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Interview with Tempe Anne Oehler and guest

Tempe Anne Oehler
SC Mother of the Year 1990

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Dr. Disney: Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Jennifer Leigh Disney and I am honored to be here interviewing Tempe Oelher, the 1990 winner of the South Carolina Mother of the Year award. Thank you so much for being here and welcoming us into your home.

Tempe Anne Oehler: Well, thank you for coming to visit and I am most happy to welcome you and your crew into my home because this has been one of the most exciting things in my life.

Dr. Disney: We are so excited to learn all about you and all about your award. So let's start by you telling us a little bit about when and where you were born and raised.

Tempe Anne Oehler: I was born in Columbia, South Carolina. My father was a registered civil engineer and he'd been with the highway department in Columbia. He came to this part of South Carolina to work with Brooke Green Garden, so he did a lot of the surveying on Brooke Green Gardens. He and my mother were living in Murrells Inlet and she was 42 years old and scared to death of having a baby. She knew the doctors and hospitals in Columbia and she wanted to go back there for me to be born. I was about three months old when she came back with me and we settled in Myrtle Beach.

Dr. Disney: Wonderful. Tell us a little about your family and your early childhood experiences.

Tempe Anne Oehler: My father, like I said, was a civil engineer and he did a lot of the early surveying of Myrtle Beach and the map that he did in 1938 was used for the corporate description of the parameters of myrtle beach. An attorney had to do the legal end of it and my father had to do the surveying end of it. My mother had been a schoolteacher. She went to a state normal college and I always told her that it was not a normal college. Then it became Women's College and it was that when I went to school there and when my girls went it was the University of North Carolina Greensboro. My father studied engineering at chapel hill. At that time it was at Chapel Hill instead of in Raleigh in North Carolina State Engineering. My father had been a teacher too because my greatgrandfather had established a school in North Carolina. It was a prep school and they trained lawyers and doctors and military men. I heard my father talked many times about having to prep the students taking the exams for Westpointe Naval Academy.

My father's father was an episcopal minister. Two of my greatgrandfatehrs were ministers and an uncle and a cousin were bishops. We were polluted with Episcopalians in his family, and my mother too. My mother's father was a horse-and-buggy doctor in North Carolina and he had studied at John Hopkins Medical school in Baltimore and when he went it was the College of Physicians and Surgeouns in Baltimiore. But when John Hopkins died, he left him a lot of money, so they named it for him. So my grandfather got his medical education there and what was really interesting is that when they were doing studies of genetic traces in families they asked him for his record because he would've treated three generations of people.

My mother taught before she and my father were married. My father nearly died when I was five years old of a ruptured ulcer. My mother went back to teaching and she was in charge of the lunchroom at the school. So because of that I was put in school at five years old. The principal told my mother to put me in the classroom since I was there everyday. I finished high school when I was sixteen and finished college when I was twenty. I was active in things growing up that you could be active in then. Myrtle Beach was really a small town then, but you had your church activities and school activities and I was in Girl Scouts for a short while. I remember some things very vividly. My father

was a (?) warden and when the siren would go off he'd put on his warden's hat and he'd go off and do whatever he had to do. But I have seen gunfire battles off of this coast by the German submarines and the American oil tankers. After that we would get tar washed up on the sea shore and I can remember one February I got some of that tar on my feet and I could get it off. It just had to wear off; it took about a year for it to wear off. We had to have blinds drawn all the time and you couldn't smoke a cigarette because ships could see the cigarette. I remember OPA bills and coupons we had to get our food and at that time I worked at the delta drugstore, which was next to a grocery store. I always heard when the ration items came in – the butter and sugar, the lard, even shoes, whatever – and I would get on the phone and call my mother because if you didn't get it right away, it wasn't there very long. So I remember those. I had a happy childhood here. It wasn't glamorous and we didn't have all the video things that young people have today, but we used our imaginations a lot to entertain ourselves. So those were a lot of the things I did at that point.

Dr. Disney: That's wonderful. It sounds like a great childhood.

Tempe Anne Oehler: It was. I attended the myrtle beach school system from the first grade through the eleventh grade. I was the valedictorian and then went on to the Women's College of North Carolina. I was honored to be elected to Phi Beta Kappa there. I was real thrilled about that, and also the Golden chain leadership and scholarship society because I was very active in things. I majored in Spanish and my degree is in Spanish, but I really majored in the student newspaper. That's where I spent all my time. We did not have journalism courses; I learned that from the University of Hard Knox. We did have a news bureau chief and one of my jobs was to work with him. He taught me a lot about newspaper and that was the most formal education I had about journalism. I just loved it.

