

**“IT’S BECAUSE OF HER SUCCESS THE REST OF THE HIVE SUCCEEDS”:
THE AMERICAN HONEY QUEEN PROGRAM AND WOMEN’S ADVOCACY
IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY APICULTURE**

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History**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the foundational decades of the American Beekeeping Federation’s American Honey Queen Program from the 1950s through the 1990s. While women have played vital roles in American apiculture, their achievements are often absent from the histories of the industry. Similarly, rural and agricultural women’s experiences are frequently overlooked or misinterpreted in studies of twentieth-century feminism. The following project serves as a step towards restoring the unique voices of women in the beekeeping industry to these historiographical conversations. This work centers around oral history interviews with six women who participated in the American Honey Queen Program in the latter half of the twentieth century. The interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom in October 2020, and bolster Honey Queen stories recovered from newspapers, agricultural journals, and beekeeping association newsletters. These narrators’ memories reveal how women navigated gendered perceptions of pageantry and femininity to shape and push the boundaries of women’s authority in the beekeeping industry. Ultimately, the history of the American Honey Queen Program illuminates the ingenuity and agency of women in apiculture and demonstrates the fluidity of agricultural feminisms in the late twentieth century.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of College of Arts and Sciences, have examined a thesis titled “‘It’s Because of Her Success the Rest of the Hive Succeeds’: The American Honey Queen Program and Women’s Advocacy in Twentieth-Century Apiculture,” presented by Kathleen Foster, a candidate for the Master of Arts Degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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Introduction

In August 1996, nineteen-year-old Louann Hausner stood before a crowd at the Ohio Honey Festival wearing a crown and beard made of 10,000 live bees. A young woman donning a “bee beard,” she noted, “really captivates people’s attention. And you have the opportunity for another person to share – now that they have everyone’s ear – to talk more about the value that honey bees play in our society.”¹ As the 1996 American Honey Princess, Hausner was one of the national faces of the beekeeping industry. Throughout her year-long tenure, she traveled across the United States to educate the public about honey products and beekeeping. Hausner spoke at fairs and conventions, in front of state representatives, and gave media interviews. At times, she experienced people reducing her role to pageantry tropes, assuming that “it’s just a figurehead, and this person doesn’t have knowledge of the beekeeping industry.” These stereotypes did not deter Hausner; on the contrary, they fueled her advocacy. “What’s so amazing,” she noted, “is when you capture their attention because you have the crown and the banner. You can cut through all the noise, capture attention, and then wow them with the information that you have about the industry.”²

Since 1959, the American Beekeeping Federation’s (ABF) American Honey Queen Program has elevated the voices and expertise of women in apiculture. Crowned Queens and Princesses are selected for their ability to represent and advocate for the beekeeping industry through an annual contest akin to an extended job interview. During the process, candidates are assessed on their knowledge of bees and beekeeping, as well as their marketing and public speaking abilities. The winners, the American Honey Queen and American Honey Princess, then

¹ Louann Hausner, oral history interview by Kathleen Foster, October 6, 2020, video recording, remote via Zoom, 22:13-22:26.

² Hausner interview, 14:35 -15:13.

serve for a year on behalf of the entire American apicultural industry by “educating people about bees and beekeeping, and advocating for the consumption of honey.”³

At first glance, it is tempting to analyze the Honey Queen Program as an agricultural or commodity pageant. In addition to the crown and sash, which participants must wear at all public events, participation requires that women adhere to other qualities associated with pageantry, like maintaining a “wholesome” presence.⁴ Scholars have shown that commodity-related pageants utilize such representations of ideal femininity to garner economic investment and recognition for their products and communities.⁵ This is in part true of the American Honey Queen Program; however, participants do not view themselves as simply pageant queens. Carol Bockenfeld, the 1991 Honey Princess, explained to a reporter that the program was not “a swimsuit and high heels thing [...] It’s much more in-depth. You do have a purpose.”⁶ Instead, they described their roles as Honey Queens and Princesses as public-facing authority figures and integral to the economic success and visibility of the beekeeping industry. Participants have always been required to have extensive knowledge about beekeeping and be able to impart information to a variety of audiences effectively. The emphasis on Honey Queens’ and Princesses’ apicultural expertise and their access to a position of authority in the industry is noteworthy and warrants a

³ “American Honey Queen Program: Purpose and Objectives,” American Beekeeping Federation, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://www.abfnet.org/page/queens>.

⁴ Eden Stiffman, “Meet the Queen Bees Building Buzz for the Honey Industry,” *Modern Farmer*, November 7, 2014, <https://modernfarmer.com/2014/11/queen-bees-honey-industrys-female-boosters/>.

⁵ Historian Blain Robert’s analysis of the Tobacco Queen competitions of the 1930s for example, depicts agricultural pageants as events that commoditized women’s bodies, serving as economic relief for rural communities in the Southeast. Roberts also demonstrates that pageantry offered women access to new personal freedoms and sexual power. Blain Roberts, “A New Cure for Brightleaf Tobacco: The Origins of the Tobacco Queen during the Great Depression,” *Southern Cultures* 12, no. 2 (2006): 30-52.

