom is still in it. That's been about 6 years ago. So I did some at first for free, but since the demand has gotten so great I have to charge. I get the cane already done and take the chairs.

I don't believe we have mentioned anything about your children. How many children do you have? What are some of the things that you remember in your family life, the values that you taught your children as they were growing up?

I have a son and a daughter. I never have worked other than at home when they were growing up. I stayed at home and I went to more PTA meetings, more football games, ran a public jitney for anybody else's kids that wanted me to. So this is the type of things that I did when my children were growing up and I tried to have a good home life for them and to teach them how to work as I had been taught how to work. Right now they are on their own and I have 7 grandchildren. Of course that's always a grandmother's pride and joy are her grandchildren, all the way from 17 years down to 2 years. That gives me an outlook on life today that I know about the young people.

Do you see the differences in family values now as when your children were growing up.

Yes, things are different now. The children now have so much more than my children did when they were growing up. Of course I think children learn

so much from TV which my children didn't have at first when they were growing up. Of course we got the TV while they were still at home, but I think whether it's a bad or good influence, children are influenced by TV.

What are some of the values that you learned as a child that you've lived by as you've grown older?

My daddy was very firm in teaching me to be honest, to be truthful, to in other words be what you are, not a put on. That's the thing that has really been with me all of my life. Not to brag, not to be jealous of anybody else, not to down people because they're not like you, but to be honest and truthful. Everybody's not alike. These are the things that I have carried all through my life and things that I've tried to teach my children. My daddy used to say, "All have come short of the glory of God." So nobody's perfect, nobody does things perfect all the time. Of course strive to but we do know that nobody's perfect and that's the thing that I taught my children. When I was growing up there was just two girls in the family, my sister and I, and I had to more or less do the boy chores around the house. I followed around after my father and I was the one who drew the water, that brought in stove wood and things of this type and my sister was the one that stayed in the house and did the housework. There was nothing I thought was any better than getting in the garden and hoeing the garden with my father and things of this type and this was what I did. I guess that's the reason I have such a love for the outdoors today and the things of nature. The berries and squirrels and everything of nature. We have a bluebird project now in Homemakers Extension work that we've been doing and it's just a joy for me to do these kinds of things because that's what I've been doing all my life.

So you live in an area where nature is close around you?

Oh yes. We have squirrels in the front yard. We have all kinds of birds and we live on a small farm. I always said I was the farmer after we were married and my husband was a railroad man because I stayed at home and I had a few cows, cats and dogs and I've even got a couple of goats now that are pets and three ducks that are pets. But I just love that kind of thing. Even though my husband is retired now I thought that when he retired from the railroad then I was going to retire from the farm but you know it hasn't worked out that way. I'm still that farmer. We still raise our garden. We raise our vegetables to eat and love every minute of it. I still can and freeze. Of course we have a lot better way of doing it now. Through the Homemakers Extension we have learned how to do short cuts and things and preserve our food better and quicker than we did way back, but we still do those things.

You mentioned canning and freezing. Earlier you had mentioned when you were a child canning beef. Is the canning you do now similar?

All we can now more or less are things that we don't freeze. We freeze our beef now and we freeze lots of vegetables. Tomatoes are one thing I still have to have canned. I love canned tomatoes and it's our favorite of all things and I put up about 100 jars every year even though it's just my husband and I at home but we use them. We'll make tomato juice and I use it in my sauces and all, so I still can tomatoes. Also, I make jelly. We are jelly eaters and I still make jelly. Things of that type are the only things that we can now. We freeze our butterbeans, we freeze our peas, we freeze our meats and used to we didn't have the freezer. Of course we had a wood stove then. We could can on our wood stove, and we drew our own water. But now of course we have all the modern conveniences of life.

You mentioned that your husband and you were the only ones at home now. I'd like for you to tell me some of the differences of your way of doing things in your home now that there are just the two of you and when your children were at home. I'm sure there are some differences in the amount of time spent planning meals and even the way you do the meals.

Yes, there definitely is. I used to have three big meals a day when my children were at home. Now my husband and I have breakfast and then we have a light meal at lunch.

Jane, I want you to tell me a typical day's routine for you as a homemaker when your children were small or in school. What was it like then?