Dr. Disney: That's just wonderful. You predicted my next question. I was going to ask you to tell us about your education, your young adult life, and when you think back to that time in college and working on the newspaper, what do you remember were your dreams, goals, and aspirations?

Tempe Anne Oehler: From the time I was a little girl, and I don't know how it got started, I wanted to be a momma. I wanted to have a bunch of little children to love and children to love me. I wanted to be a mother. In a way it was ironic that I got to be the South Carolina mother of the year for 1990. We didn't have Spanish in our high school system; we have French and at one time, Latin. But my mother who was a teacher and very progressive in ideas, decided we needed a Spanish course and I needed to study Spanish. She talked the school board into getting a Spanish professor, so I studied Spanish the years I was in high school. I went on to college and got my degree in it and studied it for four years in several different courses some times at one time. I did have some dreams about being an international correspondent or working in international relations, but that got expired along the way. When I finished college, in my senior year, I was offered a scholarship to Yale University and they were started a new educational program – which to me makes perfect sense and I don't know why people don't think about it all the time – to show how everything is related from A to Z. Everything is related; that's what the course was about. I was also offered a teaching fellowship at our university in French. I turned both of them down because I owed \$600 for my education and it looked like a million dollars for me to have to pay off. So what do I do? Instead of

getting a Master's degree and a PhD, I got married and had children every two years for a while.

Dr. Disney: Tell us a little bit about how you met your husband.

Tempe Anne Oehler: Oh, that is a real story. One of my jobs – I've had many careers in my lifetime – the first job I ever had when I was thirteen years old was working at Mac's five and ten and stock the counters. I'd love to just sit on the floor and hide from the manager and stock the counters. But anyhow, I was familiar with Mac's five and ten. When I was in college, that was our shopping emporium. There was a little shop near the college and that's where our finances extended. So we saw this young man in there and my roommate and I were trying to figure out whether he was married or not. We saw that he was wearing a university of north Carolina ring so we figured that's where he went to school. Then she came home from school one day – she was a student teacher – she said, "I know where that man lives," and I said, "Where?" She told me, "He lives about two or three houses from the shopping center, he rooms and boards with his family, and he's not married." She had gone to one of her student's birthday parties and Fred came in while they were having the birthday party.

At that time I didn't know his name, but I went down to the Mac's cashier and asked her if she knew the manager of that Mac's store. She said she knew him and he worked there for six weeks as an assistant in training. She told me his name and I never would have remembered Fred Oehler, especially Oehler being spelled O-E-H-L-E-R. One day I went up to him in the store and I said, "Excuse me, is your name George?" and he said, "Hell no, it's not George." I was so fluster and thought this young man thinks I'm trying to pick him up and I am. He said there was a group of them who got together every night for their social hour, and one of them was named George and he was always pulling tricks on him, so he thought he thought somebody was pulling a trick on him. Fred was pulling tricks on George too. So we talked for a little bit. One time I went in and bought a 25 cent spool of thread and back then it was a huge spool of thread. That was to show him I was the domestic type. He said, "I don't think you ever used that spool of thread." I figured out when he went to lunch because my boss sent me down in her car to mail out mail from the alumni office. I was the assistant to the alumni director. So I figured out his schedule.

One day he was walking by and I said, "Hello Fred," and he said, "Well, hello." He came over and started talking to me and said, "Would you like to go to a movie?" I told him, "I'm a good Episcopalian and I've given up movies for lent." Then he said, "Would you like to go dancing?" and I told him I'd given up dancing, too. Then he said, "Have you given up eating, too?" and I told him, "No, I can go eat." So he asked me out on a date on March 7, 1952. I remember the date and when he asked me, my mind said to me, "This is the man I'm going to marry." I was always very comfortable with him. We went out to this Southern diner and we had dinner. They used to take street cars and make diners out of them. For two hours I let him talk and found out everything thing I wanted to know about his family and I just did a real interview. And then his mother and sister had gone to the college and I went and checked their historical background in their alumni records. Fred said that was the only time I let him speak for two hours straight.