⁶ Bill White, “West Salem Woman Named National Honey Princess,” *La Crosse Tribune*. February 8, 1991, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/13B54BBF97C83DD8>.

more nuanced analysis. Examining the first four decades of the program from the 1950s through the 1990s provides a window into the shifting social and cultural backdrop of both women's experiences and agricultural life in the late twentieth century. Because the American Honey Queen Program has required women to balance perceptions of femininity and apicultural authority since its inception, studying the program—from the vantage point of its participants—offers a unique opportunity to explore how women have navigated agency in agricultural contexts.

Honey bees and the women who keep them are often absent from the narratives of twentieth-century American agriculture and feminism. Beekeeping is typically considered a niche industry, seen as separate from the cultivation of crops and livestock. Therefore, it is not surprising that the “ugly stepchild of agriculture,” as beekeeping has been called, is largely removed from the industry's history.⁷ While scholars have written accounts of beekeeping, apiarist Tammy Horn suggests that women's active participation in apiculture has been largely overlooked. Although women have been prolific in beekeeping for centuries, their roles have been featured as periphery to men rather than central figures in the industry.⁸

Similarly, rural and agricultural women's experiences have been relegated beyond the scope of “mainstream” feminism. This is particularly evident in the context of twentieth-century feminist movements, or “waves,” in which rural women are often depicted as passive or

⁷ Eleanor Andrews, “The Main Objection to Numerous Small Bee Keepers’: Biosecurity and the Professionalization of Beekeeping.” *Journal of Historical Geography* 67 (January): 84.

⁸ Kentucky State Apiarist Tammy Horn suggests that the omission of women in histories of beekeeping is similar to what scholar Carolyn Gerald called “zero images,” or the lack of good images of African Americans in children's books of the 1930s. This seems particularly applicable to studies of beekeeping and agriculture. Tammy Horn, *Beeconomy: What Women and Bees Can Teach Us about Local Trade and the Global Market* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), Location 209-210, Kindle Edition.

apolitical when compared to their urban counterparts.⁹ Historians have traditionally defined feminism in the late twentieth century by the political ambitions of the predominantly white, middle-class women who dominated these movements.¹⁰ Scholarship on rural womanhood and the performance of gender in rural communities has made strides in rectifying this narrow perspective, highlighting the need for a more fluid, complex definition of feminism.¹¹

The foundational decades of the American Honey Queen Program coincided with two critical postwar shifts: the women's liberation movement and the rise of agribusiness. Generally referred to as "Second Wave" feminism, this period is often perceived as urban and characterized by large-scale efforts to secure the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). However, historians Sara Egge and Jenny Barker Devine argue that exploring feminism through the lens of

⁹ Scholar Claire Goldberg Moses postulates that while the term "feminism" had been in use since the 1880s, it became commonly associated with women's rights movements in the United States during the 1970s. Members of the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s-1980s first reclaimed the term to establish a less radical label for their politics, recognizing that many American women would not associate themselves with the rhetoric of liberation. Employing "feminism" also connected their efforts with a historical tradition of "acceptable" women's activism, particularly the women's suffrage movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, commonly known as "First Wave" feminism. Claire Goldberg Moses, "'What's in a Name?': On Writing the History of Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2012), 766-767.

¹⁰ Historian Nancy C. Unger demonstrated a similar pattern in her evaluation of environmental histories of women. These studies tended to focus on the pursuits of white, middle-class, urban reformers of the Progressive Era, the 1880s through 1917. She expands the scholarship on women's environmental activism by contextualizing women's sex and gender-based environmental interactions within the confines of race, class and power. In doing so, she not only introduces narratives of a diverse group of women, but also depicts their environmental interactions as reflections of their personal agency. Nancy C. Unger, *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers: American Women in Environmental History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹¹ Barbara Pini, Berit Brandth, and Jo Little, "Introduction," In *Feminisms and Ruralities*, Barbara Pini, Berit Brandth, and Jo Little, eds, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 1-5. Jo Little, a British scholar of gender and geography, notes that recent discourse on rural feminism has built on foundational feminist scholar Judith Butler's ideas on gender performativity. The result has been a "dynamic study of constructions of masculinity, femininity, and their performance" (107). This focus on masculinity and femininity, Little notes, highlights "the power of socially accepted and embodied norms" that are "shown to be spatially as well as socially constructed" (111). Ultimately, these studies identified that the performance of rural masculinity is typically associated with extreme rural landscapes, while femininity is associated with idyllic rurality. Understanding gender performance in rural and agricultural settings is vital as it illuminates the gendered activism of rural women often rendered invisible by conventional definitions of feminism, such as Honey Queens' use of gendered pageantry symbolism to garner attention for apiculture. Jo Little, "The Development of Feminist Perspectives in Rural Gender Studies," In *Feminisms and Ruralities*, Barbara Pini, Berit Brandth, and Jo Little, eds, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 107-118.

