7-15-2015

Interview with Elsie Porth Shealy

Elsie Porth Shealy
SC Mother of the Year

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Dr. Disney: Good afternoon.
Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Yes, good afternoon to you too.
Dr. Disney: My name is Dr. Jennifer Leigh Disney and I am honored to be here with Elsie Shealy, the 1988 Winner of the South Carolina Mother of the Year Award.
Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Thank you, I am honored that you are here too. I am very pleased.
Dr. Disney: Thank you. Thank you for having us into your home. We appreciate it. Let’s start by asking you when and where you were born and raised.
Mrs. Elsie Shealy: That’s easy. Alright, first the where is in Lexington. I was born in Lexington, right here. And I was raised right here. Lexington, Lexington, Lexington. And when? Let me see, I was born August 16, 1925.
Dr. Disney: Wow. That’s wonderful. So you’re ninety years old?
Mrs. Elsie Shealy: I will be just in a–
Dr. Disney: Ninety, you’ll turn ninety on August 16. Wonderful, happy early birthday.
Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Thank you.
Dr. Disney: Tell us about your childhood.
Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Oh my goodness. I grew up, my daddy was a farmer, nobody had been to college in my family. I mean, college was something way off as far as we were concerned because we were farmers and nobody, we didn’t go to college. They considered if they went to high school, they got a good education. I mean, I’m just telling it like it was, that was the way the fielding was back then. So I did not take college preparatory courses, which I probably should have, but I didn’t anyway. I didn’t because I didn’t know I was going to college. And you know how I happened to go?
Dr. Disney: How?
Mrs. Elsie Shealy: I guess the school principal or the superintendent must have gotten behind this and he must have had somebody from Columbia College come out to the farm where I was to encourage me to go there, to go to college. Now, let me tell you. Where she got there, I had on, I know she was dressed fancy, just classy, I had on overalls, now I don’t mean jeans, I mean overalls, ugly overalls, I know she thought, “Why did they send me out here? We don’t want her.” I just know she had to think that because I just looked like the worst country hick she’d ever seen. But I didn’t know she was coming. And reason I was dressed like that, I didn’t stay dressed like that, we were setting out tomato plants where you plant them, dig your hole, put your tomato in there, and I was the baby of the family so they didn’t let me do much and I took advantage of that, but somebody would dig a hole and I’d stick the tomato plant down in there and I’d stick the dirt in and then cover it up. So you can imagine how dirty we were. And that’s why when she came out there all fancy as you can imagine, I bet she thought, “I was supposed to be coming to get somebody to go to Columbia College, but I’m not sure we want her.” I know they just had to think that, but she was nice. Anyway, they offered me a scholarship. In fact, a double scholarship, I had a double scholarship.
Dr. Disney: You must have been a very good student in high school.
Mrs. Elsie Shealy: I was. I’m not gonna say I wasn’t, I was. In fact, I made a B instead of an A. I kind of felt like that was a failing grade, so I was a good student. I don’t know what happened to me in all those years since, because they must have gotten all of the good stuff out of my head because it doesn’t seem to be around anymore.

Dr. Disney: I don’t think so. You said you were the baby, how many older brothers and sisters did you have?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Four. I have to stop and think. Alright, wait a minute. So there were five, I was the youngest of five, so how many did I have, I had four. I gave the right answer, I knew how many I had, but I wasn’t sure I gave the right answer, you asked it a different way.

Dr. Disney: Exactly. You did it beautifully. Is there anything else from your childhood that you would like to share. About your mom, your dad, your four brothers and sisters, anything else you want to share about growing up in Lexington?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Well I was going to tell you but I don’t know whether this is the time, you said from my childhood and growing up and everything. When I was young, I was trying to think here what I did. Ok, I went from door to door selling encyclopedias and not many people would do that. I got way up and people said, “How’d you ever get this good of a job way up here?” I said, “By doing things that most people wouldn’t have done.” And that’s exactly how I did get it. Knocking on strange doors selling encyclopedias.

Dr. Disney: Did you sell encyclopedias before college or after college? Or during college? Was it at Columbia College or after?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: It was before.

Unknown Guest: You went to college first and then you became a teacher and then you sold Worldbook.

Dr. Disney: Oh, well that’s a wonderful experience. Why don’t you tell us anything more you want to share about Columbia College, what was that like?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Columbia College, oh I loved Columbia College.