We dated from March until – when he asked me to marry him, he was smoking cigarettes and he used one of those little folding match books and he went and parked at the end of this golf course and this is where I had dated a golfer who really was a baseball

player but he was teaching me how to play golf there, but anyhow, Fred takes that matchbook and taps it around the steering wheel. He says, "I always said I was going to marry a girl who could sing like a canary and you can't even carry a tune." It made me so made that I wasn't going to say yes right now. That was probably in May, but in July on the grand July 4th, I was visiting my family and I sent him a telegram that said, "Next June will be okay." He was so excited that he got in his car and drove down from Greensboro. He kept badgering me about moving up the date, but I wanted to pay my education bill. He said, "You're making money more important than love." We ended up getting married on Decemeber the 27th that year., 1952. But I would never do that again because you're going to miss out on a chirstmas gift or an anniversary gift. We were married for 59 years and he died March 7, 2012, sixty years after he asked me on that first date. It took me a couple of days to realize that because my granddaughter was born two months premature three days later and then eight to ten days later, my sister died suddenly, so I had three extreme experiences of life right there together. But we had a long, happy life together and we did things together. We'd have hamburger dates with just him and me when the children were small. We'd get a babysitter to come and we'd go off for a weekend. I'm a great believer of keeping romance in marriage. We were very active in the church together.

Dr. Disney: That's wonderful. Thank you for sharing. What a great story and what a lesson for all of the future generations of women who are going to hear this. Keeping romance in marriage, even with children, that's so important.

Tempe Anne Oehler: One of our assistant passes in the church, she said, "Tempe, you were stalking Fred!" I said I never thought of it that way, but I guess it was.

Dr. Disney: Tell us about the birth of your children.

Tempe Anne Oehler: That was just a wonderful experience. of course, the happiest day of my life was the day Fred and I got married. The next happiest day was when each of our children were born. To me, bearing children was a sacred trust. I just felt that each one was a gift from god. Someone once asked, "Isn't that kind of heavy?" I don't know if it's heavy or not, but that's what I believe and that's what I lived by. (?) Ann was born first and I always tell everyone and she always says, "Momma don't tell people that!" She was born in 1954; we'd been married for two years. My son was born in 1956. Then our daughter was born in 1958. Then we had about a four-year rest and our youngest daughter was born in 1962. It was almost like having two separate families with that four-year difference because when she was in middle school, the other four children were away from home and going to college and starting their professions. She was an only child for a while, which she thoroughly enjoyed.

I worked at Mac's Five and Ten. In the summer I was going to college, I worked as a cashier at a theatre, but first I started out as an usher. On Saturday's I had a terrible time because we had Double Westerns on Saturday afternoon so that was wonderful babysitting time. All the momma's brought their little children to the movie theatre because they knew they'd be safe there, but they all brought their cap pistols. There were adult there who wanted to see the movie who didn't like the cap pistols. I had to institute a program of having a box and having all of them checking their guns in before going into the movie. Then I worked at an automobile agency in the mornings and that lady had trained at Winthrop; she had trained in a degree of business and commerce. She trained me to be a bookkeeper, which was just wonderful. I didn't have to go to school with all

she taught me. I really enjoyed that. I did those things and I worked for the city of Myrtle Beach two summers in the water department. When I finished college, I came back and worked for the Myrtle Beach Sun, which was just starting out. We already had a paper here called Myrtle Beach News. I celebrate the first birthday with the Sun and the university called me back to work there. After Fred and I got married and we came back here to live – we lived in North Carolina for two years after we got married in Raleigh. Fred was an outdoors salesman for a paper company and I worked as a technician at the school of engineering at North Carolina State University. What I did was write articles about what the professors did. I wrote one little pamphlet that went all over the world; the professors actually wrote it and I edited it. I did different newspaper work things and the stories I wrote went through the news bureau of the college. I just really enjoyed that work. Little did I know then that some time later our son would be graduating in chemical engineering from that school.

I came back and worked, after we were married, at the chamber of commerce; I loved that work and I set up a news bureau there. We sent out news stories about Myrtle Beach and this was just a year after Hazel and Hazel had done a lot of damage, but put Myrtle Beach on the map because it tore down a lot of old properties that needed to go. It got to the point that I had to call the state editors to send their reporters down here because it was so high tide they thought we were having a hurricane. We weren't and of course the motel operators didn't like that one bit. I worked one year at the Sun Fun festival with the Miss South Carolina Pageant, the year that Marilyn McKnight became Miss South Carolina. That was a great joy to work with that. I worked at the chamber of commerce until our son was three months old. I couldn't be a full-time momma and have a full-time career at the same time. I resigned and I stayed at home until our fourth child was in middle school.

