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Careering in Benton County

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IOWA, ala rural—we got a glimpse of it this past summer through extension eyes. Extension—that's a part of Iowa State College education that we as students hear little about. Yet it's going on right before our eyes. It's an educational program for all Iowa directed by a staff located in Morrill Hall on the campus. They work through local "teachers" placed in each county of the state.

And that's where we were. Three of us juniors majoring in home economics education spent the summer gaining experience in extension work—Betty Proeger in Linn County, Norma Dudley in Scott County and I was in Benton County. Our directors were the county extension home economists. We were their "younger sisters"—called Junior Assistant Home Economists.

The title sounds impressive—but we had a job to do in the counties that was just as big as our junior titling. From training demonstration teams to planning style shows we got a real glimpse of extension work. Here's the way things kept popping in my county—Benton.

First, weary from college spring quarter finals, my spirits were lifted as I approached my summer job to behold a desk of my own, something I'd dreamed of since my days in 4-H club work. That plus my title gave me an energetic yet bewildered start. The county extension home economist was a great help during these orientation days. She pointed out office supplies and procedure, took me around the county to meet leaders, then drove home by way of the more colorful country roads to give me an idea of the beauty of Benton County.

My first big job came with the canning season. Rural women were asking for food canning and freezing information beginning with strawberries and peas and following through the season to tomatoes and corn. By the questions we answered it was easy to tell what was being harvested in the Iowa farm garden. I helped answer telephone queries and assisted in demonstrations.

Because their pressure cookers needed cleaning and the gauges needed testing we staged "Pressure Cooker Tune-Up" clinics in various communities. I soon found myself in an apron testing gauges, cleaning pet-cocks and wondering just how many different kinds of pressure cookers there actually were.
Of course, during the summer the biggest part of the extension program is devoted to 4-H. So that’s where we spent the most time—helping with demonstrations, supervising recreation, directing programs. It was really a well-rounded experience.

The 4-H’ers monthly newsletter was one fun item on my schedule. Each month I met with the county 4-H council to supervise the publishing of “Benton Breezes.” It took a fried chicken picnic to get us started, but from then on, the 4-H’ers and I were up to our elbows all afternoon writing, editing, clipping and pasting the Breezes. When the girls found out I’d taken journalism at college they put me to work on a monthly column for them, titled, by-lined and all.

BEFORE county fair time, I was dashing from one side of the county to the other helping the 4-H girls master their demonstration techniques. Almost every club has a pair of girls to represent them at the fair and help teach their mothers and friends some of the things they’d learned in their project work. The girls took great pride in their demonstration work, especially since they were one of the main attractions at the fair. So any suggestions that I gave to help them brush up on their presentation were adopted whole-heartedly. And I learned a lot too. The subject matter of the demonstrations was always something educational and interesting.

There were lighter moments out in Benton County. For instance, the 4-H girls annual camping trip. They had a full program of sports, crafts, nature study and discussions. One’s own talents determined the part they played in the camp life. My niche was that of assistant swimming instructor, which led to a much desired suntan.

I worked with older youth, too—the Rural Young People’s group. This is the unmarried group beyond 4-H age and interests. They met twice a month to discuss problems of the day and study better farming methods. They also carry on such service programs as collecting paper and tin for salvage or sending fruit, records, and gifts to Schick hospital. We put the finishing touches on every meeting with a hay ride, a barn dance or a steak fry.

The summer passed much too quickly. College days were coming up. As I left, plans were well under way for the winter women’s meeting and 4-H achievement banquets. I wished that I could continue with the program as I was feeling quite at home in Benton County. But I cleared off my desk, packed up my bag and hoped that someday I’d get back in the extension program whirl.