Unknown Guest: Tell her about that time you and some students were out from Columbia College. You and some students were out, off, from Columbia College and you had to get a ride back and who you had to get a ride back from.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Oh. That’s interesting, I’d forgotten all about that. So Columbia College was, well anyways, we went there. I’m trying to think now how to tell it, this is kind of funny.

Unknown Guest: I think you were out past curfew.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: The bus came to Columbia College and picked up girls and took them to that, whatever it was Methodist, we didn’t want to go there. So we went on the bus, but we got out and we were standing on the street corner and we were waiting and, I don’t remember, three or four of us girls, we were waiting and after a little bit, a car drove up and it was a limousine. It had a chauffeur in it and the person in there said, “Are you girls from Columbia College?” We said, “Yes.” He said, “You want a ride? It’s beginning to rain a little bit.” You know who it was, it was the Governor. That’s who that was, that was the Governor. And he said, “Well we can’t have you standing out here in the rain, c’mon and get in.” Well let me tell you, Columbia College then had a rule, it was a girls’ school, you could not ride in a car with a man without a chaperone, that was the rule. Well hell, we forgot all about that rule, that was the Governor. We got in that car and we rode and the bus carrying the girls, the other bus that had the rest of them
back to college, was sitting there when we went on in and we just waved at them as we went on in. But let me tell you, we got restricted to the chapels. Well, they said, “We cut it in half, the restriction. Because you self-reported even if it was in a boastful way.” That’s what they said. So we were restricted to the chapels for maybe a week, two weeks, something like that. But that was the most fun we had at Columbia College, restricted to the chapels.

Dr. Disney: Wow, not that many people get a pickup limousine with the Governor.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Well let me tell you, the Governor got word that, I’ll tell you how he got word. I had a, you can have work scholarships and I had more than one scholarship, partly honor, partly work, and one was a telethon, I manned a telethon I did that and got a little bit of money from that for tuition. We were poor, my daddy was a farmer so you know, we didn’t have extra money so we had that, I got to listen in because we had the phones that you could listen in on. I heard this because we took our phone down, the Governor called the Dean of Women at Columbia College and said, Mrs. Sutherland was her name, and said, “Please do not restrict them for riding home with me because I gave them a ride.” You know what she said to the Governor? She said, “You run the state of South Carolina and I’ll run Columbia College.” And I know she did, because we were eavesdropping on the phone when we heard her say that, but that’s exactly what she told him. Well, that made him so mad that he got, he said he got the biggest box of chocolate candy he could find anywhere in town and had it sent to us so that was the most fun week we had in college.

Dr. Disney: What an amazing story, thank you for sharing that. That is awesome.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: It’s kind of a different story, isn’t it?

Dr. Disney: It is. It’s the first time I’ve ever heard anything like it. It’s a great story. Did you go to Columbia College to become a school teacher? Did you become a school teacher?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: I was trying to think. I always knew I would sort of like to be a school teacher, but I’m telling you we were just poor ole farmers, I thought that was completely out of my possibilities, but I knew I would have loved to have been a middle school teacher, but I didn’t think it was possible.

Dr. Disney: Wow.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: But it turned out that it was possible and I did.

Dr. Disney: Do you remember, when you went to Columbia College, what were your goals? What were your dreams?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: What were my goals and dreams? I don’t know, I was just so glad to be in college, I don’t know that I had any much beyond that. But I think to go on and to be a teacher, I still wanted to be a teacher. Always in the back of my head, I was going to be a teacher if I could. I didn’t intend to go on and have any all kind of extra degrees or anything, because I don’t know, that just, a poor family of farmers didn’t know about all of those things.

Dr. Disney: How did you meet your husband?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: How did I meet him? You think that was a funny story. He came in my class when I was teaching. I mean, he got out of, he was between semesters for him and it was too late to go into the next, he had to go more and get more college, but he couldn’t, it was too late to get in for that semester so he had to wait to get into the next semester. So, he got permission from the school superintendent to sit in class to get his mind going right and here’s what he said that the superintendent told him, “You can do it, but you can’t wander in and out of class all like that.
So you’ve got to act like, even though you’re not getting credit for it, you’ve got to act like you’re a full-time student and do like that.” That’s what he told him he had to do. So anyway, to brush up, he came in my class to brush up and I was teaching and the funny thing is all those other students sitting there, he was good looking. I’m going to show you his picture up there, he’s on the wall up there, he’s the middle one, when we go out there, he’s the one in the middle.