By that time we had three children in college and that's a powerful motivator to put you back to work. Then I went back to substitute teaching; I was on call a lot of time and I could get a lot of days teaching and the students would say, "Please don't get Mrs. Oehler!" because I was going to make them behave and be quiet and do their work. I enjoyed that. I've enjoyed every job I've ever had except for writing sports stories; I just was not cut out for that. When I worked for the Myrtle Beach Sun, I had to write sports stories and they didn't have those "Football For Dummies" books back then, so that was a real challenge for me.

Our children were involved in activities, first in church because I wanted them to find their way to the lord. Then they were involved with school activities and scouting activities. We went to everybody's activities that everyone in the family did to have togetherness in the family. You just had to go. If Fritz was doing something, all the girls had to go. If one of the girls was doing something, Fritz and all of the other girls had to go. We stressed having family dinner every night. I was really interested when Fritz was taking psychology in high school. His psychology professor asked the class how many of them had a family meal once a day and Fritz was the only one in the whole class that had a family meal once a day. That was just amazing to me. Then we had board meetings in this house. We sat around the dining room table and Fred was the chair and I was the vice chair and the others had votes, but we had the veto votes. We'd discuss current events and family finances and this was to teach them how to manage their money. So we'd

have these little board meetings and have a good time and discuss things. Of course, the children didn't get their way too much.

Dr. Disney: I'm a political scientist so I love that you were kind of modeling collective decision-making, but also power because not everyone has equal power around the table.

Tempe Anne Oehler: Absolutely. We kind of trained them all to do that kind of thing. We were a close family. We had just one car and that was really a challenge when they got to be teenagers and even in college, but it sure did promote togetherness too. I grew up where there was a lot of love in a family, but not a lot of money. The money was kind of meager, but we had a whole lot of love. With both of my parent having been taught, they tutored me at home and they wanted me to get an education and my sister, too. Of course, Fred and I wanted that for our children and they all got their degrees. They got scholarships, they worked, they borrowed money, and of course we helped them too. They were paying out of state tuition, which was expensive and we never could have done it for them if it hadn't been a combined family enterprise. That was a big thing, to get them educated. My daughter says, "Momma, I remember one time that you wore one coat for a long time," and I said, "You're education was more important to me than having a new coat."

We were very frugal in the way we lived to be able to do this, too. When we bought this house, it was an upstairs and downstairs duplex, so we lived upstairs and rented the downstairs to help make the payments. We had one room in the back and added two rooms and made a little rental cottage and we rented that in the summertime. I was the owner-manager of that rental property and I did a lot of cleaning. I told the children I scrubbed floors for them to go to college. Sometimes I'd get on my hands and knees and scrub that kitchen and bathroom floor. But again, trying to get them a good education, trying to get them to develop a good spiritual life for themselves, good morals and good character because I always told them that anyone can take your money from you, but they can't take your character and education from you. You can hold on to that. Oh my I had to pray a hotline to the lord every day, every hour, every minute, and every second because I never said my children wouldn't do that because I never knew what my children would and wouldn't do. I prayed all the time. I did tell them that if they were dumb enough to get thrown in jail, I was going to let them sit there and serve their time; I was not going to bail them out. I just prayed that that day would never come, that I'd ever have to make that decision. But they said it worked; it scared them enough that they decided to try to stay out of jail. I'm trying to hit all the highlights.

Dr. Disney: You are hitting all the highlights. Do you want to tell us what all of your children are doing today? Do you have any grandchildren?

Tempe Anne Oehler: Teann has an MSW in Social Work. She went to UNCG undergraduate and to Chapel Hill for graduate. She is a clinical psychologist and she's also an adjunct professor at Georgetown Technical College. In the past, she has been an expert witness in death penalty trials. She has a wide spectrum of things so she wouldn't get burn out as a social worker.

Our son was educated as a chemical engineer and he did that for a number of years. Then after he got married – he was in Pennsylvania at that time – he and his wife moved to Harrisonburg, Virginia, which had been her home for a good period of time. Her father was a Lutheran minister and he would go to new towns and build churches. So they moved back there. Fritz operates and owns an apartment building and he's also the

head of a cytology lab, which Susan's mother had and they had to have somebody with a lot of biology to do that. Susan is a partner at a patchwork quilt emporium and he helps with that too. He kind of got away from the engineering part, that's what a good education is about – adapting yourself to other things.

