

profile

Phyllis Morgenlander

COMMUNITY EDUCATOR, NUTRITION AND HEALTH

We're going to talk about my work with EFNEP [Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program] and the Community and Families Head Start Program in Far Rockaway.

I've been with Cooperative Extension forever. Actually, what happened was when my eldest son started school, they were trying out this program; it was called the Family Room. It was a precursor to what they have now with the Family Assistance, dealing with different problems that the parents might have and helping them to communicate with the school. Because I was thoroughly embarrassed, I finally decided to go down and participate. And I was so happy I did, because I met such nice people there.

My son was going to P.S. 38, at the time, in Brooklyn. I had gone into the center, and I was talking to the person who was in charge — Vivian; I don't remember her last name. And she asked me, had I gotten a call from Cornell? And I said, "What?" And she said, Yes, they're starting a program and they had asked her if there were any parents who would be good as family assistants, that's what they were called at the time. She had recommended me. In the interview, they asked me what I would do if I won a million dollars, and I told them that after I woke up from the coma, I would probably decide something. That started my career, back in 1969.

It was called OEO — Office of

Economic Opportunity. We did consumer education, and we also dealt with welfare. And it was a blast. I had some fantastic experiences; Cornell has really been very good to me. I mean, I really, really never pictured myself as someone who could get up in front of people and actually talk.

It's been 31 years. My daughter was born in February of '69, and I started working in July of '69. I wasn't used to really doing anything like that. My previous jobs had been some book-keeping. I worked for the Coca-Cola Bottling Company, in their main office, when I decided I wasn't going to go to college. That was very different. It was just a small group of people that I had to interact with. It wasn't going down to an agency and talking to people and finding out why things aren't being done for this person, or whatever. I worked right in my neighborhood. We had a lot of people who were having problems going down to Social Security, because they had no one there who spoke Spanish. Not that I could speak Spanish, but at least I understood English. And, it helped people to realize that just because you don't speak English doesn't mean you're stupid. It just means you don't speak English. I found it fascinating that I never realized how many problems people could actually have. Or that just by saying something to the right person, how things could go along very smoothly.

Because I worked for Cornell, people listened, which to me was very unusual. I found that to be very refreshing, that they were actually listening to



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what the problems were. They couldn't always do something. But at least, I felt they tried, or they explained why they couldn't do anything, or the proper person to go to, or the proper agency. So I found that very, very enlightening, and it made me feel very grateful for what I had.

I started working for EFNEP in 1980. In between, I worked in a lot of other programs. They had something called South Brooklyn Community something or other, that I worked in. I also worked in a pilot program with Brooklyn TB and Cornell. We did some follow-up on people who had been identified as having TB, and why they weren't going to the hospitals to get their medication. And here again, it was a very caring type program, where it wasn't just people with numbers. They were people who had problems. So I enjoyed that. There was also a garden program that I was in, which I thoroughly enjoyed. And then when they had a scare that the federal money was going to be discontinued in the garden program, I was switched to EFNEP. So that's how that all came about.

I work with a lot of different EFNEP groups. This particular group that I'm singling out for this story are the pre-K parents. A lot of them have older children. Some of them, their oldest child is in pre-K, and they are pregnant or they have a younger child.

Through all the experiences that I've had in working for Cornell, I find that one of the biggest strengths of any program in Cooperative Extension is the fact that we have in-services, and that we're asked what kind of in-services we want. It's not just nutrition, although the nutrition is very important, because that's the basis for every program that I'm doing now. But it's bringing, I guess, a part of yourself.

What makes it special to me is that it's a challenge. There are some people who feel they know everything.

There are some people — like me — who feel they know very little and they need to learn more. And not just from one person; we pick up from each other. We learn from each other. A good example: there was a lady from the Middle East, and she kept telling me she didn't think she could come. And I asked her why. She said, "I don't speak English." I said "That's funny. I understand you." And she looked at me, and she saw I wasn't joking; I was very serious. And she said, "No, my English isn't good." And I said, "Well, let's see." So I asked someone else, and the other person agreed, yes, she understood her. She came. At the end of the program, she brought a dish that they eat in her country, and she gave everyone the recipe in English. Basically, what her problem was, she didn't have the confidence in her English. She thought that no one could understand her because she had an accent.

