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Interview with Peggy Kinney

Peggy Kinney
SC Mother of the Year Committee

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South Carolina Mother of the Year Award Oral History Archives
Interview Transcript

Peggy Kinney

Member of the SC Mother of the Year Award Selection Committee

July 14, 2015

Dr. Disney: Good morning. My name is Jennifer Leigh Disney, and I'm honored to be in the beautiful home of Peggy Kinney on July 14, 2015. Thank You So much for inviting us into your beautiful home today.

Peggy Kinney: It's a pleasure for me. Truly is.

Dr. Disney: Would you start by telling us a little about when and where you were born and raised.

Peggy Kinney: I was born in this county, Marlboro, and this section of the state which is the Pee Dee. 1940, actually in my grandfather's home, he was a medical doctor, was really a horse and buggy doctor although we did have automobiles when I was born. I grew up on a farm, my father's family farm in this county. I attended public school in Cheraw, which is Chesterfield County on the other side of the Pee Dee River. When I was 15, I went off to private school to Saint Mary's School and Junior College in Raleigh, North Carolina. Went there for 2 years of high school and first 2 years of college. After that, I attended The University of North Carolina in Greensboro, which was a woman's college at The University of North Carolina at that particular time. It was also my mother's Alma Mater and I got a degree in English, well, English and History - a double major. Went to work in Atlanta after what was a sort of traditional schoolgirl tour of Europe with a tour group. This was before young woman backpacked in Europe, so we rode the bus. All 30 some odd of us. I worked for a publishing company in Atlanta. We put out magazines for industry principally. I was living there, then, when I met my husband who was also from this county that I had grown up in but he lived in Bennettsville and I was more closely associated with the other end of the county, so we didn't know each other in growing up years. We began dating, and married in 1964 and I came to Bennettsville to live and I've been here for 51+ years now.

Dr. Disney: Wow! When and Where did your husband meet?

Peggy Kinney: At an apartment in Atlanta, a mutual friend of ours. She was a school friend, and childhood friend of mine whom he was dating a little bit at the time and he and a buddy one day went back to South Carolina from The Seattle World's Fair.

Dr. Disney: Wow. So you both are from the same county and you met in Atlanta?

Peggy Kinney: Right. I had been associating with newspapers in High School and in College, so it was even more coincidental that he was editor of a little town newspaper.

Dr. Disney: Is there anything else you want to share about your early childhood experience, or your family growing up?

Peggy Kinney: It was a fun growing up experience. I was sort of a tom-boy, my sister and I were the only 2 children in the family and I always thought my daddy needed a son and I tried to be that boy. I would dress up like a little cowgirl, well a cowboy actually. We didn't have a horse, or a pony, I had a billy goat that I would ride. That was always an interesting experience. The goat's name was Billy, and he had a wife, named Nanny. Real original, but you know, those are fun things for a little girl.

Dr. Disney: You talk about your education, You talked about working at the publishing company in Atlanta, talk about what were your dreams, goals and aspirations when you were a young woman at USCG going off to Atlanta getting your first job. What do you remember about your dreams, goals and aspirations at that time in your life?

Peggy Kinney: Well, really I spent a lot of time, in High School and in College, with the Newspapers and I aspired to be a Newspaper Woman. In fact I even interviewed and offered a night job, which I thought, "That's not gonna work out so well," at The Atlanta Journal and Constitution. But I thought, I don't know that I'm going to be too well suited for covering a beat into the middle of the night. About that time, I met Bill, my husband to be and that ended that.

Dr. Disney: So tell us about how things changed when you met and married your husband, in the early years of your marriage.

Peggy Kinney: In a lot of ways, my hopes and dreams didn't change a lot because I was still involved with a newspaper. I assisted him a little bit, and then after we'd been married for a couple of years, I had the first of our two children. I spent a lot more time, as a mother and homemaker, then I did as a journalist. It was a nice combination. I've always enjoyed that association with the public through the printed media. So pleased now, that our daughter, and her husband are in the family business which my husband's parents had started. So, now we're in the 3rd generation, hopefully there will be more than that.

Dr. Disney: Wow that's great. So you've already mentioned Journalism, Publishing - one of my questions to ask you is, What activities you were involved in both before and after your marriage in terms of, you've already mentioned education, employment, family, community. Is there anything else you want to share in terms of activities you've been involved in?

Peggy Kinney: I never have really been too involved with sports, as far as things that I enjoy. I did the usual sort of things that a young wife and mother did, 50 years ago. Played bridge, went to little parties - the social scene in a little town. I've enjoyed statewide associations such as the mother of the year committee. I served on the state museum foundation board. I'm a member of The Colonial Dames of America. I have been involved with that organization. That sort of thing.

