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Pat Adams Oral History Transcript

January 28, 2009

New Orleans, LA

Pat Adams, a native of Thibodaux, Louisiana, recently retired (again) after a long and rewarding career in child nutrition programs. Pat was already a teacher when she was recruited to be the assistant supervisor in school food service in Terrebonne Parish in Houma, Louisiana, in 1979, and was promoted to supervisor in 1984. She remained with Terrebonne Parish until 1997, when she retired the first time and went to work for the Archdiocese of New Orleans school nutrition program. Pat again retired in 2009 to pursue other interests. Never one to sit still for long, on the day of our interview she was taking a break from chairing her local Mardi Gras committee.

Melba Hollingsworth interviewed Pat Adams at the New Orleans Archdiocese in New Orleans, Louisiana, on January 28, 2009.

MH: Pat would you tell us a little bit about yourself and where you grew up?

PA: Sure. I grew up in Thibodaux, the second of four children. I have two sisters and a brother, and my oldest sister has eight children.

MH: Wow.

PA: So I have numerous nieces and nephews. My parents are still living; they're seventy-nine years old, and basically good, hardworking people that never really finished high school back in that era, so they always pushed us as far as we could go, and out of my siblings I'm the only one that managed to go to college and get a degree, so that made them extremely happy.

MH: So what was your earliest recollection of child nutrition programs?

PA: Well that's what's really funny; when I saw the questions and I tried to look back on...I started school lunch in 1979. It's not something I thought I would ever get into, but when I look back I noticed there were some things that were always drawing me into it. I

was a classroom teacher. My degree was in Education. I went to Nicholls State University and got a degree in Home Economics with a minor in Science. Started out teaching knowing that it's not really what I wanted to do, and one of my former principals had gotten to the central office and the superintendent was looking for someone to be the assistant supervisor in school food service in Terrebonne Parish in Houma. Apparently the state has just gone down and done one of their reviews. And since Terrebonne had forty schools they recommended to people. Apparently they were having trouble finding someone. They had advertised; I don't ever recall seeing the advertisement. So this principal recommends me to the superintendent. And I get a phone call from the superintendent's designee, telling me about the job and they would like to talk to me about it. I'm thinking, "School food service; what is that?" I went in and sat and spoke with them and thought, "You know, this might not be something bad to get into; it's very challenging, it's very different." But then when I went back to look back on things about what kept drawing me into that, I was moving several years ago, and I threw out a bunch of college notes. I found a research course on a topic that I had done, which was voluntary, the topic wasn't assigned. It was on school lunch. And I thought, "Gee, that's interesting. I don't even remember doing that in college." And I also had a college professor who I worked for as a student worker at Nicholls State, and she was just starting the dietetic internship program. My interest was not the food side. My interest was the other part of food service, and she drew me in and I worked with her. And she did all of the quantity cookery, she did a lot of dedication of buildings at Nicholls, and I worked one-on-one with her. I just got drawn into quantity and food service.

MH: And what was her name?

PA: Dr. Jean Holland. I don't know if you remember, she started the dietetic program at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux. And I remember one of the buildings we were going to dedicate. Something happened and she had to leave. She looked at me and she said, "Okay, Pat, do it." And I went, "What do you mean do it? She said, "You've done all the others with me, you know what to do." So we were talking several hundred people, to plan the menu, which was hors d'oeuvres and things; get it prepared, serve it, set it up. So when I look back, that's probably my first introduction to anything close enough to school food service because even though it wasn't school lunches, it was quantity cookery and things like that. So it just seemed like between the principal who thought a lot of me as a teacher and all that, the people just kept drawing me into it in 1979. I got into school lunch and it's thirty years.

MH: Wow.

PA: So it's been an interesting road.

MH: So that's how you became involved?

PA: That's how I became involved in school food service through a recommendation from Mr. Gus Brown who was a principal in an Ellender Junior High School when I taught. He told the superintendent, "This is the lady who can do it", because the other lady was going to be retiring in a few years.

MH: Now who was the other lady?

PA: Rose Marceaux.

MH: Oh.

PA: I don't know if you remember her. Rose Marceaux. She had been there for many, many years and I worked with her as her assistant.

MH: Was she the first one?

PA: As the way school food service was formed, I would say yes...and you can remember Joelle Noelle?