Getting up at 5 o'clock in the morning, getting breakfast, getting them dressed and ready to meet the school bus. Then doing housework. Either getting my husband off to work or waiting for him to come in because he worked for the railroad and he would come at odd times, different times. Doing the washing and ironing and seeing that the children had clothes to wear to school the next day. And then being there when they came home from school with a snack or something to eat and usually I had the meal then because they were always hungry and they would eat just knick knacks if I didn't have a meal fixed so I'd usually fix a meal and then they would eat their little knick knack before bedtime. Of course we didn't have telephones then, and lots of times my husband would get a call and I would have to carry him to work or I would have to go and sit and wait for him to come in. Of course then we just had the one car.

Where was it you would go sit and wait for him to come in?

To McComb to the railroad which was about 10 miles from where we lived and of course we didn't have paved roads to go on either. We had a washboard road, if you know what that is. And we would go there to do our shopping also.

Maybe you could tell me what this washboard road was like.

It was just a gravel road that had a lot of traffic on it and it had ruts in it that were rigid from the amount of traffic. Of course now the roads are all paved right to my front door.

What is a typical day for you now that there are only you and your husband at home?

Well, a typical day would just be getting up when we want to get up. We don't have any deadlines to meet. Having a good breakfast when we do get up and then maybe a light lunch and then a heavier meal later on during the day. Going to the mailbox is great satisfaction. We always look forward to friends. We have many friends and neighbors who visit us quite often and we always look forward to that. That's a typical day now. We go to bed whenever we please and get up whenever we please.

Jane, how does your typical day differ from your mother's typical day when you were a child?

My parents always got up about 4 o'clock in the morning and had breakfast and then my father would go to the field and plow at daylight and of course we would have to walk about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to meet the school bus. Many times we walked during the dark hours and it was dark when we got home. Of course there was always, my mother used a scrubboard and three big tubs of water to do the washing with and cooked on a wood stove and certainly we don't do that now.

When you say 3 big tubs of water you're not talking about a washing machine are you?

No, I'm talking about zinc tubs of well water that we had drawn from the well and used a wash pot. Of course wash day was an all day affair. Now I can do my whole wash in less than $\frac{1}{2}$ day, but that was a big one day affair, usually Monday.

Of course then a wood stove also many days if you were going to do any kind of baking, tea cakes or ginger cakes or something of this sort, well you would have a fire in the wood stove all day long. Of course biscuits was one thing you had every morning made from scratch. Now I hesitate to say, but sometimes I pop the cans open and have a biscuit in just a minute. But things of this sort was typical. It took so much longer then to accomplish the things that you can do now in just a few minutes. Of course there was the chore of ironing. Ironing was an all day affair. You had a little round furnish of coals that you heated the iron on or used the fireplace to heat the iron or the wood stove. You had to keep the fire going as well as do the ironing. You starched the things and then sprinkled them down and then ironed them and it took an awful lot of energy. Today if you're going to starch anything you just spray a little bit on there and you've got it made and it doesn't take nearly the time and we have the materials now that you don't even have to iron. So we save that. It's not an all day affair to do your ironing now anymore. Of course then back in my childhood we had kerosene lamps that we read by and studied by and you had to keep the chimney clean and you had to fill up the lamps to see that they were full and of course that took time, whereby now you just flip a switch on the wall and that's it. So we save a lot of energy now compared to what we used to.

With all of this extra time and energy that you save with your modern conveniences, what do you do with that extra time?

I'm a great person to read or to do handwork, crochet, I do counted cross stitch and needlepoint and things of this sort, make pillows or quilt or purses, just lots of things like that and now my husband and I and son even though he

is not at home, we have gotten terribly interested in wood work and doing wood working things. It's a great consolation to us to make something that we see in a magazine or a friends house. We sell a good many for gifts and things of this sort. So we can always spend our time.

Do you see that you have more time now for handwork than you had when you children were growing up?

Oh, yes. Then I had to quit. I didn't do any handwork then. I was running around after them then. I was always interested but I didn't have time to do it then. Now I know exactly what these younger generation say when they say, "Oh, I want to do that but I don't have time" because they have little children at home and I very often tell them they will have time later. I'm just glad I know how to do something that I can do something because I'm not a person to just sit down and hold my hands. I've got to be doing something and I like to be doing something constructively. I've learned so much from being an Extension homemaker, and I think one of the greatest things that I have accomplished by being a homemaker is to learn things that I can show other people. Many, many times people call me and want to know how to do something, maybe a recipe or how to crochet something or if I will read the directions and make them understand them better and things of this sort and it just thrills me to death to help people.

It sounds like you enjoy people.

I do. My husband and I both do. We enjoy people and enjoy helping people. We always helped anybody that wanted us to.