Dr. Disney: Wonderful. So tell us about the birth of your children.

Peggy Kinney: Well, Elisabeth, our oldest was born in 1967 and two years later, our son was born, in 1969. He died at age 20, he was killed in a sort of freak automobile accident when he was working at the beach for the summer. He was a student at Wofford College. We have 3 grandchildren, of course our son was not married, he was young. We have 3 grandchildren and they are aged 21, 18, and 13. I have grown up right here in town, and that has been my real focus for the last 21 years. I feel very fortunate that we have been allowed, that Bill and I have been allowed to be a part of their lives as they have grown.

Dr. Disney: I'm so sorry about the loss of your son, I can't imagine that. You're such an amazing woman and mother to have been able to survive a trial after that kind of experience.

Peggy Kinney: Well, of course it's something that no mother ever ever thinks they will have to face. There have been some remarkable and beautiful things that have happened in our lives because of that loss, that wouldn't have occurred - insights and things like that into life and into the lives of other people that have had things happened like that.

Dr. Disney: Would you like to share any advice to any other mothers out there who may be going through a similar type of trauma or tragedy? What advice would you share?

Peggy Kinney: We had a wonderful minister friend. We're members of the United Methodist Church, who was serving our home church here at the time. One thing he told me, and this was in the early weeks, months of that deep grieve was, "Peggy, don't navel gaze" which I thought, "What is he talking about?!" but I finally came to realize that rather than focusing on my own grief, and my immediate families grief, that I needed to focus on other people who have things happening in their lives that grieve them, concern them, worry them. Get outside of myself, don't navel gaze. That was wonderful advice from him and something that I treasure.

Dr. Disney: This is a question I've asked all the mothers. I think it's particularly poignant for a mother who has experienced what you've experienced with the loss of a child. What does "Motherhood" mean to you?

Peggy Kinney: The opportunity to help mold a little life and then as that child grows and matures to see the fruit of your work, your endeavor. I've grieved so for other people who maybe just don't have the same good love that I have had. Our daughter is a wonderful young mother, young woman, and a young mother and career woman. Our son was very outgoing, delightful young fella. There are those who hadn't had such good love. Not necessarily because of parental guidance or lack of guidance, just sometimes it's the luck of the draw in a sense. It worries me for them because I sense so often, that a parent feels that it's so futile.

Dr. Disney: You talked about being a young mother yourself, and working, doing journalism, publishing, your daughter's a young mother. Balancing being a mother, and being a career woman. How were you able to balance working outside the home, being a mother inside the home, being involved in community activities, volunteerism. And how do you think young women today are able to balance? Talk about your own experience balancing all the different work women do outside and inside the home, mothering and then maybe reflect on young women today and how you think they do it?

Peggy Kinney: I think it's a lot more difficult this day and time, in the first place I think more young women and maybe not so young are called to work, to have an occupation. Sometimes out of necessity in order to be able to provide wealth for their family. That puts a tremendous responsibility on a household, and a family I think. It was easier for me, because I didn't have the necessity I suppose of bringing in an extra income. My husband has been a wonderful provider. At the same time, the young women today who do work, either feel that they must work in order to provide things for their family and so often they are single mothers too. Some of them just feel that they might just be driven to work, their real life calling is outside of the home rather than inside the home. I've never really felt that way, I've felt that my first duty has been my first love, was my family.

Dr. Disney: Given that, that you've had this first duty, in your home for your family as a mother, do you remember how and when you first got involved in the South Carolina Mothers Association, and Mother of The Year Selection Committee?

Peggy Kinney: I do. Wonderful lady, wonderful friend, whom I've come to love and enjoy even more so, former first lady, Ann Edwards, called me one day. We had been associated in another organization. Called me and asked me if I'd be interested in submitting my resume. Such as it was, to the committee and would I like to serve. I really had no knowledge of The Mother of The Year Award program in the state except that I knew and had greatly admire the lady who was responsible for starting the program in the state of South Carolina, back in the early 1940s. Anne Edwards, who has a wonderful way of convincing anyone of doing anything she thinks they ought to do. So, I was accepted to the committee and I have just thoroughly enjoyed serving with

these wonderful ladies and helping them select even more wonderful ladies in most instances, certainly, to be mothers of the year.

Dr. Disney: It certainly seems like an amazing group of women on the selection committee, and women that have been chosen as mothers of the year. Talk a little about your years of service, I know you've been to tea's at the governor's mansion and that sort of thing. Talk about what it was like to serve with these amazing women, to read the applications and make selections for mothers of the year, and the recognition ceremonies, and the governor's mansion and that sort of thing.