Dr. Disney: Yes, he was handsome.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Oh, he was. And all the girls up there, all the girls that were like seniors, oh lord they thought he was something.

Dr. Disney: Where were you teaching when your husband came into the class?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Batesburg-Leesville, when I had him come in there. Yeah, I think that was where it was then.

Dr. Disney: Wow. So how did you two end up getting married?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: He asked me and I said yes. I think, I’m not real sure he did ask me, come to think about it. Yeah, I know he did. He asked me and I said yes. Oh listen, he asked me more than once, I didn’t say yes the first time he asked me because he told me a long time after that he made up his mind the first day he came in that classroom that I was going to be his wife, but I didn’t know it.

Dr. Disney: Wow. It was love at first sight for him.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Yeah, and I tell you what, he treated me like a queen every day. I mean, he really, I couldn’t have asked for anybody that would have been better for me, better to me, or anything. So I was fortunate, very fortunate that our lives came together like they did.

Dr. Disney: What did your husband do for a living?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: I don’t remember him doing anything. What did he do for a living, I have to think back really.

Unknown Guest: He was a state senator and a lawyer. He delivered papers when y’all first got married.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: I can’t tell what she’s saying.

Dr. Disney: When you first got married, he delivered papers.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Oh. Oh yeah he did. He didn’t make much money, he never did earn a lot of money, but he made up for it in a lot of other ways.

Dr. Disney: It sounds like he went on to become an attorney and to become a state senator? Your husband did all that? Wow, you must have helped him along the way to do all of that.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Well, I probably did, I mean not really. I mean, I don’t know if I get any of the credit for it. I mean, I don’t want to get any of the credit for it is what I’m trying to say. But I’m sure I helped him somewhere.

Dr. Disney: Tell us about the birth of your children. We have a beautiful photo over here.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: I have to stop and think. I don’t know how to tell you about the birth of my children.

Unknown Guest: Why don’t you tell them about when Sherry was born, how Ryan had to get some collect to get out of the hospital?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Oh, yeah. What was that? We didn’t have enough money, you know, when she was born, we didn’t have enough money to get her out of the hospital. We couldn’t get her until we paid, so what did we do? He went and collected early to his good customers on his paper
route. They knew he was good by then, so he collected early to have enough money to get the baby out of the hospital.

**Dr. Disney:** Wow, what a story. Was that your first born daughter?

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Yeah, Sherry. And she’s turned out really good, all of them have. All of my children have.

**Dr. Disney:** That’s wonderful. Do you want to tell us about any more of your children, it looks like maybe you could hold that up, you want to hold that up and talk us through your children?

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Yes sirree, I’d love to do that. I’m glad you asked me.

**Dr. Disney:** Most mothers love to talk about their children, so I want to give you a chance.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Okay, now let me see here. This is Sherry, she’s the oldest and lord, there’s a lot of good stuff I could tell about Sherry.

**Unknown Guest:** Well, when Sherry and Granddad, when she served in the House of Representatives, father and daughter. Tell them about that.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Yeah. She served in the House of Representatives, Sherry.

**Unknown Guest:** Tell them about how old she was and what’d she do.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** She was the youngest legislator in America.

**Dr. Disney:** Wow, what an honor, you must be so proud! And a father-daughter team serving together in the state legislator? That is amazing.

**Unknown Guest:** Didn’t somebody dare her while she was at Columbia College to do it? Somebody at Columbia College dared her to run for the House of Representatives and she did it.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** It was something like that. I don’t know if it was from Columbia College or what, but somebody kind of dared her to do it and she got it.

**Dr. Disney:** Somebody dared her to do it and she was successful. Wow. What a great story. What an accomplishment for a young woman, the youngest legislator in the country. How young was she, do you remember?

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** When she was first elected, she was a teenager still I think.

**Unknown Guest:** Somewhere between that nineteen and twenty-one years old range. I’m not sure what year in college she was, but it was in that age frame.

**Dr. Disney:** That’s amazing. Do you want to tell us about any other of your amazing children?

**Unknown Guest:** The next one is Rod.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Okay, that’s Rod. Now let me see. I don’t know where to start with him. Help me. Start me and I’ll carry it.

