



Ethel Schoonmaker Myers
Speech to Annual Meeting
Florida Association of Public Health Nurses
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The following is transcribed from a handwritten copy of Mrs. Myers' speech. Mrs. Myers is in her 97th year when addressing the Public Health Nurses participating in this Annual Educational Conference provided by The Florida Association of Public Health Nurses, Inc. Dr. Kim Curry, Ph.D., ARNP-Chairperson of the FAPHN Legacy Project

Those Were the Days!

Here I am again with the people I was with when I was working. I never thought this would ever happen. Public Health Nurses were my favorite people. There were always so nice to me and I never met one I didn't like. **Back to "those were the days".**

I graduated from Cornell in 1935 with a BS in nutrition and Institution Management. This was in the middle of a deep depression. No jobs, no money. I worked part-time for my Nutrition professor correcting papers at 35 cents an hour. This was the current pay for students.

After 5 years as a 4-H club agent in a rural county in New York State, I decided to get a Master's Degree in Public Health Nutrition. As I looked back I realized our knowledge of nutrition was very limited so there was little interest in it.

There were only three Universities in all of the U.S that offered a degree in Public Health Nutrition: Columbia University, one university in the midwest and one in the California area. I decided on Columbia University. Not too many women were in graduate school. As most of the students worked, classes were held from 4 pm to 10 pm.

At this time, nutrition education centered on the study of vitamins. So, when I registered for my classes, I noticed a required course that was a lab which involved care and feeding of white rats.

I forgot to tell you, I was deathly afraid of mice and rats. When I arrived at the lab, I discovered that each student was assigned a number of cages, each containing a pair of white rats, which we were required to take care of for the semester. I didn't think I could go near them, but I did not want anyone to know how I felt.

I could not find any way out of my situation, so I decided to try and make the best of it. I eased my way up to the cages and peeked in with fear and loathing, and the rats looked back at me with the same expression, and I just knew we were not going to be friends.

I arrived at Columbia University in the fall of 1941. Then came Pearl Harbor: things changed! But first, I should tell you that the world was quite a different place. No TV. You had to rely on radio for news, which came at a specific time each day. No supermarkets, all small family owned stores.

I remember going to the A&P and the clerk was waiting on me as I gave my order one item at a time. Then on to the meat market and bakery. Credit was limited and not too easy to obtain. All were small stores, "mom and pop" stores with a limited selection of merchandise. Beginning to sound like the "Dark Ages"?

There were few restaurants and no fast food places. Everyone ate at home. Many had small vegetable gardens. We have come a long way since then!

Nutrition was not well known. Breast feeding was not talked about or done in public. Natural childbirth was a hush-hush topic. I was in my fifth month of pregnancy before I got up enough courage to ask my doctor about it. He

replied that he had classes in the hospital for pregnant women and their husbands. I asked why he did not tell me about it and he replied he did not want to influence me.

I believe one of the reasons for lack of interest in nutrition was that the doctors did not have classes in nutrition in medical school. The American Dietetic Association, along with other groups, was involved in promoting nutrition education for doctors.

Maybe you would like to know what I have done. After passing a state test, I was hired by the New York State Health Department and worked in Albany for about fourteen years. During the time, I was married and had three boys. Then we moved to Orlando, Florida. It was interesting that a former student at Columbia University, Mildred Kaufmann, became Director of the Florida Department of Public Health Nutrition. She remembered me from the time I spoke to her class about the New York State nutrition program. She traced me to Maitland, Florida, and offered me a position as Regional Public Health Nutritionist.

I was assigned to thirteen counties from Volusia to Key West, all in the east coast area. My job was to provide in-service education to public health nurses in these counties and anything else related to nutrition that was needed. This included filling in for the team from Jacksonville that inspected small hospitals and nursing homes, when they needed a dietician on the team. By the way, I was a Registered Dietician. I also assisted public health nurses with patients on special diets and promoted nutrition education. I also assisted the county public health nutritionists. There were two I visited regularly, Ann Rhode in Brevard County, and Ann Gardiner in Key West. Maybe some of you knew them.

I am sure you know this, but just as a reminder, be aware that a person wearing a white coat does not always represent knowledge or training. Do not take anything for granted. Ask about their qualifications before accepting their advice or spending your money.

Then there is advertising for new drug products that sound like they would cure all your pains and aches. For example, the ad says "powerful joint pills flying off drug store shelves". This ad appeared twice in our paper, "Florida Today", and I thought it must be effective. Also, I was intrigued by the thought of bottles with wings flying off the drug store shelves. Remember to be a smart buyer. You want to know who took part in the study and how many and how long.

At the end of this article in very small print, **"these statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration"**. This eight week clinical study was completed with 54 participants. No indication of who was included in the sample and any side effects. You can decide if this is a really good study. Now is the time to talk to your druggist or doctor.

Looking back on the past 75 years and seeing the progress that has been made in nutrition knowledge and knowing that so much more will be made, I am truly envious of you who will be part of it.