“waves” is too limiting to capture rural and farm women’s experiences adequately. For example, while they may have often rejected the rhetoric of national issues like the ERA, rural women favored family, agricultural, and community-based activism.¹² As Barker Devine notes in her work, this era ushered a new form of women’s activism in rural communities. Prior to 1945, rural women’s activism was largely focused on issues that did not challenge male-dominated political systems, like public health, education, and maternal and infant care. Following the Second World War, however, demographic shifts and decline in rural communities due to the rise of large-scale, technology-heavy agribusinesses spurred “agrarian feminisms and a politics of dependence,” which allowed “women entrance into public spaces where they could act and speak with authority on behalf of agriculture.” Barker Divine posits that Midwestern farm women’s activism was not just a response to marginalization “but rather part of a larger process wherein women imagined new forms of community and redefined their proper roles in ways that conformed to understandings of gendered work in rural society.”¹³ Through women’s groups and auxiliaries, rural women actively claimed spaces within male-dominated organizations. Furthermore, they used their skills as family matriarchs, educators, and social coordinators to bolster agricultural policies that benefitted local farms and ultimately uplifted their lives.¹⁴ These nuanced explorations of feminism, gender, and rurality provide a framework to analyze how women in agriculture embraced feminine roles in their activism as a tool for personal empowerment, and to support their families, businesses, and communities.

¹² Sara Egge and Jenny Barker Devine, “Putting the Community First” Feminism and Rural American Women’s Activism in the Twentieth Century,” In *Feminisms and Ruralities*, Barbara Pini, Berit Brandth, and Jo Little, eds. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 15, 29-30.

¹³ Jenny Barker Devine, *On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women's Activism Since 1945*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013), 3-4.

¹⁴ Egge and Barker Devine, “Putting the Community First” and Barker Devine, *On Behalf of the Family Farm*.

The history of the American Honey Queen Program connects these historiographical conversations and highlights women's experiences in the history of late-twentieth-century beekeeping. This project opens a window into the fluidity of agricultural women's feminism by exploring how participants viewed and navigated the markedly gendered nature of this apicultural endeavor. The American Honey Queen Program was never just a pageant contest; instead, it was a business competition that used feminine ideals of pageantry as a tool to amplify the knowledge, expertise, and passion of young women in beekeeping. Ultimately, the histories of the American Honey Queen Program participants demonstrate that consciously employing pageantry tropes offered women an opportunity to find personal empowerment and claim a space as important figures within the apicultural industry.

This project would not have been possible without the use of oral history methodology. I conducted six interviews with former state and national Honey Queens, Princesses, and Program Chairs, encompassing stories from the 1950s through the 1990s. The women whose voices narrate this history – Anna Kettlewell, Louann Hausner, Patty Sundberg, Karen Peterson, Virginia Walker, and Beverly Gibbs Breckenridge Versfelt – demonstrate the variety of women's roles and experiences during the foundational decades of the American Honey Queen Program. Although some stories were recovered from journals, newspaper articles, and local beekeeping association newsletters, men often authored or mediated these sources. Alternatively, our oral history conversations offered a distinctly female perspective of the Honey Queen experience. Even though they participated in hundreds of interviews that highlighted them as industry advocates, the oral history process enabled my narrators to reflect on what that period of

their lives meant to them, a perspective that is often missing in their polished media interviews or male-authored descriptions of the program.¹⁵

Many women featured in this oral history anthology came from rural communities and had previous agricultural and apicultural experience. Some were from or married into beekeeping families, while others had no connection to beekeeping prior to becoming local Honey Queens. Their paths to the Honey Queen Program also varied, from the pursuit of winning college scholarships to fulfilling life-long dreams of becoming Honey Queens. Regardless of their background, each used the American Honey Queen Program platform for personal and professional growth, and claimed a space in an industry that often overlooked women's contributions. Collectively, their stories demonstrate that even though women navigated gendered ideals of pageantry and femininity, their participation in the American Honey Queen Program ultimately led them to shape and push the boundaries of women's authority in the industry.

Women in Commercial Beekeeping After WWII

Women have been involved in American apiculture since the introduction of the honey bee to the North American continent in the seventeenth century. By the late 1800s, women engaged in all parts of apiculture, including daily hive maintenance, writing for beekeeping journals, and inventing new beekeeping technologies.¹⁶ Women also bolstered the apicultural workforce during the First World War, as federally-supported markets for honey and beeswax

¹⁵ Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, *Women's Words : The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, (New York: Routledge, 1991).

¹⁶ Horn, *Beeconomy*, Location 2399-3130.

offered an opportunity for women to enter the profession. In the following decades, however, economic downturns in the industry and the need for women's labor elsewhere in the wartime workforce during the Second World War led to fewer prospects for women in beekeeping.¹⁷ While the industrialization of agriculture in the postwar years did provide opportunities for specialization and growth in commercial beekeeping, cultural perceptions of acceptable women's work required many to adjust their roles within the industry.¹⁸

During the Second World War, national sugar rationing efforts and federal requests to increase honey production boosted apiculture in the United States. This was short-lived. The end of the war signaled the end of sugar rationing, resulting in a steep drop in honey prices in the postwar period.¹⁹ In 1950, Congress implemented the Honey Support Program to stabilize fluctuating market prices. This government loan encouraged small farmers to keep bees for honey production and incentivized beekeepers to stay in business to ensure commercial crop pollination.²⁰ In addition, research on plant pollination in the 1950s laid the foundation for diversification in commercial beekeeping. Crop producers across the nation, particularly California almond growers, increasingly required honey bees to pollinate their produce. Their need to rent and acquire hives enabled beekeepers to specialize in commercial pollination,

¹⁷ Horn, *Beeconomy*, Location 3145, 3239, 3376.