Our daughter Cindy graduated from UNCG with a degree in business and she has her Master's degree from Western Webster University in management. She is a civil service officer and at one time, one of her job was buying medical supplies for the United States Army all over the world. She's had some heavy responsibilities like that. She has two daughters and Fritz has two sons. Teann has a daughter and a granddaughter. Teann's daughter is 22 and her daughter is three. My grandsons are 16 and 13. Cindy's daughters are 28 and 25. The older granddaughter is graduated from Florida Atlantic University and she is the manager of a recovery – I don't know if you call it a hospital or not – but she is the manager of a recovery situation. She worked for them part-time while she was going to college and they gave her a full-time job and a full-time salary, so she's happy there. The younger granddaughter got her degree in psychology from the University of Texas at San Marcos. She hasn't opted to get her Master's right now, but she's working at a detention center in San Antonio – the resident from ten to seventeen – and she's been promoted rapidly there to a management position. Our son-in-law Jim, Cindy's husband, worked for the University of Texas health and science center in San Antonio. He's a retired captain of the Special Forces in the Army and he's just recently gotten his PhD. That was almost a year ago.

Camille and Greg don't have any children. She is the assistant to the head of the department of English at the College of Australia in Kuwait and she's a candidate for a PhD. Her husband works for mainframe computers and he's had several jobs in Kuwait. **Dr. Disney:** You must be so proud of your children and grandchildren and it's a testament to you and your role as a mother.

Tempe Anne Oehler: Oh, well thank you. All of our children got a Master's degree and all of them paid for their own Master's degree, so that was really an accomplishment. Education has been a big thing.

Dr. Disney: It's clear that education has been important to you and that working has been important to you. The discipline and values have been important to you. I want to ask you about another concept or word and how you may define it. What does motherhood mean to you?

Tempe Anne Oehler: I told you that I always wanted to be a mother when I was growing up, but to me, it's a sacred trust and as I said previously, each child was a gift of God. It's a very important role and I feel that the mother sets the model, so to speak, of how the children are going to be and to do. Boy, it is a full time job. You are a cool, you're a chauffeur, you're a nurse, you're a planner, you're a manager; everything that involves your children's lives, you do that thing. It is very important. I never considered it a sacrifice that I didn't do something else; that was not problem for me. Being a mother was the first, most important thing in my life.

Dr. Disney: I really appreciate that you talked through many of the jobs you had and then you talked through how you were able to stop doing some of those jobs so you could be a full-time mother from the three months old second born to the middle school age of the last born. A lot of women and mothers, I think, struggle with that issue of balance. All the work their doing, all of the roles you just so eloquently described of being a mother and

the work outside the home, doing volunteerism, working in their church, having to work to have two salaries. Talk a little bit about how you were able to balance and then how younger women today, like young women like your daughters, are about to balance those things.

Tempe Anne Oehler: It was difficult for me when I was manager and director of the news bureau because that's when I had to stop – when the second child was three months old, but the others were when you were a schoolteacher, you could match your hours to your children. That worked out very well. I did a lot of volunteer activities and Fred would babysit so I could go do those things. Of course, he had his activities too, but I'd be the babysitter while he was doing them. But he supported me in doing those things. I just think that young women today have a terrible challenge; I don't see how they have the time to do a full-time profession or career and be a full-time mother, too. Most of those years, I was at home for my children when they came home from school and mothers who work 9 to 5 don't have that luxury. They also don't have the luxury of going to their children's activities. The Girl Scout movement started to slow down when women started working because there weren't enough volunteer mothers to be scout leaders. It's an amazing challenge to young women today, or mothers of any age who are trying to balance a career and work at the same time.

Dr. Disney: You mentioned your husband helping out when you left for evening activities. It seems to me in conducting all of these interviews across the state with mothers of the year and committee members that having a supportive partner is one of the most important ways women can balance that work inside the home and outside the home. Do you agree with that?

Tempe Anne Oehler: Absolutely. We didn't have babysitters that much back when our children were small – they became the babysitters! We just didn't have babysitters that much and it was an economic thing, too, because we were always saving money for their education. But absolutely, I could not have done it if my husband hadn't been there to help. He said that I got the South Carolina Mother of the Year title was that I could not have done it without him and then the children told me I got it because of them. There is just always somebody around to put you in your place and make you humble.

Dr. Disney: That's a good segue to my next question, which is: how did it feel to be named the 1990 South Carolina Mother of the Year?

