

The challenges of home economics

By Daisy Webster

BIOGRAPHY

Daisy Webster (formerly Daisy de Jong) was born and educated in Manitoba, graduating in home economics in 1932. Lack of professional opportunity caused her to find experience for the next five years as a waitress, as a store clerk and as a worker in a seed company.

In 1937 she came to Nanaimo to begin her teaching career in B.C. schools. From there she went to Duncan, Saanich, Prince George and Vancouver. During the war she received a two-year Leave of absence to serve as a nutritionist in the Canadian Army. In 1953 she joined the staff of the Home Economics Branch of the Department of Education as a provincial inspector of Home Economics.

In 1955 she married Arnold Webster, a secondary school principal who was at that time the Leader of the Opposition (CCF) in Victoria. Daisy became active as a volunteer worker for the CCF and NDP and served several years on the executive of the Vancouver Council of Women. When her husband went to Ottawa as an MP in the 1960s, she accompanied him and interested herself in the federal level of politics. She also had the opportunity of seeing United Nations in action. She returned to university in 1966 to study for a Master of Arts degree in Adult Education. She graduated from UBC in 1968.

In 1970 she wrote a book, Growth of the NDP in B.C. 1900-1970 -- 81 Political Biographies. She was a successful candidate in the 1972 provincial election, becoming an MLA for Vancouver South.

Home economics is a broad field, so broad, in fact, that the public rarely grasps its importance. You, as teachers, are expected to embrace all aspects of it related to the home, to industry and to health services. Here are only a few of the areas in which you are involved and for which you are made responsible.

CLOTHING selection and construction, as well as other home sewing. As clothing prices rise it becomes more and more important for young people to become aware of wise selection and to be able to turn a hand to making their own clothes and later to be able to sew for their children. Related to home sewing are also the many facets of home decorating.

CONSUMER PROBLEMS, such as budgeting and marketing, which include the need to understand credit buying and its hazards.

FAMILY RELATIONS and child care cannot be over-emphasized in importance in a time when our culture and our values are changing so rapidly. Population mobility, the rise of the women's liberation movement, and easier divorce legislation have all increased the need for a new look at the family in general, and at day-care centers in particular.

NUTRITION, which envelops the whole area of food and its preparation. Careful planning of meals to provide the highest nutritional standards possible for the family cannot be over-emphasized.

Home economists, during my years in B.C., have been faced with many challenges in this area. During the Depression we taught our students, both in day school and night school how to live within meager budgets, and how to plan and prepare well balanced, inexpensive meals.

During wartime, we put on special courses for housewives to help them cope with food shortages and rations. Many home economists, also, entered the armed services, where their skills were utilized to provide a good nutritional base for our servicemen and women.

Since the war, advanced technology has taken over rapidly. New foods have come on the market -- freeze-dried products, instant breakfasts, synthetic products and TV meals. Living habits have changed. More women are working outside the home; people have become highly mobile and are eating out more. Interest has developed in organic foods, and health food stores have sprung up all over the country. New diets of all kinds are advocated and old ones revived. But with all the changes, are we eating better? Somehow, the Canada Food Rules got lost in the shuffle.

From a recent issue of the magazine *Nutrition Today*, we have learned that deficiency diseases are reappearing. We assumed we had conquered them in the 1930s. However, a report by two leading Canadian nutritionists, Drs. Campbell and Sabry, showed that in 1967, in three hospitals in Montreal and Toronto alone, there were more than 400 cases of rickets serious enough to be hospitalized. Many of them were sufficiently severe to cause permanent deformity, night blindness, softening of the cornea or xerophthalmia. Many of the cases also

showed evidence of no storage of Vitamin A in the liver. These conditions were also found in other parts of Canada, including Vancouver.

We are finding, too, that many of our senior citizens, who do not have enough income, are predisposed to under-nutrition and poor health. They are no longer assured of the essentials of milk, meat, cereal grain, fruit and vegetables. With the inflated prices of food products, very frequently the tea-and-toast syndrome becomes the established pattern for the elderly. Recently, Dr. J.C. Alexander, a Guelph University nutritionist, linked poor eating habits to such diseases as hypertension, diabetes, circulatory diseases, gastro-intestinal problems and other defects.

These are just some of the challenges of the nutritionists today. One answer, of course, is the need for more trained home economists in our schools and colleges, in our health clinics, in our senior citizen homes and extended care units.

Dennis Cocke, Minister of Health, in making a complete survey of his department, is finding that far more people go to hospital than need to, and often stay longer than necessary. For this reason he is planning to extend the Homemaker Service in British Columbia. For many, what is required is a bit of help at home. This may make it possible for a mother with a new baby to come home earlier. Service from a homemaker can also help a mother who is overwhelmed by her chores, and save her from a nervous breakdown. A homemaker can keep a family of children together in a time of crisis, such as the loss of one or both parents, or in a marriage break-up. The homemaker can also be invaluable in keeping an elderly couple in their own home when one becomes chronically ill but does not want to go to hospital. Or the homemaker can give comfort to a single shut-in by preparing a meal or visiting to offset loneliness.

Much of the training of homemakers has until now been the responsibility of home economics teachers called in to teach particular aspects of the course. With a renewed interest in the expansion of homemaker service, students with a background in home economics would be outstanding material as trainees.

This brings me to the crux of the situation. To have a healthier community, we require people who are informed and educated as to the value of good nutrition and eating habits, as knowledgeable consumers, and about the importance of happy family relationships. The home economist, whether she be a teacher or dietitian, can be one of the key persons in sorting out the problems and doing the educating.

There is, at present, a critical shortage of home economics teachers in British Columbia. According to the 1971-1972 Public Schools Report, home economics departments are now located in 272 public schools. There are 747 teachers of home economics, an increase of 76 over the preceding year. As a result of retirements, transfers to other positions and the opening of new classrooms, 100 teachers will be needed this year. However, only about 23 will graduate from UBC this spring and not necessarily all of them will enter the labor market. This means advertising for teachers in the other provinces or importing them from abroad. Some may have a Bachelor of Education with a major in Home Economics, and many others may be granted letters of permission.

It is a constant headache to search for teachers to fill all the vacancies. Not once during the past 20 years has the School of Home Economics at UBC been able to supply near to one-half of the teachers required in our public schools.

One thing that appears to discourage more girls from entering home economics for the purpose of teaching later is the heavy pre-requisite of chemistry and mathematics. While these subjects may be essential for those students specializing in dietetics or going in for research in foods or textiles, they are not nearly so necessary for those planning to teach in our secondary schools. It is much more advantageous to them to have a background of secondary school home economics. By no means do I suggest that the standards should be lowered, but I do feel that adjustments should be made in streaming of certain courses.

I have approached Mrs. Dailly, Minister of Education, to ask her Commission on Education to look into the matter. To be able to supply the needed teachers for industrial education, special courses at BCIT and the Vocational Institutes have been undertaken by journeymen to qualify them in the variety of trades they are required to teach, and in methods courses in teaching relevant to their specialized subject matter.

In home economics, the present qualifications demand a five-year course, that includes teacher training, or a B.Ed. (five years) with a major in Home Economics. As teacher training for this specialized field should be relevant to the peculiar needs of the subject, difficulty is found in getting home economics graduates to commit themselves to the present teacher training program.

I urge you to challenge your best students to enter the teaching profession as home economists. It is an exciting and rewarding career. I have found it so, and I hope you are all getting a great deal of satisfaction out of it too.