The groups are generally very, very mixed. There are people from the Islands, from Haiti or St. Thomas, or Puerto Rico. There are also American Blacks. There are also other Spanish-speaking people. Sometimes they're from South America — from all over, really. But that's generally the mix of the group. And everybody brings something very special to the group.

The agency itself is extremely helpful in making the programs there very successful. The agency is called Community and Families Head Start Program, Inc. They also have a group in Brooklyn, and when I worked in Brooklyn, I worked there. Soon after they opened this other branch, they called me and asked me if I would please do some work in Far Rockaway.

If you came to see one of my groups, you might say, "What is she doing?" And I mean that. My style of teaching really reflects a lot about me as a person. I don't like tons of paper. I realize that there are some people who

don't feel right unless they get something, so I also deal with those needs. But I'm very laid-back. What I do try to do is find out what they are interested in, what are their problems. Is it that the children aren't eating vegetables? And I tell them: "Sometimes, it's the way it's prepared. Not that you're not preparing it right. But everyone has different tastes. Some people like crunchy food. Some people don't. Some people like mushy food. Some people like food that's in-between. And sometimes the best thing to do is just experiment." Also, it can work to get the pre-K children, if they're not eating, to help. I'm not talking about using knives or anything. But they certainly can wash a lettuce leaf and tear it into little pieces. They can certainly put some napkins down on a table and do other things.

At the Center, they let the children take their own food. I'm very heavy into portion sizes for children, because most adults try to feed their children the way they feed themselves, as far as amounts go. And I saw something, and I really had to smile. The children were eating lunch. Part of the lunch was macaroni. And this little boy wanted, really, only one elbow macaroni. But it was stuck together. So he took the four pieces of macaroni and put it on his plate. And he sat there, and he did pull it apart. He was eating, and I went into the kitchen to get ready for the group. When I came out, he was chewing the last piece. He was taking his bowl, and I had to see how much more he was going to take. He took four more pieces.

When I was telling this to the parents, they were looking at me like "What is she, crazy?" I said, "That said a lot to me. The children had little bowls or a little plate. To him, that was plenty, because he could have more." And they said, "You know, I didn't think about that." I said, "Maybe that's the way to

look at it. Children will eat as much as they need to. But if we keep piling a lot of food on their plates, they're going to think that's normal, and it's not, because their portion sizes are different."

I don't like to make people feel as though what they're doing for their children isn't good, because I know that's not true. I do know that things change. When my children had chicken pox, the doctor told me to give them aspirin. When they came out with that report that said giving children aspirins with high fevers when they have chicken pox is not good, I said, "Oh my God, I could have killed my kids." But I thought about it. The pediatrician — of course, I thought he was the best in the world — he gave me the best knowledge that he had for that time. Things change.

And when people tell me, "My mother said to put some cereal in a bottle," I tell them "Listen, my mother told me a lot of things. But when I found out this was not the thing to do, I called my mother up. She always defrosted meat out on the counter. So did I. So did my sister. Then some people from Cornell did a workshop on food safety. And I said, 'Oh my God, I'm killing my babies. What am I doing?' I didn't know. But once I did know, I changed what I did." And that's what I say to them: things are always changing. I'm not saying what a parent is telling their child to do for their grandchild is awful. I am telling them what the research has found. And that's exactly how I put it to them. I never want someone to feel that they're inadequate as a parent, because that's not my role. My role is to build up confidence in them, and let them know we all make mistakes.

I tell them, "If you don't understand something, ask the doctor. Don't necessarily rely upon people around you. You might know more than they do." So I always try to encourage them

to write down information before they go to the doctor. I had to do that having four children. I used to get nutsy. I couldn't remember who was doing what. And I would get everybody's names screwed up also. So this was my way of trying to keep things straight. And I tell them, this is what I would have to do. When I would go to the doctor, I had a sheet for this one, for that one, and went down the list. He's sneezing, coughing, whatever the heck it was.

I'll deal with an actual lesson that I do. A lot of the ladies were saying their children don't like to eat vegetables. I

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made stir-fry vegetables with chicken; they couldn't believe how quick it was ready. In the beginning, I let them feel very relaxed, but then I make everybody work. I will help them if they don't know how to do something. I will show them. But I really like for them to do it. And I've never had too much of a problem getting people to do things. I'm the world's worst cutter. When I cut vegetables, you would think a baby did it, with their teeth. I don't have the patience to stand there. And I tell them the truth — this is not one of my best things that I do. I generally find someone who does cut very nicely, and I always say, "Wow, I wish I could do that."