MH: Yes.

PA: Well actually Joelle started out her career in Terrebonne Parish because when Rose Marceaux went out on maternity leave, Joelle ran the program. I didn't know that until after I got to meet Joelle one day. We'd those area supervisor meetings and Joelle was talking about it. I said, "You were in Terrebonne?" She had a sister and a brother-in-law that lived in Terrebonne. So she started in Terrebonne before she went over to Ascension Parish.

MH: Wow.

PA: So it's a small, small world.

MH: Oh, yes.

PA: Very small world.

MH: A networking world.

PA: It is, it is because I also got to be very good friends with Barbara Gautier, who was Lafourche Parish in Thibodaux where I grew up. But her father was a very good friend of my former husband's father and I knew that I could call Barbara, and Barbara helped me through a lot of first things when I first took over because when Rose retired and I took over the program, they didn't give me an assistant. That was in 1984, the oil field had bombed, money was tight. So I found myself doing my old job plus a new job.

MH: Oh.

PA: So Barbara was a good mentor for me I guess, to pick up the phone and say, “Okay, Barbara, I need to ask you how to do this” or “What does this mean?”

MH: Do you recall how many people were at the time in the Parish, in Terrebonne?

PA: In Terrebonne I had a little over 200 employees, we had forty schools, and the population in the schools was probably somewhere around 21,000.

MH: Okay, so a real good mid-sized school system.

PA: Good. We were a little innovative I was told when I got into there. We did a lot of satellite feeding. We did not, even though there were forty cafeterias, we did not have – excuse me, forty schools – we didn’t have forty cooking cafeterias; we satellited a lot. We had special trucks with lift gates; we had special warmers. And we would hire the bus drivers; we’d make a route for them. They’d finish their bus route; we had a centralized warehouse and they’d park the trucks there; and after their bus route they’d pick up the truck and they might’ve had two or three schools that they had to deliver to. And then after lunch they would pick up the warmers and the remaining food, bring them back to the host school, bring their truck back to the warehouse, and then get on their school bus. And Mr. Charlie Collins was the finance director then, very, very innovative, and he kinda pushed Ms. Marceaux into looking into that direction, and later on I’m going to talk about one of the challenges, which was the Terrebonne teachers’ strike in the 80’s, and I’ll tell you how valuable it was to have had satellite schools. So I think Terrebonne was very innovative in school food service and that’s where I spent almost twenty-five years.

MH: Tell me about the positions that you have held.

PA: Okay, well I started out as the assistant supervisor in Terrebonne Parish from '79 to '84, and in 1984 I became the supervisor of school food service as it was known then, now we call it child nutrition. Then in 1997 I retired from the Terrebonne Parish school system and came to work here at school food nutrition services with Pat Farris.

MH: At the New Orleans Archdiocese.

PA: Here at the New Orleans Archdiocese...interesting to see the difference between public and private where my responsibility here was mainly a chore and we had 600 employees, we had over a hundred schools. So it was a lot bigger than what I was used to. However, in Terrebonne I had to do everything. I did commodities, I did free lunch, I purchased, I did the menus, I visited the schools. So when I got here and they said all I got to do is a HR and personnel, I was like, "Wow, you mean I don't have to do commodities? I don't have to do free lunch?" But I found that a lot of the people here would call upon me and say, "Can you tell me how you did this?" or "Can you find a better way?" So we did a lot of sharing. A lot of the systems are the same; in public schools you work a lot through the principal and the school board, where here at the Archdiocese we're our own self entity and while we work with the principals and the priests, Pat Farris as the director pretty much has the final word on how things are going to happen where in a public school system you go through the principal, then you work with the superintendent, and then you work with the school board members. So the political side of what a public system has, we didn't have here at the Archdiocese. I found we had a little more freedom, you know, to do the things we wanted to do.

MH: That's wonderful.

PA: Yes, yes, very much so! Very, very much so.

MH: So do you feel like your educational background really prepared you for the career?