**Unknown Guest:** What did he do for a living?

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Rod, what did he do for a living? I don’t remember anything.

**Unknown Guest:** He ran people’s campaigns.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Oh yeah, that’s right. That’s what he did. He ran people’s campaigns, that’s what he did. He ran their campaigns when people ran for stuff. He was excellent at that. I mean, he almost never had somebody that didn’t win. He ran their campaign and they were willing to pay him good money too, because of his record.

**Unknown Guest:** He ran Sherry’s campaign also.

**Dr. Disney:** I was going to ask that. So Rod helped Sherry with her successful campaign run.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Sherry, oh my lord, she was so successful. Tell me, think, kind of fill me in. Tell me about Sherry, I can’t think of what to tell about her.
Unknown Guest: She did the House of Representatives, she was a state senator, and she was a worker’s comp judge for twelve years.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Workman’s comp, yeah, that’s right.

Dr. Disney: Wow, you must be so proud.

Unknown Guest: The next one is Christy, Christy is the next.

[Christy enters the room.]

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Christy has been a dancer all her life and I can remember the first time, you probably don’t know what I’m going to tell.

Christy: Yes I do because she does remember this stuff.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: She was a little thing and I was so proud of her, you know, she was going to dance on the stage, she was up on that stage, she turned around, when she was doing the dance for me, I was behind her and she was looking at me back there but that’s because we were learning it in time. Well then she did that whole dance turned around with her back to the audience because of the way we had done it when she was rehearsing.

Christy: And I’m the dance teacher and I have been for thirty-eight years and I’ll never live that down. She loves to tell that story.

Dr. Disney: It’s a beautiful mother-daughter story though, it’s how you learned it so I love that.

Christy: Exactly. She taught my first dance routine.

Dr. Disney: I love that. So she was your first dance teacher.

Christy: Yeah, and she was always the coach. She really didn’t know how to dance but her last words to me before I always went on stage were the ones that were the most meaningful and they were, “Put some oomf into it.” So it was really important.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: And you know what? She really put it in it too. She was a good one for me to have, she made me look good because she did it so well.

Christy: Well I think it’s backwards, I think she made me look good.

Dr. Disney: Oh, that’s beautiful. Okay, who’s next in our story?

Unknown Guest: Sean, at the bottom right.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Sean, okay. He’s my son, he has a couple of patents in his name, things he has had patented so he was really smart in school, really smart in school.

Christy: And he’s still really smart.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: He still is smart?

Christy: Yeah, he is but we call him computer geek.

Dr. Disney: Wow, you must be really proud of him too.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Well, I don’t know how smart he still is, I reckon he is.

Christy: Oh you should tell him about the Iron Man. He’s not just a computer geek.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Tell ‘em.

Christy: In Switzerland last summer, he completed an Iron Man triathlon.

Dr. Disney: Oh my goodness, wow.

Christy: Yeah, he’s really, and his son started, how old is Spencer?

Unknown Guest: Um, like seven or eight years old.

Christy: Yeah, he started doing triathlons or something like that too.

Dr. Disney: Wow, that’s amazing.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Okay, who haven’t we done?
**Unknown Guest:** Laurie at the top left.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Laurie? She can almost come in here and do it by herself, but I don’t know where she is.

**Christy:** She’s in Boston.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** She’s in Boston? Oh my goodness, what’s she doing in Boston?

**Christy:** It’s some kind of autism related, there’s some camps going on.

**Dr. Disney:**

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** I have, one of her children has autism (Ryan) and they do everything they can with him and to him, you know, and she just says she’s thankful because it’s really expensive, the things they have to do and she says she’s glad they could afford it and I was glad they could too. So they could give him whatever it took, but it kind of keeps her on her toes.

**Christy:** Well, more than that though because what she does is travels the country, she’s an advocate, she works for AutismSpeaks and she’s trying to get all the states to get insurance to help cover it because it’s terribly expensive and so she gave up her law practice. Well she didn’t actually have a practice—

**Unknown Guest:** She gave up the Department of Justice.

**Christy:** Yeah, that’s right. She gave up being a lawyer to work for AutismSpeaks.

**Dr. Disney:** Wow. Your children have been so impressive, have accomplished so much, you must be so proud.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** I am. I’m about to tear up now.