In the beginning, sometimes they don't know each other that well. So it's a matter of them getting to know each other and feeling comfortable. Once that's established, I talk over with

Renee (I forget her title) about different things that we could make. I also ask the ladies; what are they interested in? We have a cookbook, and I let them look through the cookbook. What is it would you like to try? And I tell them, "This is a great way of trying something without spending a lot of money. How do you know if your family is going to like it? You don't. If you taste it and you like it, then at least you know one person's going to eat it." That's what I always tell them. I tell them, "Don't make too much either. When you're trying something new, make a small amount. See who likes it."

I find one of the best ways of getting a child to taste something is telling them that they can't have it. I did that with my own children. "That smells so good. What is that?" "Oh, you're not going to like it. Go away." Go eat whatever I made for them. And they would come back, "No, no, no, no. Could I have a

little bit?" And I would give them just a little bit to taste. We talk about different techniques on getting children to eat things, on trying new foods.

Some of them have problems with their husbands, because to them, dinner is rice and beans and meat. They don't want to know about anything else. Salad is alright. But that's basic. So we talk about what they can do without spending a whole lot of money. How can they make a variety of things and keep their husbands happy. We also talk about cutting down on fats. Any time I do a food demonstration, I use Pam; I don't fry anything. So that's introducing them to something different. We talk about it. We talk about the calories. We talk about all sorts of things. And it generally is something that can come up as easily as someone saying "Gee, I never ate zucchini. What is it?"

profile Phyllis Morgenlander

So we start talking about “Who has eaten it? Would you like to try it?” And the next week we make zucchini salad, instead of cucumber salad. Or sometimes I put both cucumbers and zucchini in, and they find they like the zucchini better. People aren’t going to eat things they can’t identify. They just won’t do that. So that’s my style. I always ask them if they have anything that they really need some information on.

Food safety is another big topic. So that’s something that I always incorporate in all the lessons. And here again, I play a lot of games with them. I made up a game. It’s called “You Bet Your Life Food Safety Game.” And we play with fake money. And let me tell you, they get very loud. We have Jeopardy games — with fruits and vegetables. They love them. There’s nothing like having fun and learning. It’s really the best of both worlds.

Actually, I like to play more games and do very little talking as such. My theory is people have a lot of information. Sometimes we forget it. Sometimes it’s just in our brain, and we don’t attach it to anything. I look at it as it’s my job to help them attach it to something so they’ll say, “Oh wow, I knew that.” Of course you knew it. Because unless you use it, you tend to lose it. So that’s another strategy that I like to use with adults.

There are puzzles that we’ll do. I like the rebus — I’m a puzzle person. Doing the protein lesson, I have a warm-up that I do for the meats and stuff, because most people do not equate fish and eggs with beef and chicken, or nuts. They think you’re a little nutty when you’re talking about it. But I play a game with them. What I do is scramble a whole bunch of words, and I put them on a board, and I ask them to unscramble them as a group. And what I’ve tried to do is have enough of a variety of foods so that it covers a lot

of different ethnic groups. For instance, I have goat; a lot of people from the Islands use goat, so I include that. Red snapper is another. Crabs — most people eat that. And then the beans, the chick peas. They call them garbanzo, they call them chick peas. But I want them to know what it is, and that it’s part of this whole protein thing. Sunflower seeds. Goose, duck. Now, some people only eat turkey and chicken. But there are a lot of people who eat duck and goose. With the nuts I have walnuts and pecans. And of course, my favorite, tofu.

When I do something like this, I try to have the tofu there to show them, and we make something with it, so that they can actually taste it. To me, it’s a way of getting things together so they can really get a clearer picture of all these foods. And I tell them, there are more. These are only a few. Otherwise, I’d be there the whole year, thinking of all these different kinds of protein foods. But that’s sort of it. I like the games, I like the puzzles. There are some people who have very low literacy. That’s why I do it as a group, so that nobody gets embarrassed or has to feel funny or anything like that.