¹⁸ The rise of large-scale farming in the "industrial countryside" led to an increased demand for pollination services, which became a major source of income for beekeepers. Tammy Horn, *Bees in America: How the Honey Bee Shaped a Nation*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2005), 199-200.

¹⁹ Harry A. Sullivan, "Honey Price Support Program," in *Beekeeping in the United States*, ed. U.S. Department of Agriculture, revised October 1980, 182, https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=KiEiAQAAMAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA2&ots=Zkfiq7aN6s&sig=OkIp_h98_ouTdelGwNZmlppq2qs#v=onepage&q&f=false.

²⁰ Horn, *Bees in America*, 203.

queen-rearing, and package production, offering new ways to expand beekeeping businesses beyond honey sales.²¹

New struggles accompanied the benefits beekeepers experienced in the latter half of the twentieth century. In addition to falling honey prices, beekeepers also contended with large-scale bee deaths due to commercial farmers' unregulated use of pesticides. Pests such as mites and hive beetles, and heightened occurrences of bacterial diseases like American and European foulbrood, also resulted in increased bee fatalities.²²

The social and cultural changes of the 1950s presented particular challenges for women in beekeeping. Kentucky State Apiarist Tammy Horn posits that “socialization and discrimination have shaped perceptions about women’s opportunities in agriculture generally, and specifically apiculture.” Socially-enforced notions of appropriate “women’s work” and salary discrimination, for example, still affect women’s ability to participate in apiculture.²³ As the country faced transformation during the postwar years, Americans attempted to redefine “women’s work” as in the home rather than the bee yard.²⁴ As historian Elaine Tyler May explores in her study of families in the Cold War era, many postwar Americans embraced ideals of domesticity, which echoed the ideology of “containment,” the notion that a potential danger would not be a threat if it could be contained within a defined sphere of influence. This desire for

²¹ Horn, *Bees in America*, 205.

²² Horn, *Bees in America*, 201.

²³ Horn, *Beeconomy*, Location 177-178.

²⁴ Studies of the association between rural masculinity and agricultural labor from the 1990s and early 2000s, such as those by European scholars Berit Brandth and Lise Saugeres, have suggested that “the particular relationship that is believed to exist between (male) farmers and agricultural tasks serves to distance women from farming.” It is plausible that these gendered notions of labor are also applicable to apicultural work in the United States, and may have been heightened by the industrialization of agriculture and cultural flux that characterized the postwar era. Little, “The Development of Feminist Perspectives in Rural Gender Studies,” 112.

domestic containment drove Americans to strive for fulfillment in their own sphere of authority—the home—to combat perceived social and political threats to their stability.²⁵ These changes pressured women to focus on their domestic responsibilities, and forced many women to adapt their roles in beekeeping to comply with acceptable notions of womanhood. Despite these challenges, women forged innovative—albeit gendered—ways to engage in the industry while balancing their cultural obligations, such as handling administrative aspects of their family bee businesses.²⁶ Within this particular national apicultural and cultural context, Henry’s Honey Farm sponsored the first Honey Queen contest.

A Marketing Idea for the Beekeeping Industry

The idea for the American Honey Queen Program began with Esther Piechowski, the wife of a commercial beekeeper from Redgranite, Wisconsin. Esther grew up in Milwaukee, and in 1938 married Henry Piechowski, who had been a beekeeper since the age of seventeen.²⁷ Ironically, the couple wed “only to find out that [Esther] was allergic to honey bee stings.”²⁸

²⁵ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 25.

²⁶ Tammy Horn uses the story of Roberta Glatz, a New York honey producer, to exemplify the challenges women faced while balancing beekeeping and cultural obligations. Glatz began beekeeping with her father during the Second World War and was interested in becoming a biologist, but instead became a teacher because, “in those days, women were either teachers or nurses or retail clerks” (3392). She returned to beekeeping in 1958, juggling a family, teaching career, and tending to two hives. She eventually amassed 125 hives to support her teaching income. Beekeeping enabled her to work from home around her busy schedule, though, Glatz recalled “April and May were tough times because of swarming and teaching responsibilities, but everything worked out. Sometimes the dishes didn’t get done” (3406). She was eventually able to pursue her interests in bee research upon her retirement in the 1990s. Horn, *Beeconomy*, Location 3146, 3392-3406.

²⁷ Anna Kettlewell, oral history interview by Kathleen Foster, October 2, 2020, video recording, remote via Zoom, 3:42-3:51 and 5:05-5:08, and Obituary of Henry E. Piechowski, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* via Legacy.com, January 18, 2008, <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/jsonline/obituary.aspx?n=henry-e-piechowski&pid=101454749>.

²⁸ Kettlewell interview, 5:09-5:18.