PA: Yes, I do, because my Master's and Plus Thirty – like I said I was very lucky that Nicholls State was in Thibodaux where I grew up – with my Master's and Plus Thirty, it was in Administration and Supervision. So even though it was Education-oriented at some point, it was a lot of information on how to supervise people, how to be a good administrator, how to get people to work as team players, and how to do that. So yes I feel like my undergraduate work and when I got the job in Terrebonne I did go back and get all of my certification for a supervisor certificate for school food service. So I took all the accounting, took all the quantity food courses and things like that...which helped me learn a little more about that, but I really think all of the graduate classes that I took in Administration and Supervision really helped me pull things together and be able to do, I think, a good job in both places in supervising personnel.

MH: Really rounding the whole thing.

PA: Yes, yes, very much so.

MH: It was good that you already knew exactly what you wanted and how you could implement it too. It makes a big difference.

PA: Yes, exactly. It did. It made a big difference. When Pat and I would talk – I had a central warehouse in Terrebonne - so one of the big adjustments here was, “Oh, we gotta deal with the vendors.” So if the peas doesn't come in, the manager doesn't know about it until the last minute or if the peas come in and it's the wrong brand...it was an adjustment for me not to have my hand on everything, because in Terrebonne we sent deliveries out weekly to the lady who filled the food orders. If we weren't going to have enough pizza or if we weren't going to have a delivery come, we were able to adjust the

menu before the manager ever got it, whereas here in the Archdiocese they would have to call their supervisor all panicked to say, “We’re not going to get that delivery in time.” So it was a different adjustment in that respect that I didn’t have my handle on the control on the food is here this is what we’re doing. So that was a big difference...big difference.

MH: Well is there anything unique you feel about Louisiana in regard to child nutrition programs?

PA: Well you know I find that, like many of the southern states, Louisiana has its challenges with where it’s located with hurricanes and disasters. Louisiana’s one of the few states that still has typical, traditional school lunch. We don’t have a-la-carte, so I think that makes us unique in how we do things. So the first thing I’d say is we never, I think, got away from the basics of the National School Lunch Act about the traditional school lunch and the other thing, like I said, is its location. In Terrebonne, my first year we had Hurricane Juan, a few years later we had the big teacher’s strike, and then in my later years we had Hurricane Andrew. So I think that Louisiana is challenging and they always rely on the food service people to pull things together. So I think Louisiana’s challenge is always when there’s any disaster whether it’s a hurricane or something that the community goes to the schools, goes to the food service directors who know how to plan a meal, who have contacts to secure food to make sure with the Red Cross, or whomever, and that the community is going to be taken care of and we always knew the best way to get a community back going after any disaster and have normalcy is to open the schools.

MH: Yes.

PA: And of course you can't open the schools unless you can feed the children. So in that respect, I think, like many other states Louisiana has a lot of different cultures. What we feed children in the southern part of the state is very different than what we feed children in the northern part of the state. So I'm sure other states have those same unique things to deal with, but I just think the fact that we've stayed on the core of nutrition in the National School Lunch Act probably makes Louisiana, and a few other states perhaps, a little unique.

MH: Well now that you mentioned the hurricanes, could you tell me a little bit about...did you have to go through...?

PA: Actually, actually yes. I've been through many hurricanes. In 1984 Hurricane Juan, which wasn't a severe storm in Louisiana, but it was a water maker. It travelled back and forth in the Gulf, and all it did was to push water into Terrebonne Parish. And we had many, many schools in the lower lying areas of the community. So we have gotten rid of mud and dirt out of kitchens so many times. Then we had Hurricane Andrew, and people remember that so much for Florida, but when it left Florida and hit the Gulf it came in at Terrebonne Parish. So Hurricane Andrew did a fair amount of damage again, and I remember getting a phone call in the middle of the night, because our schools were shelters, from principals, who also had cafeteria workers there as evacuees, and we're on the phone at two o'clock in the morning going, "Okay, go in the storeroom, tell me what's in there; this is what we're going to prepare for lunch." I had friends and neighbors that if I needed them to go into a school so that we could feed the community, they did. So when I got here and we had Katrina in 2005, didn't really know where Pat or anybody else was in the office, we were all scattered, there was no communication. The