Tempe Anne Oehler: I was so thrilled. I didn't know what to do. I just couldn't believe it! This was going on when I think I was writing my part of the application, Hurricane Hugo was going on. During Hurricane Hugo, I was a CNN representative for Myrtle Beach. A young lady across the street had worked from CNN for a couple of years and she called me and told me that a crew couldn't get here and the hurricane might hit here and if I would speak for them. I told her I'd be happy to. Five minutes before the broadcast, they called me to do a voice test and they would call and ask me to tell them what is going on so I could tell them when the lights went off, how high I thought the wind was, and things like that. At twelve o'clock, I looked out my upstairs window and I saw two young men heading to the beach with surfboards to get that wonderful surf with this terrible hurricane going on. Later, I was out at Coastal Carolina University making a talk about the Ocean Forest Hotel with several others and one of my former students said, "Mrs. Oehler, that was me going down your street," and I said, "Andrew, had I know it was you, I would've gone out there, gotten you, and pulled you to safety," because he'd

survived and he was in college then. But that was exciting to be the word person and then they finally told me they wouldn't need to call me anymore because it had hit and they told me it hit in McLaurinville. I had no clue what was going on and I didn't have a bell of electricity. I didn't have a radio at that time. My CNN neighbor came down and asked me what I'd like her to bring. I told her I needed a radio and some ice.

Dr. Disney: Tell us a little about your experience that year as an award winner, the year of service, the governor's mansion, the statehouse, and all that stuff.

Tempe Anne Oehler: It was just wonderful from beginning to end. They had an interview down at Firsty Presbyterian Church fellowship hall and only one interviewer showed up because one of my local prominent students who I taught myself was getting out of jail that day. But he really got the word out as far as the television interview was concerned and the newspaper published was wonderful. Every four or five years, they hold the convention in New York City and that was the year for the convention. John McMillan, who I think was on the staff of Governor Campbell that year, made arrangements for me and Fred to have a room at the Waldorf Astoria, which was wonderful. They told us to pack snack because our meals might be kind of irregular. Let me tell you, you haven't lived until you've eaten Vienna sausages and crackers at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City, and did you know that place has 37 kitchens? Can you believe that? We had the Westpointe Cadets escort us at the formal dinner, we had a lot of good activities to attend. I went to Sak's Fifth Avenue for the first time. It was just like a fairy tale story for me.

I got to meet all the other mothers too. When I came back, I went all over South Carolina talking about being the South Carolina Mother of the Year. I went to Orangeburg and spoke there to a group of mothers who were homeschooling their children and that was really special. The South Carolina Mother of the Year from Orangeburg had invited me to come and I know her husband was a doctor, so Fred and I went for that and that was really nice. I spoke to several churches here in Myrtle Beach about the program. When I was in the Sun Fun parade a friend of my husband's made his convertible available to me and I rode down the boulevard, sitting on the back, where it says "South Carolina Mother of the Year" so that was exciting. I got so many letters of congratulations from friends of the children who I hadn't heard from in years and friends I hadn't heard from in years. It gave me, maybe a new self-confidence and I wanted to aspire to be the best mother then that I could be after this experience. But it was just a wonderful experience. I ran across a card from our son the other day that said, "Mom, have a wonderful time at the Waldorf. Love, Fritz," and he had sent a bouquet of flowers for it. One of my friends sent two orchids and I already had two orchids from the Mother of the Year committee so I just won all four of them.

Dr. Disney: That's wonderful. You deserve it. Congratulations again on a wonderful award and certainly well deserved. With four children, all of the jobs you had – you've contributed a lot to society and to your family.

Tempe Anne Oehler: The Lord has really blessed me and I've had such wonderful experiences in life. For about 30 years, I was on the Board of Trustees for the South Carolina Hall of Fame and for most of those years, I moderated a student forum on the induction of the inductees. We had a deceased inductee and a contemporary inductee and we had high school students from all over Horry County to come and I would speak to them about the contemporary inductee and the contemporary inductee would speak to the

students. We'd give the kids a mic and they could ask questions. I got to meet so many wonderful people in that work and in that field. We started having those forums and I thought, we didn't have heroes back then. I thought, here are all of these men and women who are heroes; these kids need heroes, so why don't we bring in the school kids? So that's what we did. I had worked with forums in college, too, so that format was very familiar to me. That has been an exciting part of my life. I served for 30 years on the Horry County board of architecture review; that's the preservation of history in Horry County and I really enjoyed that.

Dr. Disney: You have done so many activities. You've mentioned so many things in terms of employment, civic, giving back, church. Are there any other activities you want to mention that you haven't yet mentioned?