What have been some of the great satisfactions that you have gotten from being a homemaker?

Well, being in a position to help other people and being in a position that knowing the new trends or the new things as they have developed. I feel

like my education has been furthered along this line and really just helping other people, being in the know that I can help other people and if I don't know as they often say, can you find out for me. I think I know a source through Extension that I can find out any answer to any question. So I think that's one of the great satisfactions that I have for being a homemaker. If I don't know the answer I believe I can find out.

So you have never regretted that you didn't take time when your children were small to get outside employment rather than staying at home and being a homemaker.

No, I've always felt like that my place was being a homemaker. I taught school a short period of time and then when I married I decided that the home was the place for me so I stayed there ever since and I've never seeked outside employment.

When you told us your satisfaction of homemakers, have you had some disappointments along the way during these years that you have been a homemaker?

I don't think I've really had any disappointments, not grave disappointments anyway, maybe little things. You know you're going to have certain little things through life but that's just part of living. I've never really had a great disappointment in being a homemaker. It might not have been easy all this time, but not really a disappointment. If it was to do over I'd live my life in the future like I have in the past. I've never regretted being a homemaker.

It seems like you've been real satisfied with your role of being a homemaker.

I have. I've enjoyed being a homemaker.

What are some of the things in Extension Homemaker club work that you have gotten satisfaction from, that you feel has helped you personally or maybe has helped you to help your family?

I think my whole life has been based on being an Extension homemaker. There's not a day passes that I don't use something that I have learned through being an Extension Homemaker. We have learned to save energy, we have learned to do things a better way, a faster way and all of this we have gotten first hand information through the Extension Homemakers. And I don't think a day passes that I don't live better by being an Extension Homemaker. All of my life has been centered around. Now I've done other things and joined other organizations, but being a homemaker has been my first love. If I didn't have time to do the other things, well that's second fiddle, homemakers was always first. I felt like I could do that and still carry on my life as a wife, a mother because I could carry my children with me to the homemakers club when they were small and we just always as a family did things together. I used my homemaker skills in doing everything I've ever done.

What will you be able to tell a young person that is a young homemaker are some of the advantages of Extension homemaker club work?

I think that they could have a better way of life by knowing, getting first hand information, of knowing how to do things better and of course there are many things that we learn craftwise and well as educational wise. I think anybody can find a field in Extension homemakers that they will love to do. It is an education within itself. Now I think we have so much greater ways and means of educating the young homemakers than we did way back when I first was a member of the homemakers club. There is just so much to learn. The field is just wide open for whatever you're interested in you can find the answer through the Extension homemaker's club.

Can you tell me some specific things that perhaps in your own local club that would be of interest to young homemakers today?

In this day of emergency disasters, we have a study program on safety and emergency preparedness, helping us to know what we do in accidents and you know the home is one of the major places we seem to have accidents; tornadoes, floods, disasters, we learn what to do in these cases. We study tradition, culture, food and government affairs in countries all over the world which is most interesting as well as educational. It teaches us good working relationships with other club members. We have firsthand information on nutrition for the family including babies through senior citizens. Also we have a better understanding of drug usage for our families. Though we are not a political program we study candidates, local, state, legislature, in fact when I was state citizenship chairman I became so involved in helping people to register and the importance of voting that our people in our county approached me and I was elected election commissioner for the county. We are encouraged to read good books, magazines and promote the use of these in public places such as hospitals, nursing homes and so forth. We study historical landmarks, we have tours of cultural interest, so why wouldn't anybody want to be a member of a homemaking club?

It sounds like that you will have something to tell those young homemakers that want to ask you what is the advantage of being a homemaker? Are there any other things that you might like to tell someone else about being a homemaker, about any experiences about you might not have already discussed, that you might want to share with someone else?

Well, the whole program is an educational program bettering our way of life and we strive to make the best better. We never get too old to learn and we have the firsthand information of new trends, new ways of doing things, and the world is constantly changing and through the Home Economics program we learn of these changes firsthand and know what to do.

Then you have no other things. You think everything has been covered that you might like to tell anyone concerning homemakers.

As I have said before, I have based my whole life on the homemakers Extension work. There's no problem that I can't solve through the Extension homemaker's work. Even though we are not a craft oriented program, we do have the crafts which is good mental therapy for anybody. So we just have a well rounded program.

It seems like you are a real good advocate for homemaking and homemaker activities. Thank you for allowing me to interview you. This tape recording was starting on January 19 and completed on January 20, 1982.