schools in Terrebonne naturally were affected, but not as much as our schools here in New Orleans. I just hit the ground running. The superintendent in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux that we also serve is Sister Immaculata; [she] knew they had a handle on things and wanted to get those schools opened as soon as she could because they weren't damaged like here in New Orleans. Well, I think Katrina hit on a Monday, the water situation kind of affected here on the Tuesday. By the Friday I was already meeting with the superintendent in the Houma-Thibodaux Diocese and we were planning; it was Labor Day Weekend that weekend. I pulled all the managers together in that region on a Saturday. We grouped on the menus. I found vendors and two days later all of the schools, the Catholic schools, for the Archdiocese of New Orleans and the Houma-Thibodaux Diocese were open and we were serving children. Then when I finally connected with Pat to tell her what was going on, it was like, "Oh great, okay." Because I had so much background with disasters and storms, I didn't even think twice about what needed to be done. In fact right before I left Terrebonne - there's a hurricane management school by FEMA - it's in Emmitsburg, Maryland. I was selected as a school food service person when I was still employed in Terrebonne to go to this FEMA school, and I don't know how many school food service directors from around the country have done that, so when Hurricane Katrina hit it was just a matter of find our people, get the kids to the school, do what we need to do to get things going. And the same thing just happened with Ike and Gustav...

MH: Yeah.

PA: ...who hit Terrebonne and Lafourche; same thing. We did evacuate, I got back on the Wednesday night, got in touch with Sister Immaculata, pulled things together, and

within a few days it was the opposite. New Orleans was opening before Houma-Thibodaux was opening. But it was a matter of you just pull on the people you know and you do it and it's just - hurricanes don't concern me as much as they do other people when it comes to how we are going to pick the pieces and resolve it - because we know in food service we always have a good team of people. And we're going to do it, we're going to do whatever needs to be done. So I've been through my share of hurricanes.

MH: Yeah. The dedication of people is unbelievable isn't it?

PA: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

MH: What are some of the biggest challenges that you have faced?

PA: I guess I'm going to say in 1989; again the economy wasn't real good, this relates back to Terrebonne. The teachers were not pleased with the school system - they wanted pay raises - so they decided they would do a job action. So they walked out in October of 1989, for the longest strike in state history by public school teachers for forty-one days, from October until January after Christmas, which sounds like more than forty-one days, but we're talking forty-one school days. It was a Wednesday. A lot of the educators knew that if they could get the food service personnel and the bus drivers to walk the line with them, they'd be able to close schools and make an impact. So on that Wednesday morning I didn't know what really to expect. My staff, who was great, we got on the phone; we started checking with schools who's at work. We had schools with no managers but a staff, schools with a manager and no staff, and other schools with nobody. Because of our satellite feeding, because we had cook-in kitchens, because we had trucks and we had equipment, we sat down as a team. I guess I had probably had - maybe twenty-five or thirty percent of the 200 employees had decided they were going to walk

the line with the teachers - so we regrouped, I pulled people together, I consolidated kitchens, I had people off the street coming to the office to say, "What can I do to help?" I had bus drivers coming to me and saying, "What can we do?" I walked in the superintendent's office probably around nine o'clock that morning - he pulled the senior staff together - and he said, "Pat how is it?" I said, "Everything's fine, it's under control." "Do you have the sandwiches ready?" And I said, "No, Mr. Bourgeois we're not serving sandwiches." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "We are having the hot meal today that's on the menu and we will have a hot meal every day school's in session because we are not going to have school food service blamed for the fact that schools are going to close because we can't feed them." So for forty-one days, pulling that off I think was probably our biggest challenge, but everybody pulled together, nobody questioned what needed to be done, and the longer it went people realized - a lot of our food service people came back to work - they crossed the picket line and came back and when everything ended and the strikers in food service came back we spoke with them and said, "It's the past, we're a team, we're here to feed children, that's our goal, think about why we're here, we gotta move forward." And we didn't look back. So when I looked back at my years in food service I think it's like "How are we going to feed these children?" Sure a lot of children didn't go to school because parents kept them home, but we had a lot of, a lot of children.

MH: That did go.