Despite Esther's allergy, the Piechowskis grew Henry's Honey Farm from two hives into a large beekeeping business. They eventually amassed 3,000 to 5,000 hives, used for honey production and transporting bees across the country for crop pollination.²⁹ The pair were also heavily involved in their county and state beekeeping associations in Wisconsin, and the American Beekeeping Federation. In our oral history interview, Anna Kettlewell, the 1999 American Honey Queen and the Piechowski's granddaughter, shared that her grandmother supported the family business while raising twelve children. This experience, in addition to navigating her bee-sting allergy, she suggested, was essential in the development of the Honey Queen Program.

Kettlewell recalled:

[Esther] actually had to find a way to help wherever she could. So, her part of the business was more helping with marketing of products and doing things like that. From her ideas stem this idea of 'what if we had a spokesperson for the industry?' [...] that became the Wisconsin Honey Queen eventually, and then morphed into state programs around the country, and ultimately, the American Honey Queen Program.³⁰

While some women, like Piechowski, could not help maintaining the beehives directly, they were integral to sustaining their family businesses. It is notable that Virginia Walker (née Cox), the 1979 Idaho Honey Queen, also described her mother as the marketing force behind Cox's Honey, their family's beekeeping business. Betty Cox had eleven children, and like Esther Piechowski, happened to be allergic to bee stings. Walker noted that her mother came up with the business' advertising slogans, and recalled that when honey sales declined in the 1960s, she developed a honey gift box, which remains a top seller for Cox's Honey today.³¹ Marketing and

²⁹ Tim Tucker, "Beekeeper of the Month: Henry's Honey Farm," *ABF E-Buzz*, September 2012, <https://www.abfnet.org/page/211/ABF-E-Buzz-September-2012.htm> and Interview, Anna Kettlewell, 4:12-4:28.

³⁰ Kettlewell interview, 5:19-5:46.

³¹ Virginia Walker, oral history interview by Kathleen Foster, October 24, 2020, video recording, remote via Zoom, 7:15-8:13.

promotion were common avenues for wives and mothers of the postwar period to participate in the public-facing aspects of commercial agriculture. In her exploration of Iowa farm women's activism in the latter half of the twentieth century, historian Jenny Barker Devine describes how women in farming families often translated their skills and status as homemakers into advertising and marketing roles in farming advocacy organizations.³² Similarly, matriarchs of beekeeping families like Piechowski and Cox, neither of whom attended school for business or marketing, likely drew upon their experience managing a household to support the businesses and industry that fed their families. Using her expertise and clever marketing ideas, Esther laid the foundation for a promotional model that would ultimately bring attention to both the beekeeping industry and women's skills as purveyors of apicultural knowledge.

By the mid-1950s, Esther's vision for a national honey industry spokesperson began taking shape.³³ In 1955, fourteen young women, listed in the November issue of *Wisconsin Horticulture* as "4-H club workers," competed in the Waushara County Honey Queen Contest. Carol Ann Lehman was awarded the crown for her honey-based recipes and a poster showing the uses of honey.³⁴ Lehman, an eighteen-year-old student from a farming family in Berlin, Wisconsin, entered the competition on the encouragement of her 4-H club leaders, who were also

³² Barker Devine, *On Behalf of the Family Farm*.

³³ It is important to note that Piechowski's idea for a Queen pageant did not take place in a vacuum. Historian Blain Roberts notes that agricultural beauty pageants first became popular among agricultural trade boards in the 1930s as a tool for promoting their commodities. Agricultural pageants remained popular in the postwar years, often traveling thousands of miles on promotional tours. Esther and Henry Piechowski were likely familiar with these types of promotions, as well as the Miss America pageant. The 1950s have been described as the "golden years" of the Miss America pageant, due to its immense popularity at the time. Blain Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women: Race and Beauty in the Twentieth-Century South*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 129, 199, and 202.

³⁴ H.J. Rahmlow (ed.), "The Honey Queen Contest" *Wisconsin Horticulture*, vol. 46, no. 4 (November 1955): 124, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/WI/WI-idx?type=turn&id=WI.WIHortv46&entity=WI.WIHortv46.p0124&q1=honey%20queen>.

beekeepers.³⁵ Winning the contest thrust Lehman into the local limelight. As Queen, she appeared on various state and local radio and television programs to promote the culinary uses of honey, spoke with chambers of commerce, had lunch with the governor, was photographed for newspapers, and even led a parade.³⁶

Beekeepers soon realized the economic benefits of the program. The following year, the Wisconsin State Beekeeping Association adopted Lehman as their first state-wide honey spokesperson, signaling the program's expansion.³⁷ In 1956, Lehman appeared at the American Beekeeping Federation convention in Biloxi, Mississippi. As Henry Piechowski reported to *Wisconsin Horticulture*, Lehman made an impression on those in attendance and garnered interest in promoting Honey Queen contests at county fairs that season. He noted that “there [was] work to be done” on the Honey Queen contests, and that “unless someone [was] willing to follow it through, there [was] not much use of doing the job halfway.”³⁸ Esther Piechowski was willing to follow it through. According to her daughter, Mary Kettlewell, Esther presented her proposal to the American Beekeeping Federation, “highlighting the potential of the program, as

³⁵ “Things Start Buzzing for Stout Honey Queen,” *Leader Telegram*, January 22, 1956: 3, <https://newscomwc.newspapers.com/image/300547038/?terms=Carol%20Ann%20Lehman&pqsid=KHCw5dRxQct9mdNre8BJNw%3A20000%3A892777193&match=1>.