Peggy Kinney: South Carolina, I think has had a unique history and among the states that have had this program. We have honored our very special ladies, our mothers of the year, in what I think is a beautiful way. The day that they are particularly honored, which is around, well we don't do it know, but it had been around Mother's day. it would begin with a luncheon at a private club in Columbia with our committee and former mothers of the year and the immediate family, usually just the spouse or what have you of the current mother of the year. The mother of the year, and some of the committee members would go to the state house to the governor's office, and the governor would recognize the mother with a pin, would present a pin and a plaque. There was a photo-op and usually the media was there and it was just a big day. After that, we'd go to the governor's mansion, where the governor's wife and the governor would receive her and her family and friends for a tea. The governor's mansion would help us put on the tea, but our committee with the funds we had raised one way or another would provide for the refreshments for this lovely tea in this lovely mansion. That made it feel very special. The mother would serve for a year. They were always notified. When I was chairman of the committee, it was a real treat to call the mother that we had selected on New Years day and finally reach them by telephone and tell them they had been selected and would they serve? Which was a real fun thing, and most of them - were almost overwhelmed they were selected. We reassure them that it wasn't going to be so hard.

Dr. Disney: Do all the mothers necessarily know they were nominated, or were some of them surprised?

Peggy Kinney: Actually, they all knew at least the ones in recent years because there was a nomination form that had to be filled out. It asked for comments, personal comments from them. I don't know really what the process was like back in the 40s and 50s, it may have been a little different and it could've been that it was more of a surprise. We [our committee] always had several nominations to consider and we'd pick one, because they didn't know that they were gonna be the one selected. Sometimes if they weren't selected for a particular year, that nomination was held till the next year, or the next year and they may have thought, "Oh I'm never gonna get it" and then they did.

Dr. Disney: So they had application materials to submit to the committee and if they were selected, they had additional application materials to submit to the national, for the national selection.

Peggy Kinney: Right, it was an expanded form, basically.

Dr. Disney: What impact did your service, or your membership on this committee have on you, have on your family, have on your community? How do you speak to, or measure the impact?

Peggy Kinney: Personally, the association that I've had with the ladies that I've served with has just been absolutely delightful. We have formed very close, almost family connections. We care about each other's ups and downs, and what we are doing, and that sort of thing. There never have been that many of us. I think there are maybe 12 currently, but somewhere between 10 and 15 at any given time. I think that is one of the real pluses to me, that I've had this wonderful, close friendship with these ladies on the committee. I truly think that selecting a mother from a community in South Carolina has impacted that community. They all seem, each little town or big city, all seem to be so supportive of that woman, and so delighted that she has been selected almost to represent them, and that's been fun to watch.

Dr. Disney: It's had such an amazing history, and so instructive for me to learn about the amazing women and mothers who have served on the committee, who have served as mothers of the year. I want to take the time and ask you a few just broader questions about society, about women, given your experiences. You're an amazing woman and mother in your own right. What do you think are the most important issues facing women today?

Peggy Kinney: The pressures of the outside world. I think in any family dynamic, there are pressures. There are things that pull and push for and against a woman. We are so involved in the world around us, women can't be isolated. Mothers can't be isolated, their families can't be isolated. To be able to reconcile those things, and make it work - is just a difficult thing to achieve, with success.

Dr. Disney: I'm thinking, you know you mentioned the outside pressures. You mentioned earlier that one of those pressures can be an economic necessity to work outside of the home, and have to engage in that kind of balance with work and family. That is difficult, it was difficult in your time, and it difficult today. You said earlier that you think it's even more difficult for women today to balance.

Peggy Kinney: I do, I do think so.

Dr. Disney: What does feminism mean to you?

Peggy Kinney: Well we joked a few minutes ago. I don't really know, if you want to know the truth. I've looked it up and you defined it according to Webster. I suppose Feminism is, the trait of being female in a society that has both males and females. Some have said that it's reconciling the coexistence of men and women, both in a marriage or in business, or just in society in general. Maybe, the women achieving equality with men and I laughed, saying, "We aren't equal, Women are superior!" They should be. I think a successful woman knows how, I don't want to use the word "manipulate" because that's not a very kind thing to say, but a successful woman knows how to manage a situation in what maybe perceived as a man's world and to achieve success. It's not by force, because man, men would not respond well to that. So, you've just got to make them think whatever it was, was their idea.

Dr. Disney: So when you joked earlier, "We're not equal, were superior" what you meant was, that idea of women being able to manage situations.

Peggy Kinney: It's what we should try to achieve, not to force things because, well man or another woman for that matter, they will resist and that is going to cause friction in the relationship.

Dr. Disney: I think you gave us beautiful definitions, reconciling the coexistence between males and females, managing situations in a man's world and learning how to be successful, and even making a man think it's his idea, when it's really yours. I think those are all very important aspects of feminism.