If they want to talk about budgeting, saving some money, there are generally people in the groups who are very good at math. And I will ask them, “What do you do when you go food shopping? What’s the first thing you do when you get to the store? What do you do before you go?” It’s really information that they have. And I look at myself as someone to fill in the blanks.

To do this job, you’ve got to like people. You must. If you don’t, you’re going to get annoyed and ticked off at everything. You need to realize that people’s lifestyles are very, very different. And though I’ve not experienced some of the things that they have, there are a lot of things I have experienced that are the same kinds of problems that

they’re having now. And that’s what I try to build on — not the differences, but the similarities.

And acknowledging that things don’t always go as planned. You go into a supermarket and you make the mistake of bringing your children with you. But you don’t have any place to put them. What are some of the things you can do to make it less stressful? Because that I know; I used to wind up with dog food and bird seed in the cart. We don’t have any pets. So there are certain things I would do if I had to take my children shopping. First, they had to eat. That was number one. So did I. And then I had to explain to them, no one touches anything unless I ask them to, and also I wrote things down.

But really, the main thing is letting people know that they do have knowledge. And knowledge is power. And the best thing to do with knowledge is to share it, because then you’re going to get knowledge from someone else also.

Either you like people or you don’t. Actually, I’m going to take it a step further. Either you love people or you don’t. It’s not even liking. If anyone told me before I worked for Cornell that I would go out in a blizzard because I made a commitment to do this group in a school, I would say, “What are you, crazy?” The principal of the school recently said “What are you doing here?” He took me to the auditorium. There were 30 children sitting and watching a movie. He said, “That’s all the children that showed up.” I looked at him and said, “I guess I’m going to go home.” I can laugh at it now. But at the time, and even now, I take very seriously my commitment to do things. I know that it’s not life or death. But I know that many times people are told things and disappointed because people don’t follow through. I don’t like that. I don’t want people to do that to me, therefore I’m not going to do it to them —

unless something happens that I have no control over.

But you really do need to love people. You also need to be a good listener. And for some people, that's hard. I would say for most people it's hard; we just listen with what I call half an ear. And it's a type of job that if you're bored, you're not doing it right.

I've never been bored on this job, except doing paperwork. But never doing groups because people are different. Every group I do is different — every week, depending upon what kind of week they had, how they're going to relate to me. One lady, she has a little baby — the baby is eight months old. She is so cute; she's always saying something. And I'm always talking to her, and she smiles. Her brother is in the pre-K program. And he said to me, "Why are you answering her? She's not talking." I said, "Well, she is to her. She's saying something. Only I'm not smart enough. I don't know what she's saying." And he looked at me like "Whoa." And the mother was laughing. She said to me "This baby is constantly talking." I said: "She's very alert. She's always looking around." She's one of those babies that you just want to hug and kiss. Well, I think that with all the babies. But she's delicious. That's what I tell her. She is a delicious child.

The mother is a young woman, and she was sitting there, and she said to me: "You know, I didn't want to come because I have to bring the baby." I said, "So what. The baby will listen too." So she got over that. We had some cheese tasting. She had never eaten muenster cheese. And she said, "Oh, I like that cheese so much. It was so good." She comes from Haiti. She said, "I am so tired of eating Haitian food" That's what she was telling me. And I said to her, "Well, maybe you can start introducing other kinds of things." She said, "Oh, I am. I don't know about my husband." But I know that her little boy

ate the cheese. She enjoyed it. She said, "I'm going to buy it." I said, "Good for you."

Sometimes we talk about how I got my job. Before the summer, we are asked to look around in the groups and see if there's anyone there we feel might make a good community educator assistant. And I tell them that, because a lot of the ladies will ask, "Can I get a job?" And I tell them, "Well, it looks nice that you got a certificate from Cornell. It certainly can't hurt you in any way to have a certificate from our program." And it's true. There are a lot of ladies who have gotten jobs as food handlers in the schools, in the cafete-

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rias, some of them as home health attendants. And some went on to college. They did these kinds of jobs and decided that college was the way to go. So you don't know how you touch someone's life. You never know.

