1955

News from an Experimental Counseling

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by Nell Nichols

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On the job in the gleaming experimental kitchen of the Betty Crocker department at General Mills Jeanette Korslund (left) and her co-worker test cake recipes.

NEWS

AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER I’ve been interested in food preparation. My background is fairly typical of the hundreds of Iowa farm girls who develop interest in home economics through their home and 4-H work.

The experimental cookery major at ISC rated tops with me so I decided that test kitchen work was my first choice. However, when I started to look for that all important “first job” during my last quarter (Spring ’49) at ISC I found that test kitchens don’t just spring up at any location where a young home economist wants to work. So I accepted a job with the Omaha Public Power District as a home service advisor.

A three month training period was my first indoctrination. Like every other new graduate, I found that theory was of no value unless I could transpose it into practical, understandable help to those I contacted. The principles of food preparation, household equipment, chemistry, physics and economics must be correlated with common sense to give a homemaker an answer. Why don’t her cakes bake evenly; why didn’t her automatic oven turn on? What factors should she consider in purchasing new equipment?

Work with people

No one could possibly do home service work, making calls to homes of every conceivable economic, social and racial group without developing a tremendous appreciation for people. Some of the experiences are hilarious, some pathetic and some rather frightening. But through all of them one develops a feel for the fundamental kinds of help that homemakers need. That to me was the most beneficial aspect of my home service work.
In an open letter to home economics instructors and students Jeanette Korslund writes of her post-graduation discoveries. You'll find some valuable advice, some whys and whats that every professional home economist can use.

from an experimental cookery graduate

In addition to home calls I had experience with cooking schools, store demonstrations, dealer contacts, promotions, radio broadcasting and a bit of recipe testing (MY MAJOR INTEREST!). So, in spite of feeling that it wasn't my favorite field, I wouldn’t have missed the experience of home service work for anything.

After a year and a half at OPPD, an opening came up at the T. F. Naughtin Bakery Supply House in Omaha. Once again, this job involved work I was not particularly familiar with, but it appeared challenging so I became involved in the whys and wherefores of bakery supplies. Never had I imagined that bakers could need so many things to provide goodies for the world.

I learned quickly about the problems of formulation, purchasing, production, product control, merchandising, product directions, publicity and the other million details. My lab was anything but fancy, but I loved it and it featured two automatic doughnut machines for testing doughnut mixes.

I felt fully qualified to set up shop in the nearest 5 and 10¢ store when I finally learned how to operate them properly.

Designs testing program

In June ’51 I went to work with General Mills at their research laboratory in Minneapolis. Once again, this was not test kitchen work as I had thought of it in school.

My primary responsibility was to work on the development of an organoleptic (taste panel) testing program. The need for objective evaluation of flavor, texture, eating quality and aroma had been recognized by General Mills for some time. They were

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Experimental Cookery (continued)

now interested in doing actual research on testing techniques.

There is a tremendous satisfaction in working with a new program; trying, discarding, and changing ideas and plans. This work was interesting also because it provided a wealth of opportunity to learn about the many aspects of food production.

Along with this work I became interested in statistics as a necessary tool for analysis and interpretation of results so I took a couple of statistics courses at night school at the University of Minnesota. General Mills encourages this kind of study by paying all or part of the tuition for courses beneficial to the job.

After two years at the research lab, I transferred to the experimental kitchen in the Betty Crocker Home Service department. Had I had a choice at the time of graduation, I undoubtedly would have selected this department above all of the others.

Develops recipe ideas

Now, however, I feel particularly fortunate to have had the background of other types of work before getting into test kitchen work. My specific job here is to create and develop new ideas for recipes, methods and products. As in other work, there is never a dull moment and the work involves contact with product development, products control and consumer testing.

My present work seems to be that happy combination of technical work with practical applications. Some home calls to keep in touch with consumer feeling and contacts with people from research, advertising, merchandising and media fields help to keep up on changing trends. These are all a necessary part of effective food development work.

There seems to be a misconception that experimental cookery work is isolated from people. I doubt that any experimental cookery major will find herself in a position where she does not deal with a great many people.

Experimental cookery in all its phases can be beneficial only in so far as the results can be interpreted and translated to those in related areas of work and ultimately to the consumer.

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