Peggy Kinney: I must say too, that I'm not the world's best at doing that and that's where all women struggle, that we still want to be the boss. We don't need to be the boss.

Dr. Disney: Do you think women and men need to learn how to be co-equal-bosses? Kind of share that leadership role?

Peggy Kinney: That might be a good definition?

Dr. Disney: And the family, and the external world? That kind of shared leadership. One thing that this project has had me think about is how mothers are often the leaders of the family, like the CEO of a business, the women, the mothers are very typically the leaders of the family and are the bosses of what's happening but we're so trained to think of the man or the father as the head of the household, as the leader.

Peggy Kinney: Once upon a time, the man was considered more the head of the household, but I think as women have found the necessity to supplement to a great extent, then that has changed. I think, men and women are essentially different in their attitude towards things and being able to reconcile all of that is a challenge, and one that some people meet and face better than others.

Dr. Disney: Do you think men play a stronger or larger role as fathers in the family has increased or been an important part of the story of women being able to balance and work outside the home, work in the home - as if men and fathers are having to pick up the work in the home. Talk a little bit about that experience, in your time coming up, and for your daughter today.

Peggy Kinney: I think probably today, men, husbands, fathers, have more of the responsibility of nurturing in a family when it maybe it had been traditionally women were considered that, or perceived themselves those nurturers. Maybe it's changed. In my mind, I keep thinking about some television sitcoms and little books like that when the stereotypes of the father, the husband, the breadwinner was a little different then perhaps it is today, that i perceive it is today. There seems to be so many, single parent households both with fathers and mothers that maybe didn't exist before. Maybe those marriages as partnerships didn't work, maybe they were miserable situations. Divorce seems to be easier to come by these days.

Dr. Disney: It's certainly much harder for a single parent to able to balance work inside and outside of the home. I think you're right, I think it's an important changing dynamic within the family. Do you have anything else you want to share with us? or any questions that you'd like to ask us?

Peggy Kinney: One thing I'd like to say is, I personally am so appreciative to Winthrop University and your department, and you as head for taking the responsibility of preserving and projecting what South Carolina Mothers of The Year has meant to this state, without that sort of leadership, it would be lost.

Dr. Disney: Well, I cannot thank you enough. It has been my honor and pleasure. When Martha Cranford and Shirley Fishburne called me and said, "We'd like to talk to the director of women's and gender studies, we had a project that we think might be interesting" and the book project came out of that, and the luncheon and we have the celebration at the Louise Pettus Archives where we announce the oral history project. It's just been an amazing journey and I have loved traveling across the great state of South Carolina and meeting amazing women like you. Learning about what one woman yesterday called "Southern Feminism." We're having some people define what "Southern Feminism" is. I have to say, you told us a really interesting story about this house, I don't know if you're willing to share with us that story, but those are the kind of things that I'm learning about. We just had a really dramatic experience in Charleston with the

way families who lost loved ones were able to share love and forgiveness immediately. You know, the day after - it was such a model for this country and I think for human beings, for what the people of Charleston and those families were able and willing to do. Kind of speaks to our deepest humanity. You told us an amazing story about the history of this house that also just touches our deepest humanity. Would you mind sharing that?

Peggy Kinney: I'll try to do a better job than I did a few minutes ago. This house was built by one of this county's 3 signers of the South Carolina ordinance of secession. During the wars during the state's, Sherman's army occupied Bennettsville, this town for a few days and because it was learned by the Yankee soldiers that this was the home of a signer, they resolved to burn the house which they did in many cases, with Sherman's march to the sea, they actually set fire to the house in the corner under the bedroom and the northern general walked through the house to see if there were items that they needed to take with them. I don't want to say looting, because I don't think it necessarily was - and he saw The Princeton Diploma of the owner, the signer of the ordinance of secession on the wall and he read the name, and he said, where is this man? and they said, he's in the barn and he said, bring him to me. They had been roommates at Princeton. So, the fire was extinguished on the general's orders. The family was restored to the house. It still stands because of that.

Dr. Disney: The men embraced. You told us that, right? So this is just an amazing story of supposed enemies in war that we're reminded that they were truly friends, they had been roommates at Princeton and were put in this North/South conflict, but embraced, put out the fire. The house stands, it's an amazing and beautiful house and that story. I'm glad you shared, it's just a tribute to what the people of Charleston have faced and conquered, to the loss you've faced and conquered..

Peggy Kinney: Reconciliation.

Dr. Disney: Reconciliation and Love and Humanity ultimately triumphs.

Dr. Disney: Thank You so much for sharing your time with us, your beautiful home, your story.

Peggy Kinney: My pleasure.