You can tell someone will make a good community educator assistant by the way that they deal with other people. To me, you can learn about nutrition. You can read a script — you know, "My name is _____, I'm from Cornell Cooperative Extension. We are part of Cornell, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." You can read a script. But really having a feel for people, having a genuine concern, wanting to do something for your community, because actually they start off working in their community ...that can't be taught. Sometimes people have not had any experience working, so it's given them some experience and also some confidence in themselves. "Hey, I can do

this. It was kind of hard getting up, getting the kids the ready, and blah, blah, blah." But they can do it. To me, it's the people factor that's extremely important because the rest, you can learn.

I learned to talk in front of groups by doing it. It really was through my job. We worked at that time basically on a one-to-one basis. But there were times when there were in-services. It wasn't just the people that I worked with; there were people who came down from Cornell. There were times when I went up to Cornell. The opportunity was there, and there wasn't anything else I could do. But I guess people saw in me something that I didn't see in myself. And I guess that's it too — part of it. Sometimes we think we have accomplished most of what we are going to accomplish, but then we're limiting ourselves. You never know what you can accomplish unless you try.

So that's my words of wisdom on that one.

I've had numerous experiences just dealing with things, like explaining what I do. Many years ago, I was asked to talk to a class up in Ithaca. I said, "Whoa. What kind of questions are they going to ask me?" And then it became fun, and a challenge. And I guess because I like puzzles, I like challenges.

The highest compliment I ever got was about four years ago. A homemaker who had graduated from EFNEP and I were just talking, and I had mentioned something about all those buses I took. She said, "What are you talking about? You live out here." I said, "No." She said, "You're kidding." I said, "No, I'm not kidding. I don't live in Rockaway. I live in Brooklyn." She was shocked. She said, "I really thought that you lived out here. You don't act like you don't." And I said, "I don't know

what that means, but thank you.”

Afterwards I gave it some thought. And then I realized what she was actually saying: I didn’t come as an outsider into her community. I came there as me, and people accepted me for being me. I’ve worked in EFNEP in a lot of different communities, and most of the communities are poor communities. I’ve worked in Brownsville, East New York, Williamsburg, Cypress Hills, and on and on and on and on. I never thought about going into these various communities, because to me, it was just a place where people live. I live in a community, too. It might be different than theirs. But it’s still a community.

I try not to think of people as being so very different from me, because they’re not. Now there are places that have bad reputations. It’s not the people ... Well, I shouldn’t say it’s not the people. There are some people who are just mean-spirited, who cause problems. But for the most part, the people that I have come in contact with are generally people who want the best for their children, just the way I want the best. They have the same hopes and dreams that I do. So I don’t look at it as being foreign or being that difficult.

What’s most satisfying about the work is actually doing it, actually doing the workshops. I had this very special group of people, ESL [English-as-a-Second-Language]. In the beginning, no one would really speak. And I knew why, because they all felt that they didn’t speak English well, and that I’m not going to understand them, and all this other stuff. It was really difficult. When I tried doing a puzzle with another ESL class that I had, who really were tough, and it worked, I decided to do it with this class. And it was such a big hit. We had so much fun doing the puzzles that that’s what I did with them. Of course, they were all nutrition-related, and we talked about fruits and vegetables, because most of

their diets—with the exception of the Asians; Asian people eat a lot of vegetables—they were lacking in vegetables. But once we got past the difficulties, I really didn’t want to give the group up, because I learned so much from them. I had people from various parts of the world, and it was very, very interesting because they told me about things that they made, and they made it, and I felt like I was learning, which I did.

I learned so much about people, from Asia, from Japan, from Korea, from China, from Taiwan. I mean, you don’t necessarily have a relationship with people from that part of the world. But I’m lucky because I did. And also some people from Russia, the Ukraine, India, Haiti, four or five different countries from South America. And to me, every time I go to a group, it’s like I don’t know what’s going to happen.

Every group is a challenge. I try various things, because there isn’t one thing that works. People are different. Once you start getting too smug and you say, “Oh, wow, I got this down pat,” a group comes along and destroys that. And then you say, “Wait a second. That was supposed to work.” And it didn’t. And that’s why I like this job. Because it’s not pat. If you’re doing exactly the same things all the time, you’re not doing your job. There’s something really wrong. So, at least I recognize that. I can’t always do something about it. But I try. I do try.

I deal with the challenges by just being myself and not thinking that I know everything because I don’t. Still you can get very side-tracked very easily, for example, because they called me “professor.” And I kept saying to them, “No, I’m not a professor.”