Tempe Anne Oehler: I belong to about nine historical organizations. I belong to the national trust of historic preservation and I'm a graduate of their preservation leadership training program; I went to Asheville one summer for that. I belong to the Colonial Dames of the Seventeenth Century and because of that I belong to the Colonial Dames of South Carolina and in my local chapter, which is in Florence, I was the state historian for the Colonial Dames at one point. Fred and I belong to the South Carolina Historical Society. I belong to the Horry County historical society and I served on that board; I was secretary when we wrote the charter for the Horry County historical society and that just thrilled me to death to be a part of that. I just love history – all of my family did. My mother loved history and my mother loved politics. Her daddy had served in the legislature of North Carolina. My daddy's family was all teachers and historians. I just really loved it and it was kind of just in my veins. I volunteered for all kinds of things. I was a constant, compulsive volunteer.

Dr. Disney: Do you think women's work and women's roles as mothers are adequately recognized by society?

Tempe Anne Oehler: By no means. Men, mainly, don't recognize the value of motherhood and all of the work women put into being wives and mothers. I never will forget – we went to one of my husband's army reunions in Southern Pines, North Carolina. One man we met was eating by himself there. His wife had died the preceding year and he said he never realized how much she did and I thought, that's not good! Our son I trained like our girls did to do anything there was around the house. I tried to pair them off together to do their chores; so then they each had a week to do something. Our son says he makes the best potato salad in the world, but none of us have ever tasted it. But I don't think women get the recognition that they ought to. If they're a career woman or professional woman or a mother and bear children, I don't think they get the recognition for that either.

Dr. Disney: Let me ask you this question: What does feminism mean to you?

Tempe Anna Oehler: Feminism, to me, means people getting up and really speaking loudly about being feminists and that has never been a problem for me. My father was very broad-minded and I guess my mother was a feminist even though I never thought of it that way, but she was a college educated woman. My mother was free to do what she wanted to do and I was free to do what I wanted to do to the best of my ability. Then my husband, his mother was a college graduate and a teacher and she was a feminist in her own way, too. She did what she wanted to do and she did a lot of things. She took piano and art and a lot of things after she was married. Fred never put any parameters on me

from doing what I wanted to do. I always wanted to fight for the right and for the underdog; for what was right, I always tried to stand up for that. I haven't always done what I could do, but I have tried and I have always done what I wanted to do. I've tried to teach my daughters that, too. Poor Fred and Fritz, they were surrounded by four power women.

Dr. Disney: I'm the youngest of three daughters and we always say the same about my dad.

Tempe Anne Oehler: I had one grandmother, the mother of my doctor granddaddy, and she was a pistol. She married her husband and they moved to the state of Tennessee and got a share of land. They were only married six years and he died in Tennessee and she had two little boys to rear. So they moved back to North Carolina and she became the postmaster in Warrington, North Carolina. The fact that her father was a judge had no impact on that job, I'm sure. She even turned down the general who came to inspect the post office one day because she didn't think he had the proper credentials and she wouldn't let him behind the counter. Grandma Green would send money from her to my grandmother, who was her son's wife. She'd sew the money into the hem of her skirt, put her on the train, and send her back with some money. She was just a very innovative lady and was way ahead of her time. She has some very innovative daughters and granddaughters and great granddaughters.

Dr. Disney: Would you consider yourself a feminist?

Tempe Anne Oehler: Well, I never considered myself a feminist, but Ashby Ward, who I loved dearly, him and his wife, he was the executive director of the chamber of commerce here and taught our Sunday school class. One day we got on the subject of feminists and I said, "I'm not a feminist," and Ashby said, "Oh, Tempe, you are the greatest feminist I've ever seen." So somehow it oozed out, but I didn't realize it.

Dr. Disney: I think hearing you talk about generation of powerful women in your family who are innovators, who were not curtailed from their freedom and their choices, and wanting equality for your son and daughters inside and outside the home. You sure sound like a feminist to me!

Tempe Anne Oehler: Well the men were powerful, too! We have doctors and lawyers and preachers and teachers and men who served in government. They let their wives have freedom, too. It wasn't just the women all by their selves, fighting for that role, subtly or however.

Dr. Disney: Absolutely. I have one son and I imagine that parents who have sons and daughters would want them to have the same opportunities to have choices, whatever those choices might be, so that's one other way to measure.

Tempe Anne Oehler: Absolutely. I always told my children that they could be whatever they wanted to be, as long as it was honest. As long as it was honest work, they had the opportunity to go higher if they wanted to. All three of our daughters are power women. Teann is in her profession. Cindy is in her profession in the civil service and she says it is very competitive and it's a hard world to live in. But she's lived in it and thrived in it and Teann lives in her world and has thrived in it. Camille has because she is in a Kuwait university. It is an Australian university, but it is in a Kuwaiti setting. When she first went to Kuwait, she taught their Sky Watchers, who are like our special forces, and no woman had ever had that position before.