³⁶ This list, provided by Esther Piechowski to *Wisconsin Horticulture*, showed “what can be accomplished for honey promotion in this way.” H.J. Rahmlow (ed.), “How the Honey Queen Advertised Last Year,” *Wisconsin Horticulture*, vol. 46, no. 5, (January 1956): 158, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/WI/WI-idx?type=turn&id=WI.WIHortv46&entity=WI.WIHortv46.p0158&q1=honey%20queen>.

³⁷ H.J. Rahmlow, “Some Convention Highlights,” *Wisconsin Horticulture*, vol. 46, no. 4 (November 1955): 123, <https://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/WI/WI-idx?type=goto&id=WI.WIHortv46&isize=M&submit=Go+to+page&page=123>.

³⁸ H.J. Rahmlow (ed.) “Plans for the Honey Queen Program,” *Wisconsin Horticulture*, vol. 46, no. 7 (March 1956): 237, <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/WI/WI-idx?type=turn&id=WI.WIHortv46&entity=WI.WIHortv46.p0237&q1=honey%20queen>.

well as its relatively low cost, [and] the opportunities to go into venues and present marketing.”³⁹ Her platform was accepted, and in 1959, Kay Seidelman of Michigan was selected as the first American Honey Queen.

Esther Piechowski’s local contest grew into a robust national program that established a unique space for young women within the beekeeping industry.⁴⁰ For much of the 1960s and 1970s, Esther ran the day-to-day operations as the program manager, and organized the Queens’ and Princesses’ appearances.⁴¹ While Piechowski was instrumental in running the effort and even traveled across the country with participants, she did not work alone. In their survey of oral histories of rural women, historians Nancy Grey Osterud and Lu Ann Jones note that the formation of women’s informal networks within male-led organizations nurtured political and grassroots movements.⁴² Similar networks emerged in the early years of the American Honey Queen Program. The ABF’s Ladies Auxiliary supported the effort, a practice that mirrored other agricultural industries with similar queen programs.⁴³ Esther had also established a network of friends through her involvement in beekeeping associations, whose support made the national

³⁹ Yaschwartz (username), “Interview with Mary Kettlewell (daughter of Esther Piechowski),” Honey Queens: The royalty of the beekeeping industry in the United States, last modified November 15, 2012, <http://pages.vassar.edu/honeyqueens/admins/mary-kettlewell/>.

⁴⁰ The exact process of nationalization is unclear from available sources. It seems likely that the Program’s quick expansion into a national program was aided by the ABF’s status in the industry, Esther and Henry Piechowski’s connections throughout the beekeeping community, and the popularity of pageantry in the 1950s.

⁴¹ While Esther was involved in the Honey Queen Program Committee, initially, women were not allowed to assume leadership positions in the group. Anna Kettlewell noted that her grandmother was made program manager and not committee chair, as “only men were allowed to be committee chairs” at that time. Women were eventually allowed to chair the committee as rules changed in the following decades. Kettlewell Interview, 7:53-8:12.

⁴² Nancy Grey Osterud and Lu Ann Jones. "If I Must Say So Myself": Oral Histories of Rural Women," *The Oral History Review* 17, no. 2 (1989): 3.

⁴³ The Iowa Porkettes formed in 1964 as the women’s auxiliary to the Iowa Pork and Swine Producers Association. Their primary function was developing promotional opportunities for the pork industry, which included sponsoring county, district, and state Pork Queen contests. Devine, *On Behalf of the Family Farm*, 115.

program possible. Anna Kettlewell shared that Esther had a core friend group located across the country that facilitated travel arrangements, promoted representative visits, and provided chaperones to assist the young women during their visits.⁴⁴ Piechowski and her friends were also well-connected and civically engaged in other areas beyond beekeeping, including church groups and in politics. The women actively connected Queens and Princesses with state and national legislators, one even meeting President Richard Nixon.⁴⁵ By facilitating opportunities to interact with politicians and the public, this women’s network created a platform for Honey Queens and Princesses to advocate for the beekeeping industry. In doing so, they also shaped the nature of the program itself: The young women seeking to serve as Honey Queen would have to prove their ability to deliver messages to various audiences, ensuring that they were equipped to handle the demands of representing the industry on a national scale.

“All But a Full-Time Marketing Position”

Becoming an American Honey Queen or Princess was a rigorous process. The candidates were first required to serve for a year as their state’s Honey Queen before entering the national competition held at the annual American Beekeeping Federation conference.⁴⁶ In the early years of the national competition, some of the criteria under consideration of the contest judges included “beauty, poise, and activities.”⁴⁷ Anna Kettlewell described seeing traces of this part of

⁴⁴ Kettlewell interview, 8:24-8:50.