“Yes, you are. You’re a teacher.”

“Well, OK, but I’m not a professor.” Because I started thinking about that, and I said, “Nah, things can really get out of hand with that. What if

someone walks in and thinks that I presented myself as a professor.” You can get kind of silly with things. But I realized that that’s the way that they perceived anyone who teaches them. So I said, “OK, then I have to think of it on a different level.” That was their way of showing respect. And I had to learn to live with it.

And of course, I think you need to have a good sense of humor, because if anything can go wrong, it does. You know, they call it Murphy’s law. It’s not. It’s Phyllis’ law. I mean, I’ve had some really weird things happen. But here again, you need a good sense of humor. You need to be able to do your job in a way that people are going to get something from it. A good example: I went to this group and I had said that I would show them how to make chicken nuggets, using the thigh and also using the breast, how to cut the chicken off the bone. When I got there, I took everything out. I had the knife and the cutting board and the pot, and I was looking for the chicken. They said, “What happened?” And I said, “I forgot the chicken.” So one of the ladies went out and got a chicken, and I cut the chicken up. But we must have laughed for ten minutes. I mean, it was really funny. So, you know, it happens. What can you do?

What’s most important is that people are learning about nutrition. They are, for the most part, trying different foods. I think they’re getting a different perspective on how much food their children need to eat, and even for themselves. Someone lost 15 pounds, because she started measuring her food. She said, “I didn’t realize it was that easy.”

Whatever is important to them, that is what they’re going to get out of the program. And hopefully, maybe they’ll start thinking of things a little bit different. And that’s OK. We’re not looking for huge changes, because that’s

not the human spirit. It doesn't work that way. It's really taking little steps toward a larger goal which is that they're able to include more fruits and vegetables into their family's diet, because it is so important. Or maybe using more whole grains, for the fiber.

What do people mean when they say we're doing something else besides education? That "something else" is really tender love and care. That's really what it is. It's showing, maybe, the mother who's trying to raise two children all by herself that she doesn't have to be by herself, that people understand how hard it is. They know; they've been there. That it's all right to get angry. That nobody's perfect. That we're all human.

At that graduation in Queens, my group from Community and Families came — all the way from Far Rockaway, which is really quite a trip. A lot of them took their children with them. I was just so chocked up because they were there — and I know what it entails for them to get there. I knew what they had to go through. I knew what time they had to leave to get there. And they were there. They gave back to me what I tried to give to them, by showing up. When I come to do a group, I don't have little kids with me. I'm not bringing anybody except myself. But they brought their children too. And most of them came by bus, and the bus ride is about an hour.

I think part of what made them come is that some people have never gotten a certificate. And I also like to think that, maybe, I had a small part in making them feel very proud of what they accomplished. I know that I felt very proud for them, and I would tell them. Feeling something and letting somebody know are two different things. We don't always tell people how we feel. We just assume, "Oh, they know." No, they don't, not unless you tell them. I'm a huggy-kissy type of per-

son, too. And I tell them, "Listen, if you're not huggy-kissy, don't worry about it. I understand. But I am."

To me, that's very important. Not just for a child, but in some ways, even more so for an adult, especially if they're going through some hard times. And some of these ladies are. And it's a way of just getting together and doing something that maybe will spark an idea. 'Oh well, I'm going to try this or that.' And sometimes they'll say to me, 'You know, I made that dish that we made here. Everybody liked it.' Terrific.

I had someone who couldn't read, a young woman. And every week when I demonstrated something, she went

You can tell someone will make a good community educator assistant by the way that they deal with other people. To me, you can learn about nutrition. You can read a script... But really having a feel for people, having a genuine concern, wanting to do something for your community ... that can't be taught. _____

home and made it. And she would tell me, 'You know, Phyllis, I made this, but I put in...' whatever it was. And I'd say to her, "OK. That's fine." She'd ask: "That's alright?" And I'd say, "Sure. If that's the way your family likes to eat something, that's terrific. Some people don't like garlic. Some people like garlic. Some people don't like onions. Some people do. That's fine. You can take out what your family doesn't like and put in what they do like." I can't tell you how much it meant to her that she and I would just talk, sometimes before class, sometimes after the class. That's all we would do, just talk. She would tell me about what she made and what she did when she went food shopping. And I would tell her, "You need

to share this with the class." "Oh, well, I don't know..." "No, that's very important. You really do some great things before you go shopping. You need to tell them." And she did. I don't know what you call that.