**Dr. Disney:** It’s a beautiful thing.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** I’m very fortunate because I look at what some parents have to go through with their children who take on drugs and do everything, you don’t know what they’ll do, but I’ve never had to worry about that and isn’t that great.

**Dr. Disney:** That’s wonderful, that’s a testament to you as a mother and to your husband as a father and what you two must have done raising this family.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Well and I’m glad you mentioned the father ‘cause that’s a big help too.

**Dr. Disney:** Was he a help to you, growing up, raising these kids?

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Was he a help to me? Yeah, oh yeah. He was a big help.

**Christy:** They needed to be Mother of the Year together, they did, I’m not kidding.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** What?

**Christy:** I said you and Dad should have been Mother of the Year together.

**Dr. Disney:** Most mothers like you, especially, if they’re working inside the home raising children, working outside the home making a living, it’s very hard to balance work inside the home and work outside the home and I’m sure you had difficulty like all mothers balancing, and often having a good partner, a good husband or father that helps the balance, right?

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** It helps. It helps an awful lot because I couldn’t have done anything close to what I’d done if I had not had.

**Christy:** Has she told you told you about her speeches that she used to make?

**Dr. Disney:** We’ve gone through childhood, marriage, birth of the children, so now I do want to ask you to talk about your work, your activities, your work inside the home, your work outside the home, employment, community, anything you want to share about your life activities and your daughter and granddaughter can chime in anything that you leave out.
Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Cause I don’t do anything like as much as I used to do because of my age, I’m sure, I think, because I was very active growing up in the church, you know, doing any and everything. I made up my mind sometime back that you just can’t do it all, you just can’t do it all, and I was not going to try to do it all and neglect the family.

Unknown Guest: So with that right there, she started off with World Book, after she taught, she started off with World Book going door to door and worked her way all the way up to the regional senior vice president of the company.

Christy: She was the highest ranking in Field Enterprises, which was World Book Encyclopedia. That’s why I wanted her to get off on this, let me chime in. because you were talking about him helping, you just can’t imagine that before there was women’s lib, they led the way and not on purpose, but just because that’s what they did. My dad was an assistant attorney general for the state of South Carolina. She got to where they wanted her to move to Tennessee for a promotion. He gave up his job so that she could move and take that promotion and became a housemother for the younger children. Yeah, so I’m serious, they needed to be Mother of the Year together because he supported her so much. The speeches that she traveled around the country making on behalf of Field Enterprises were about working mothers and how to balance and the name of her speech was “Roots & Wings,” that you could give your children both roots and wings and they were experts at that.

Dr. Disney: Wow, they did lead the way.

Christy: They did. And the reason they never had trouble out of their children was because they were such good examples. We never remember them fusing ever, which is rare, we didn’t know it then. I know now. Y’all never fused.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: We didn’t.

Christy: No, they didn’t raise their voices to each other.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: We didn’t fuse but one of them said that’s because Daddy wouldn’t fuse, that might have been why, we didn’t fuse, we just didn’t fuse.

Christy: It has a lot to do with it because he was very laidback, but you were too.

Dr. Disney: Your dad and your mom were each so accomplished in their professional work and your dad gave up, what job did he give him?

Christy: He was a lawyer, he was the Assistant Attorney General for the state of South Carolina.

Dr. Disney: The Assistant Attorney General for the state of South Carolina when your mother was promoted to become?

Christy: Some kind of regional manager over the Southeast.

Dr. Disney: So she could be the senior vice president of what company?

Christy: It was Field Enterprises, the World Book Encyclopedia door to door and worked her way up.

Dr. Disney: Worked her way up to the top. Wow, and you said she was the highest ranking woman in the company. That is amazing. You paved the way for all of us to be successful.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Well, I think you’re right, I think I did in a way.

Christy: But she wasn’t intending to, it was just what she loved doing. She was really good at it and motivating people and that’s how she got where she got. And Dad could see how much she loved.
Dr. Disney: And your mother and father, you and your husband, you gave speeches about how to be a working mother so you really emulated, you modeled how to balance work and family and how to teach other women and men how to do it.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Well, that’s what I tried to do cause that’s what you have to. You almost have to if they’re going to turn out, right? And I tried to bring them in. You know, when I had to work and work hard outside some, I tried to let them know what we were striving for. You know what I mean? What, with World Book, when we were, I’ll let y’all know why I was working that hard outside.