PA: That did go to school, because there were some teachers, classes were being consolidated, just like the cafeterias were being consolidated. And the state department of education after the strike had asked me to give a seminar, you know, we used to have

those Spring Updates, and one of my field managers and myself did a presentation in Baton Rouge for that. And I remember looking out. People were just sitting there so quiet and in awe. And when it was over somebody said, “My God Pat, sounded like you were preparing for war.” And I said, “Well, we tried to think through the process, you know, what happens if we can’t cross the picket line?” The vendors would call and say, “Tell me what you need and we’ll be there. We look back on that and we go, “How did we ever do that? How did we keep surviving?” Because after two weeks we’d say, “Oh, it’s going to end” or in a month, “Oh, it’s going to end.” And we realized at Thanksgiving “It’s not over”; at Christmas “It’s not over.” So that was probably, even though the hurricanes were challenges and it was different, probably surviving a forty-one day teachers’ strike and never having to give a child a cold sandwich; we gave reimburseable meals everyday. We altered things, we modified things, but the children got a reimbursable hot school lunch meal every single day, which the teachers were in awe. They could not believe that we pulled it off, that we could pull it off.

MH: Wow. That is a challenge.

PA: It was a big challenge.

MH: So what changes have you seen over the school nutrition profession over the years?

PA: You know when I go back to the ‘80’s when money was tight, every school food service program in Louisiana as well as the country were looking for ways to increase revenues. Even though Louisiana didn’t have a-la-carte we had something called extra sales. So to get people in, all of us started changing our menus to what the children wanted, and it wasn’t really the goal of school lunch, it wasn’t really the healthiest and I think we’ve seen the track record when more school districts went to what we called the

fast food and convenience foods. I see us going back to what brought us here, so I've seen us go from nutrition to being worried about the finances and the revenue, which is very important. You know here at the Archdiocese we don't have a school system to go to. In a public school system if you got short of funds, you could go to the school board, the superintendent, and they'd find some money; they'd bail you out. In Terrebonne I always gave them money. They gave us salary – I mean sales tax money for salaries – and because we always did well, they'd come to me and go, "Well, what do you think we can do legally so that we can keep some of the sales tax money?" Well here at the Archdiocese we don't have that revenue to tap into. So I see us go from nutrition to the dollar being the bottom issue, and I've see us going back to "Why we're here?" We had to teach kids nutrition education, we're here for nutrition. I do believe we've made the turn again to make nutrition our goal. I feel like we tell the kids here when I was in first grade "There's more to the life of a potato than a French fry." So we've tried real hard to get those things out of the menu. So I've seen that change. I've also seen employees change. I don't necessarily think that people today – an employee said one time, "You have to have it in your heart" – and you've been around food service long enough to know that a really, really good employee is someone who takes it to heart, it's not just a job. My philosophy here with the archdiocese was "Hire for attitude, train for skill". And when people thought about that I said, "You know, you can't change a person's attitude." And if you'll look at the skill they had because they came from the restaurant industry but their attitude isn't good, they really don't make a good employee. But if you look to hire the right attitude and then you train them, you have a much, much better employee. So I think the food service people today are fabulous. I don't think some of them who get into

it now don't get into it for the reasons a lot of people got into it in the past. We don't have a lot of people, I think, anymore that stay in food service for twenty-five and thirty years. We had a manager here at the Archdiocese three years ago after fifty years retired. She'd been at the same school, Barbara Songy, all those years – she was instrumental in getting the food service program begun here in the Archdiocese. We have some employees here that have forty, either forty-seven or forty-eight, years this year as an employee. So I think, I think what people want out of jobs, their perception has changed and will survive, but I do notice the difference that some of them just don't have food service at heart. And like I said, I do believe that we are going back to the true calling of the National School Lunch of 1946 is to provide nutritious meals to kids.

MH: Right. What do you think has been your most significant contribution to the field?

PA: I'd like to think that it's people being able – I love being in the schools - I learned if I came to the office, I hardly ever got to the schools. But if I could get to the schools first, working with the people, dealing with them, all of my staff whether in Terrebonne or here in New Orleans always knew that they could speak to me, that the door was always open. We may not agree but I would listen, and thereafter was, "You know Mrs. Adams, you might've been tough but you were always spare, but more importantly you were always consistent." So I'd like to think that building a team effort, building a team approach and making people feel good about themselves and making them realize that maybe you can't bake bread, but we're gonna find something else in the cafeteria that you're good at and putting people in places where they're gonna succeed and letting them feel that there's some self worth. Nobody does everything perfectly and that it's okay to disagree but to do it politely and professionally. And even after I left Terrebonne and

even after I've left here and retired in December I still have people say, "You know, we miss you. We could always talk to you. even though you were the boss you never made us feel that way. When we walked in your office and we gave you a problem and you would say, "No, I don't agree with that but let's go out to the school and check it." And they'd say, "Sometimes you were right and we had to give in, but more importantly sometimes we were right and you would give in and say 'I didn't see that. I didn't see that aspect'." So I want to hope that I left behind team effort and people understanding that you should always have the freedom and ability to go to your supervisor whether you're a technician, or a manager, a manager going to a supervisor, or a supervisor going to a director that they should have the ability, the freedom, and the respect to be able to speak their mind.