The main work of an extension educator in EFNEP is to broaden people's outlook on nutrition, on foods, getting them to try new foods. Other extension educators teach other things. But that basically, I think, is what we try to do: get people to try something, and I always tell them, something a little different.

I would tell new educators to never, never promise anything you can't deliver. And always be yourself. Because if you're not, people see right through you, whether they're adults or children. They see right through you. So you need to be yourself. You need to be honest with people. If you don't know something, you don't know it. And if you don't, there have been many times where I have gone and asked other people. Now that we have the computers, if I have the time, I'll go on the computer and see what kinds of information I can get for them. Sometimes I make suggestions: "Go to the library; they have computers there. By the time I come back next week, you might have forgotten what it is. But you can possibly find out right there and then." It's hard, but I would say the best thing to be is truthful and to be yourself, because anything else doesn't work. It really doesn't.

One of my trademarks is I wear dungarees. I've always worn them. Always. And I know that there are some people who feel that I'm not properly attired. But I don't feel very comfortable getting very dressed to go into a

profile Phyllis Morgenlander

community to work with people. So I wear what I'm comfortable with, and every so often I will wear a skirt or a dress, and everyone laughs.

You also need a good sense of humor. I mean, there have been times where we were talking about something, and my mind just races ahead, and all of a sudden I'm answering about something that nobody asked me. I tell them, "Oh well, here we go again." And we laugh. It's no big deal. And making mistakes is learning. Nobody's perfect. And if someone wants to become a community educator and they feel that perfection is the way to go, they're not going to be very successful.

Of course, I'm only giving you my perspective. Now, when you speak to someone else, their perspective might be similar. But it might be completely different. I think you need to actually see people work, in order to understand what they do. To actually know what someone means, you have to see it. You have to see what they're talking about. When we hire new people, Carol will ask me to take them when I do youth groups, or adult groups, or whatever. And I have. And they'll say to me, "My goodness. I had so much fun." And I tell them, "If I'm not having fun, there's something wrong. If I'm bored, then the audience is bored, and I've got to do something else." Nobody wants to be

bored. You can always back up and do something else. You really can. Sometimes lessons are really bombing, and I'll stop whatever I'm doing and we'll do something else. And that's what I tell them: "I'm not here to put you to sleep." So we laugh, and then we go on to something else.

I guess there are a lot of different nuances to things. I know when I've observed people doing lessons, I'm always in awe of the way they do things because it's different from the way that I do it. But it's exciting, and they're doing it. And when I tell them afterwards, they look at me: "I did that?" "What do you mean — of course you did that!" But you're not even aware, sometimes, of what you're doing. You just do it, because it's a part of you. That's why I said it's really important for a person to be themselves. You don't have to do things my way. You've got to find what is your way. What do you feel comfortable with? Sounds simple, right?

I find the simplest things are the most complex. When you try to explain something that basically is very simple, it takes you days. If it's complex — this little thing or whatever — you can get away with it, maybe in a half hour. But real simple things are very, very difficult.

I've come to a lot of different crossroads in my life, and I had to make

choices, and I chose to stay with extension. And the reason I did is because I thought about it, and I said, "Wow, they're not going to allow me teach this way in public schools." I can do it in extension, though. Even now, there are times where, when I first walk into a classroom, the teacher will hear me, and say "Oh my, what is she talking about?" But as the weeks go on, they sort of see what's happening. It's just a different way of teaching. It's not that no one teaches this way. There are a lot of people who do. But I find that teaching really should be fun. If it's a drudge, who wants to learn?

Babies learn by touching everything and looking and examining. Right? You think that they have a billion fingers. But that's what true learning is — it's exploring. And if you don't have that fun of exploration, you're not really learning. I have my issues with the Board of Ed, as you can tell. I really do. Just teaching children how to take a test is stupid. They need to teach them things that are life.

I have a bachelor's in elementary education that I got while I was working for Cornell. I should have gone on for my master's. But anyway, that was a conscious decision that I made not to go into the public school system and to stay in extension. It has worked out well for me.