Dr. Disney: Right, so you shared with them so your kids knew why you were doing what you were doing. That’s beautiful.

Christy: She was doing it so that she could get all five of us piano lessons and dance lessons, we knew that. She wasn’t a milk and cookies type of mother, but she gave us a lot more and nobody ever felt neglected, like I think some mothers feel guilty when they’re working. But none of us ever felt neglected at all.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: None of you ever what?

Christy: Felt neglected. We never felt neglected.

Dr. Disney: That’s beautiful. They always felt loved, they knew what they were doing and why you were doing it.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Oh yeah, exactly. They did. They entered in to it. In fact, one of them, let me tell you, when I put her to bed that night, I can’t remember which one of y’all this was, John Scott was the man who was the manager out west where I was here and we liked to meet each other, I mean, we liked to. We didn’t–

Christy: She means competitively.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: You know the funny thing? Those of us with World Book, you would not believe how we did. We worked like cats and dogs to beat the other person, but we told them in advance what we were planning to do, that was crazy, wasn’t it? So they could have beat us. At that time, I had just put one of them to bed and she said, I tucked her in and can’t remember which one this was, she said, “Oh Mom, did you hit your goal?” I said, “Yeah, I got such and such.” She said, “Oh good, how did John Scott do?” Now that was the guy out west, was that you?

Christy: No, that was Laurie.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: “How did John Scott do?” I said, “Oh he did such and such.” I said, “Oh we beat him.” She said, “Oh, I am so happy.” And she turned over and went to sleep.

Dr. Disney: That’s a great story.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: But see, that’s what I mean about bringing them into it. They didn’t object if I was out working and I did, I worked at night some time. I’d be out there still calling on people at maybe 8:30 or 9 o’clock at night if I thought it was alright to because that’s when you catch people that have money.

Dr. Disney: That’s right.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: I mean, I tried to work when the working people, when I did my work with them trying to sell the encyclopedias when the money would be home, so I had to work at night.

Christy: But when she got on up, I think that was when the older two were younger. When she got up in the company, I remember her being home because I remember I’d look for her car to be
home around 5 or 6 o’clock whenever every day. So she was home when I was there in the evening most of the time.

**Dr. Disney:** You’re a good model for me. I have a five year old, so you’re helping to teach me how I can bring him in to my work and try to do it all, what successful mothers are able to do.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Take time to read to him.

**Dr. Disney:** Every night I do, yes ma’am.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** This little poem, oh I love this little poem. ‘You may have tangible wealth untold, caskets of jewels and coffers of gold, but richer than I you can never be, ‘cause I had a mother who read to me.’

**Dr. Disney:** Oh, that beautiful.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Isn’t that a great little poem?

**Dr. Disney:** I’ve never heard that before. Thank you for sharing that.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Well I didn’t write it.

**Dr. Disney:** But you remembered it, you said it.

**Christy:** That’s part of her speeches. She used to use that in her speeches.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** But isn’t that great? Because it’s the truth. You may be richer than me, but you won’t be richer because I had a mother who read to me. Because that’s more important than all those other old things.

**Christy:** Yeah, after she, well I don’t know if she told you this, after she finished being the manager of the company or whatever, the company then flew her around to make speeches, did we go over that?

**Dr. Disney:** You can tell us, you talked about speeches and how working mothers were able to balance and do all the things that she was doing, I mean, that’s amazing.

**Christy:** But the company actually flew her around the world. I remember specifically they flew her and Dad to Spain and to Australia to speak and you know, it was a very high paying forty-five minute speech.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Yeah, I was a professional speaker.

**Christy:** And that was what the topic was.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** And I enjoyed that.

**Dr. Disney:** Did you enjoy traveling to other countries to give your speeches?

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Yeah. Some of them. You’d be surprised how they treated me when I would come over there like when I went to somewhere in England.

**Christy:** You went to Spain and you went to Australia, Ireland, yeah.

**Dr. Disney:** Ireland?

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Well I was going to say though, Ireland wasn’t the one I was talking about for this. I got out and where we stopped and then they went on, the ones that carried me over there, went on somewhere and they came back and this isn’t making sense now, but I’m trying to think through it, it’s not right. When they came back to pick me up, let me see here, what am I trying to say?