MH: Absolutely.

PA: Yeah.

MH: So do you have any more memorable stories that come to mind?

PA: Oh gosh, Melba, there's so many things I could think of, and it goes back to people in food service doing whatever they wanted. I also, in food service it opened me up to knowing a lot of people all over this country, serving on boards – you know, advisory boards – whether it would be Pierre Foods, or Tyson, or whatever.

MH: You were president of the association?

PA: Yes, yes, I was president. It was called Louisiana School Food Service Association then. I was actually president the year of our fiftieth conference and when I had to plan that conference as president-elect, it really worked out well because it we had it here in the city. So it made it easy and we did special things, venders helped us, we took them on

a riverboat cruise, we did a lot of things that made that year fun. And even here as well as in Terrebonne, the National Frozen Food Institution wanted – has something called Frozen Food Month - and it's in March. They're always real big on the commercial side. You'll see things in grocery stores in March about "Celebrate Frozen Food Month!". Their logo is a penguin. Well it was Caro Foods back in Houma back in the early 90s, who wanted to be involved. Ms. Bonnie Caro called one day and said, "Pat, I serve on the board and want to get schools involved. We're forming an advisory council. Would you consider being a committee member?" "Okay." So we meet people from South Carolina, and Oklahoma, and Michigan. And our job is to promote frozen food promotion in schools. Now you know can you have school lunch without having frozen food? Absolutely not! So we started doing the promotions with their themes to get kids involved with frozen food and educate them. It was an education program and like I said the logo was a penguin. Well, one of my staff people for the conference here in New Orleans that year I got a penguin costume and I was going to present a session on Frozen Food Month and show them the nice award I got. Well she graciously put that penguin suit on, and this is June in New Orleans, and she walked from the Marriott Hotel to the Aquarium, which is on the other end of Canal. She wore it through the conference; she wore it everywhere. And she looked at me and she said, "Only for you and school food service do people like us do things." But you know it was the fun thing. It was an educational tool, but it made it fun. When I think about the things that we did in school for the kids, we did contests; you did all sorts of things to show the children how important it was to eat school lunch. So I think of my employees a lot when I think of stories that I think of. You know if I said, "I need you to go do this." "Okay." So there are

the wonderful stories too about how you're giving children a meal but they're not getting at home. And when they come back in August after the summer you realize they didn't have a lot of nutrition and stuff like that at home. So those nice little warm things come to mind. I remember being the third district in the state to automate school food service with computers on the point of service. I picked three really good principals to pilot at Terrebonne Elementary, a junior, and a senior high. They loved it. Well in Terrebonne you went to the school board through committees, and the Principal – Mr. James Charles– who wound up being superintendent one day, was the principal of the junior high school and I knew he'd love the computers and no more tickets. So I asked him to come make a presentation at that committee meeting. And you think that you know what people are going to say. He opens his statement by saying, "I just have one problem with it." And when he says 'I have one problem with it' I'm thinking, "Oh my God, what have I set myself up for?" I'm thinking, "This man, you know, is my job – and what is going to happen?" And he said, "Is if you take it away and you don't let her put it parish wide." So those things you don't think about a lot, the impact that you've had with administration because if administration buys into school lunch then the teachers buy into it and the parents buy into it. So funny things like that, you know, come to mind of the impact we've made and how hard we worked and we had all of them in right before the strike, so when the state said, "Pat, how will you account? What's going to be your accountability? We are going to work any way we can." I said, "I have a computer and I can teach a parent how to operate it." So nice little things that about the impact that we've made and there's always something that a child said that went to your heart, or made you laugh, or you know I've gotten into the food service truck in Terrebonne on the satellite and driven

the truck between schools to make sure children got fed. Here at the Archdiocese we pull things together for workshops; we've basically dressed up crazy ways, we've done anything and everything it took to make our employees realize how important they are, to put the best meal forward to any child whether he's in public school or private school.