⁴⁵ Kettlewell interview, 9:28-10:06.

⁴⁶ In most states, participants were also expected to have served as a county-level Queen prior to their year as a state Honey Queen.

⁴⁷ “Kansas Title of Honey Queen to Beverly Gibbs,” *Kansas City Times*, September 13, 1965: 45. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A11FF2A92A519802A%40EANX-NB-159BD37323D5DAED%402439017-159AB8058B624027%4044-159AB8058B624027%40..>

the competition's past in program materials from the period. She recalled, "I would look back at old program books from the convention and sometimes they'd be saying, 'okay, this candidate is five-foot-four with green eyes.'"⁴⁸ While the judges of the 1960s did consider appearance in their decisions, the Honey Queen Program Committee encouraged them to focus on non-physical aspects of the women's performance.⁴⁹

The most important qualities of a prospective Honey Queen or Princess were her marketing abilities and professionalism. The central components of the competition, therefore, have remained unchanged: Contestants wrote an essay, underwent an interview process, performed a marketing presentation, and presented a scrapbook highlighting the activities they carried out during their year as a state Queen. Candidates were also judged on their professionalism and public speaking abilities over the course of several days at the conference. Virginia Walker, who competed in 1979, found the contest to be fun but grueling as she was asked complex questions about bees and beekeeping during the interview portion. She recalled, "I realized even though I grew up doing it [beekeeping], I didn't know a lot of the answers."

⁴⁸ Kettlewell interview, 10:23-10:36. Newspaper articles of the 1960s used similar language in describing Honey Queen activities. One described Beverly Gibbs as "a 5-foot, 5-inch music major – with blonde hair and brown eyes," while another referred to 1963 Queen Linda Andrews as a "pert brunette." "Local Girl Is Honey Queen of America," *Kansas City Times*. January 29, 1966, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A11FF2A92A519802A%40EANX-NB-159C7F53A7672999%402439155-159C69E022ED8444%4051-159C69E022ED8444%40>. Jaclyn Stern, "Honey Queen, Bees Go Together," *Kansas City Times*, June 26, 1963, <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A11FF2A92A519802A%40EANX-NB-15913299714CAD1A%402438207-159087B0E2823E8A%4034-159087B0E2823E8A%40>.

⁴⁹ The judges were chosen by the Honey Queen Program Committee. As Esther Piechowski's daughter, Mary Kettlewell, noted in a 2012 interview, "There are always three judges at each Honey Queen competition. Esther put a lot of effort into ensuring that someone from the outside (of the industry) was brought in with a media background (such as a reporter). The second is someone within the industry, and the third might be someone local. On a state and national level the judge will never come from the hometown of any of the participants, for the matter of objectivity." Yaschwartz (username), "Interview with Mary Kettlewell (daughter of Esther Piechowski)."

Walker explained that her struggle in the interview was not due to a lack of beekeeping knowledge, rather, she was not experienced in conveying that apicultural information to others.⁵⁰ For the “bright-eyed and intense” Honey Queen hopefuls, as one observer described in 1976, awaiting the judges’ final decision was “a deadly serious occasion.”⁵¹ The intensity of the selection process reflected the challenging work and expectations that awaited winning Queens and Princesses.

Participants had demanding work schedules during their tenure. Queens and Princesses were expected to travel to promotional events across the country while maintaining their own responsibilities, like attending college.⁵² Beverly Versfelt (née Gibbs), who served as the 1966 American Honey Queen, recalled her mother keeping a detailed itinerary of her activities that year. She not only documented the events she attended, but also the amount of time she spent talking with the public and the media about bees and honey. In total, Versfelt traveled 16,757 miles, spoke on the radio for 837 minutes, and appeared on television for 1,618 minutes.⁵³

This level of exposure positioned Queens and Princesses as industry experts, who were often the face of apicultural knowledge to a wide audience of consumers. As such, they were expected to quickly and accurately recall and share information at each engagement. Former participants described needing to be on their toes at all times, poised to answer questions on

⁵⁰ Walker interview, 20:07-20:31.

⁵¹ “ABF Convention,” *Ohio State Beekeepers’ Association News Digest* 13, no. 3 (April 11, 1976): 1, <https://www.ohiostatebeekeepers.org/wp-content/pdf/history/newsletters/1976.pdf>.

⁵² It is notable that, apart from a modest college scholarship, the Honey Queen and Princess roles were unpaid positions. Their travel was paid for through funds raised by the American Beekeeping Federation and local beekeeping associations. Today, the ABF hosts fundraising auctions at their annual convention, for which Louann Hausner serves as the volunteer auctioneer.

⁵³ Beverly Gibbs Breckenridge Versfelt, oral history interview by Kathleen Foster, October 27, 2020, video recording, remote via Zoom, 9:53-10:24.

various topics. However, the young women saw themselves as more than sources of information, as evidenced by their media interviews. For instance, in a 1996 Pennsylvania newspaper interview, then American Honey Queen Jona Hoover referred to her role as “all but a full-time marketing position” and “a business position.”⁵⁴ Hoover’s statement reflects the amount of labor associated with the position and suggests that participants viewed themselves as professionals in the industry, a sentiment that former Queens and Princesses echoed in their oral histories.