**Dr. Disney:** They treated you very well it sounds like.

**Mrs. Elsie Shealy:** Now you’re wearing me out of my brain.

**Christy:** Now what story are we telling now? I can tell help you but I don’t know.
Unknown Guest: Are you talking about the limousine where they picked you up and treated you like royalty? They took you and Ryan in a limousine.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: One of them in Ireland, oh they did over there for sure. Oh one of them, let me see, when I went somewhere in England. It’s not unusual for them to have somebody to come pick you up from the airport, they had me my own chauffeur the whole time I was there. They said, “He’s at your disposal with the car and him. He’ll take you anywhere you want to go here in England, anywhere you want to go.”

Dr. Disney: Wow, that’s great.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Isn’t that wonderful?

Dr. Disney: Yes.

Christy: I tried to learn to speak like that, but I couldn’t.

Dr. Disney: I know I’m wearing you out, so I just have a few more questions. What does motherhood mean to you?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: What does motherhood mean to me? It means that I’m setting an example with everything and I do and I’d better be sure I’m setting the kind of example that I want them to use. I mean, that’s sort of it. You know what, I had read the questions you might be asking, I hadn’t even thought about what I was going to say, it just came out of my head somehow.

Dr. Disney: It’s a beautiful answer. Setting an example in everything you do so that your children, your grandchildren, I don’t even know if you have great grands.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Oh yeah.

Unknown Guest: Six of them.

Dr. Disney: Six great grands, how many grandchildren?

Unknown Guest: Fifteen.

Dr. Disney: Fifteen? So you’re setting an example through the generations so that everybody knows how to be, how to behave, how to be happy. I mean, you’ve just been such a role model.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: I am so glad you said how to be happy ‘cause I got something I used to use in my talks about that. Some people plan when they’re gonna be happy, ‘I’m gonna be so happy when summer comes,’ ‘I’m gonna be so happy when I graduate,’ ‘I’m gonna be so happy,’ what’s with being happy now? I mean, I thought, don’t plan when to be happy. I’ve made speeches and said don’t plan when you’re gonna be happy sometime in the future, be happy now.

Dr. Disney: That is great advice. Wow.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Yeah, it is good advice because it’s something we all ought to follow. I mean, be happy.

Dr. Disney: That’s right. How happy were you, how did you feel when you were named the South Carolina Mother of the Year in 1988? How did that feel to you?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: How do you imagine it feels? It feels great, but it feels like I hope that they’ll never look in the kitchen. Because I was thinking if somebody looked in my kitchen the way it looks sometimes, it doesn’t look bad because Tiffany helps.

Christy: Oh your kitchen if fine. Your closet, I wouldn’t want anybody to look in your closet.

Dr. Disney: I wouldn’t want anybody to look in my kitchen or my closet, to be honest. Lucky it wasn’t part of your application, was it?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: No. But anyway.
Dr. Disney: What was that year like, that you served as Mother of the Year? I hear there was a tea at the Governor’s Mansion and the State House, the reception of event, tell us about that. Anything you remember about that year that you were named Mother of the Year. And if anybody else wants to chime in about what you remember it was like. Anything you did, any activities.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Oh gee, I don’t think I can especially, I did them but right now, I did a lot of activities and I haven’t thought about that enough to remember what I did.

Christy: I remember meeting the Governor and the tea.

Dr. Disney: Of course, your mom had already met the Governor in the limousine bringing her home during Columbia College.

Christy: That was a different governor.

Dr. Disney: Different governor, but still. She’d already traveled in the highest levels of power in the state government so maybe it was not as big a deal going to the next governor’s tea.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: It probably wasn’t as a big of a deal as it would have been way back before that. But it still was a big deal, yes a big deal. I mean I didn’t take it for granted in anyway that I was going to get anything like that. I never did.

Dr. Disney: I bet you met some other amazing Mothers of the Year and some of the women on the selection committee. Do you want to say anything about the other women you met during this experience?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Oh, they’ve been wonderful. They’ve been wonderful but most of them, I haven’t met with any of them in the real recent times but there were a lot of them that I enjoyed getting to know better. I knew their names and knew their faces somewhat, but I got to know them better and it was good.

Dr. Disney: That’s wonderful. Let me ask you this, when you hear the word ‘feminism’ –

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: The word ‘feminism’?