MH: So what advice would you give someone who's thinking of entering the child nutrition profession today, you know?

PA: Well, they have to understand it's not a – I was going to say a nine to five job – but for schools it's not a seven to three o'clock job. You can't be a clock watcher. You have to understand you can plan your day. When you walk in, you can have your day outlined and understand that not one thing on your plan may happen. You have to be flexible. You have to truly love school food service. In my philosophy also in the schools I never asked an employee to do something that I wouldn't do. I've cleaned chickens. I've put a hairnet on and served lunch. I made them laugh – I can't pinch a roll. I can help make the bread but you're not going to eat the roll if I pinch it because I never mastered the skill. I think they have to understand that they have to care about children and it's not a desk job. You can't just sit behind a desk, make the menu, order the food, and go out to a school every now and then and pull the records and go, "Well your sixes are wrong" or "This cafeteria's dirty". You have to go out there and be a part of the team. It's a wonderful profession. You have a great impact on children's lives and I think they have to understand that they realize that they're not in it just for a job, it's a career and it's a profession. And I just thought about something when I said that. In Terrebonne Parish to even serve in the cafeteria, I changed requirements so that you had to have a high school diploma. I felt that education was important and why would a school system want to hire

people without a diploma? I remember a lady coming in to substitute, to fill out an application. She didn't have a high school diploma and we wouldn't let her complete an application. She was really, really upset. About three years after that, I get a phone call – I don't even remember the lady's name – and she calls and she tells me her name, and she says, "I know you don't remember me." And she says, "I was in your office one day." And I'm thinking, "Okay, be prepared; be polite." You always – you never argue with a parent, you deal with them politely; you're selling your program. And she said, "I want you to know how much you changed my life." And I said, "Because...?" She said, "I went in to apply for a job. I didn't have a high school diploma. You wouldn't hire me." She said, "I got to thinking 'if I can't even work in a cafeteria because I don't have a diploma...'" She said, "I went back, got my GED." And she says, "I'm attending Nicholls State University to be a teacher and only because you turned me away because I didn't have a diploma did I take a second look at my life." And she said, "I don't think I'd have ever done that if you had hired me to be a cafeteria worker." And she said, "I know you get sad stories and you get people fussing, and I just wanted to tell you thank you because you made a difference in my life." So I think that people today have to think about that, that what they say, or what they do... a food service director coming in today – I know you've heard the expression – it's not what you say sometimes, it's how you say it; that you have to make the people feel important, you have to be willing to mentor them – to teach them – and if you have a person in your cafeteria who can't succeed in a certain area, I think you need to determine are they unwilling or unable. If they're *unwilling* then you deal with that in one fashion. If they're *unable* then you try to find a task to put them in they're able to succeed. So I think the new food service directors coming on board

need to look at the whole picture. I've gone from two hundred employees in Terrebonne Parish to six hundred here. I know there're school districts that may have forty or fifty. You can't let the paper drown you. You have to get out into the schools and work with those people and work with the teachers, go in the classrooms and just not sit behind that desk and be the person who says, "Well you know, I'm the director of food service and do as I say and not as I do." So I think they need to think long and hard and they have to be willing to give the hours and give the dedication t and realize that not only will they impact the kids, the kids become adults and those adults are the people who are going to run this wonderful country that we're in and they will gain a lot of respect from their employees and the parents if they remember the true goal of why they're here.

MH: Beautiful. Anything else that comes to mind?

PA: Not really. I think people in food service, you know I've just retired, my goal is to give to the community, to volunteer more...I think people who have those skills become good people in the retirement community because they're looked upon to say help us build a team, come work for the Red Cross, or come do something in the community. So I think when people retire it's hard to walk away from it, but I think they become even more viable with\in the community. I plan to stay involved in our state school food service association of Louisiana because I have a love for it. You don't do this for thirty years and then just turn your back on it. It's been a wonderful journey, it was a hard decision to retire after so many years but life is so short that sometimes we just have to move on. We have to move on.

MH: Thank you, Pat. You were wonderful.

PA: Thank you. Thank you for asking me.

MH: Thank you for coming in.

PA: I really enjoyed it. No problem.