Dr. Disney: It sounds like you have raised your children well and to thrive in male dominated spheres.

Tempe Anne Oehler: I give the credit to the Lord because I couldn't have done it without him right by my side.

Dr. Disney: That's beautiful. Do you have any questions for us?

Tempe Anne Oehler: Yes! I think you have answer part of it, but I wanted to know what you will do with the video.

Dr. Disney: It is our goal to transcribe these interviews and put the videos available online so you can go to Winthrop University and then click on the Louise Pettus Archives and within the archives, there is a South Carolina Mother of the Year award archives and oral history project. We are going to have each woman's name that we interviewed so you can click and see your interview, you can watch the videos of the other mothers and committee members. When it's all said and done, we'll have about thirty interviews, including mothers of the year and committee members.

Tempe Anne Oehler: That's wonderful! The committee members have been so wonderful throughout the time I was first nominated and I still hear from Peggy Kenny; she calls me once in a while. I was hearing from Ann Edwards until Jim died.

Dr. Disney: This has been an amazing treat for me and such an honor to hear from all of these amazing women. We want this to be an intergenerational conversation, so younger women and women at Winthrop University and men can learn about the history of the great mothers of the year and the great women in the state of South Carolina. We cannot thank you enough for participating in this project.

Tempe Anne Oehler: It is my honor to participate and I was so honored to be chose as the mother of the year. At one of our South Carolina Hall of Fame meetings, the governor, his wife, and Ann Edwards were there, I got up and said the last time I saw them was when they were nominating me to be the South Carolina Mother of the Year. There were just so many wonderful people. There were almost none, that I can think of, that were not top notch people. The lord has just blessed me to be able to meet and learn from these world famous people. It's just wonderful.

Dr. Disney: What a set of experiences! Your life is a model for what younger women can learn from and try to emulate. Motherhood first, but weaving in all of these other things – commitment to education, hard work – it's just been an honor to sit with you. Do you have any final thoughts or advice you want to leave our young women with?

Tempe Anne Oehler: I always said that I thought the school system got corrupted when they took the Lord's prayer out of it and I know there's a lot of opposition from people who don't want the Lord's prayer in the school system. Starting the day with the Pledge of Allegiance and the Lord's Prayer set the tone for the day and I always felt that was a good way for students and young people to start the day. I wish we could change that. I see some swinging back, but that could happen.

Dr. Disney: If there's one theme I've seen, it's faith and family that run through all of these interviews. Faith, family and feminism – that's sort of an interesting mix.

Tempe Anne Oehler: The troubles facing young women today, I'd like to add this, and the problems facing them today are equal pay for equal work; I don't think women get equal pay for equal work and I think that should be instituted. Domestic violence breaks my heart and I'm glad to see South Carolina moving towards more penalties for that. It's so bad for us to be at the bottom of the totem pole and South Carolina having the most

women killed by domestic violence. That really concerns me and upsets me. I think proper child care for the children while the mothers are working is an issue and I applaud the companies that have child care facilities in the work atmosphere for the mothers to be able to work and have their children nearby; I think that's a wonderful thing.

Dr. Disney: I'm so glad you brought us back to that because I intended to ask you what are the most important issues facing women today. You just touched on three of the most important – equal pay, domestic violence, and childcare. Are there any other issues you'd like to speak about?

Tempe Anne Oehler: Healthcare is a tremendous issue and because I'm a geriatric, it is a tremendous issue for me, too. As I'm watching what's happening, I can see it being a tremendous issue and challenge for young people and middle-aged people and for everybody. I know when we visited Germany; I noticed there weren't any homeless people any where. I commented on that and I was told that the Germans don't let their people become homeless; they have healthcare for them and they have a place for them to live. I thought that was wonderful. I've been to Seattle, Washington and every other step is a homeless person and I think Seattle has the largest homeless population in the world. Healthcare and taking care of our citizens is an immensely important problem. The international situation – oh my goodness. The Middle East and all of the horrible things that happen there and having to send our soldiers over there, men and women. This is a tremendous problem that we're going to have to deal with for a long time. It worries me. From an economic standpoint, what'll happen is what is happening in Greece right now. They're about to get themselves shored up for a while. But now when a country goes bankrupt, it could be the whole world system because we are so closely interwoven and intertwined in our economic survival and participation.

Dr. Disney: Well said. This woman has a domestic and international expertise! Thank you so much, Tempe Oehler. It has been an honor to meet you and interview you and we really appreciate you welcoming us into your home.