Dr. Disney: What does that word mean to you, ‘feminism’?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: That’s a dirty word.

Dr. Disney: Tell me why, what makes it a dirty word.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: It seems like we’re setting apart the women from the men and I think most women can do whatever’s to be do, maybe not climbing up on houses, they could anyways, but they won’t and all that stuff. Feminism.

Unknown Guest: Why don’t you tell her what you said last night about it?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: What did I say, because I was trying to think. Feminism. No, because we were talking about that.

Unknown Guest: You said that you felt like women should have the same opportunities as men in the workplace, that women should get paid the same in the work place if they can do the job.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Oh yeah, I thought all that is good to say, for sure. I think all of that ought to be brought out. But I think now it’s better than it used to be. I think great strides have been made in that. Don’t you think, or am I blind about it?

Dr. Disney: Well I think you, by rising to the highest-ranking woman in your company, you have helped set the stage for equal opportunities, equal pay for equal work. I think your daughter being in the state legislature when there are very few women today who serve in the South Carolina state legislature, she was a trailblazer. So I have you to thank, we all, women of future
generations that will watch this video have you to thank for helping to create those equal opportunities.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Well I’ll accept the thanks, but I don’t think I deserve the thanks.

Christy: Well you do, but she would never have categorized herself as a feminist, even though that was the life they lived. It was just the way.

Dr. Disney: That’s where I was going, yeah. Do you consider yourself a feminist? You may not consider yourself a feminist, but in my opinion, someone who believes in equal rights for women and men who fought and lived the way that you lived, you might just be a feminist. Have you ever thought about that?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Well, maybe so. I don’t know.

Christy: Well she is, she just never meant to be.

Dr. Disney: And how about you two, as daughter and granddaughter, do you associate, do you think of yourselves as feminists?

Christy: Not really, no. We just didn’t talk about that, we didn’t talk about it in our house, they just did.

Dr. Disney: Right, you grew up in house where that was taken for granted, equal opportunities for women and men.

Christy: Absolutely, my dad was a big believer in treating everybody equal. We did get that sort of lecture, but it wasn’t a political statement, it was just the way it should be.

Dr. Disney: Right, it was a moral thing. That’s beautiful.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Didn’t I raise some good kids?

Dr. Disney: Yes, you did.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: I guess of all the things that I’ve done, that’s the best.

Dr. Disney: That is the best.

Christy: Well you know, it’s a little ironic because she did raise us all to work be fairly successful and that’s why we’re not here today, but we learned from her, you’ve just got to work so it’s a little ironic that’s where everybody is today.

Dr. Disney: Well we visited many mothers and not many mothers have had a daughter and a granddaughter with them at the interview, so I think it’s a testament to the love in the family and the success and again to your model, your example that you set.

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Well, thank you. And I do think the example is important because they look at that no matter, you know. A lot of mommas tell them what they ought to tell them, but they don’t set the example of it, and you’ve got to set the example.

Dr. Disney: Do you have any questions for us or anything else you’d like to say or share?

Mrs. Elsie Shealy: I always think about the questions after the people leave, I think about ‘oops, this would have been a good question.’ Can y’all think of any questions? I don’t know why I got teary eyed, because I’m not a sentimental person.

Dr. Disney: Well you got me teary-eyed and I am a sentimental person, so I know why I did. But this has been an amazing interview and an amazing opportunity to get to meet you and meet your daughter and your granddaughter and this video is going to help future generations of men and women learn how to just be who they are. I would love it if we lived in world where everybody assumed equal opportunities and we didn’t have to talk about it anymore, it was just the moral thing to do, the right thing to do and the way to be. And you’ve modeled that.
Christy: They have, they really did.
Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Well thank you. And I’ll tell you what, I want y’all to come back sometime when you can come and get out there and get in the lake and swim around and not have to feel like you ought to.
Dr. Disney: Not feel like you have to work.
Mrs. Elsie Shealy: You’ve got to work, some of us have to work.
Dr. Disney: Next time we’ll come to play, instead of work. Thank you so much for your time today, we really appreciate it. And again, congratulations to Elsie Shealy, the 1988 winner of the South Carolina Mother of the Year Award, and her daughter and her granddaughter. Thank you all so much.
Mrs. Elsie Shealy: Thank you, thank you. I appreciate this very much.