Despite navigating their tenure as industry professionals, Queens and Princesses did so within traditional conventions of femininity, particularly in the early decades of the program. The most conspicuous indication of these conventions was their sash, crown, and polished, demure physical appearance. This attire might have seemed traditionally feminine when compared with the more casual women’s styles becoming fashionable in the latter half of the twentieth century. Karen Peterson, the 1969 American Honey Queen, discussed attending a Honey Queen reunion held at the 2019 ABF Conference, where she shared stories and photographs of her tenure with some of the more recent program participants. One of the things that stood out to younger women was her conservative attire. Peterson noted:

Another thing the girls noticed about us older ones, we always wore gloves. And that was a time when we had to wear gloves and if you traveled, we were expected to wear a hat. So, things have changed. And of course, I would never wear pants unless I was working in the beehives. Or [in a silly voice] working as a Teamsters union person [laughs] in a store.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Jason Klinger, “Let It Bee: Area Woman Wears the Honeyed Crown - A University Freshman from Holtwood, Crowned American Honey Queen in Oregon Last Weekend, Now Represents the National Beekeeping Federation and the U.S. Honey Industry.” *Sunday News*. January 28, 1996, sec. Local/State. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/0EEE7986800E3291>.

⁵⁵ Karen Peterson, oral history interview by Kathleen Foster, video recording, remote via Zoom, October 21, 2020, 23:27-23:57.

While clothing requirements appear to have become less rigid since the 1970s, images in newspapers and beekeeping association newsletters suggest that wearing dresses and skirts, rather than pants, remained the norm at promotional events.

The early years of the program also offer insight into the Honey Queens' gender-appropriate duties. From the 1960s through 1980s, the program's main goals were promoting honey consumption and educating the public about bee hive anatomy. Participants often demonstrated this through cooking and teaching, both of which were long considered to be socially acceptable pursuits for women. Karen Peterson recalled that during her time as Honey Queen in 1969, cooking with honey was not common in American households, as Hawaiian sugar was more frequently used.⁵⁶ Therefore, many of her efforts involved creating and gathering recipes for the Honey Queen brochure and informing consumers about honey products on television, at fairs, and in grocery stores. She emphasized that Honey Queen appearances were more intensive than simply smiling and presenting a product. Representatives had to be prepared to answer consumers' various questions and spark their interest in cooking with a new ingredient.⁵⁷

Virginia Walker also encountered consumers' inexperience with honey nearly a decade later. During her tenure as the Idaho Honey Queen in 1978, she noted that people were still relatively unfamiliar with using honey in cooking. Thus, Walker focused primarily on the culinary uses of honey, including teaching the public about cooking with bee products and hosting honey taste tests. She also enjoyed educating the public about the importance of bees, noting the absence of widespread understanding about the role of the honey bee in agriculture.

⁵⁶ Peterson interview, 35:57-36:06.

⁵⁷ Peterson interview, 35:33-35:56.

Walker fondly remembered demonstrating observation hives (a live beehive encased in glass for viewing) and visiting schools to raise awareness amongst children. She recalled that “back then it wasn’t as popular to save the bee.”⁵⁸ This lack of public knowledge about bees and honey in the 1960s and 1970s enabled the women of the Honey Queen Committee to create a unique space for young women’s authority in apiculture. By using cooking and educational promotions to fill an informational void, they utilized perceptions of appropriate women’s work to present their young, female representatives as socially acceptable, public-facing industry experts.

Queens and Princesses also used the Honey Queen platform to promote the importance of bees, honey, and the apicultural industry in the political realm. Through publicity events with politicians, participants entered the male-dominated governmental sphere and elevated the industry’s visibility. In the early decades of the program, participants frequently made presentations and attended meetings with local and national political figures. For example, Karen Peterson shared a story and photograph of herself presenting a jar of local honey to presidential candidate Robert Kennedy in 1968 during her tenure as Oregon Honey Queen. Peterson also reminisced about meeting with the California Secretary of Agriculture as the American Honey Queen the following year.⁵⁹ Tammy Inman, the 1976 American Honey Queen, also made presentations to politicians, such as one given to the Kansas House of Representatives. The *Kansas City Times* reported that Inman thanked the legislative body “on behalf of the beekeepers” for naming the honey bee the state insect.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Walker interview, 9:38-11:50.

⁵⁹ Peterson interview, 7:49-11:54 and 38:31-41:30.

⁶⁰ Richard A. Serrano, “Honey Queen in Clover,” *Kansas City Times* (Kansas City, Missouri), August 7, 1976: 18. NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A11FF2A92A519802A%40EANX-NB-15AD3ABC359F3462%402442998-15AC87D1CE0956B2%4017-15AC87D1CE0956B2%40>.

While these engagements might appear as purely symbolic efforts, they were quite effective in garnering recognition for the niche industry. For example, the *Ohio State Beekeeper's Association News Digest* described the role that Theresa Meyer, the 1967 Ohio Honey Queen, played in connecting the industry to state politicians. Formal and informal meetings with the Ohio governor resulted in talks of a large honey festival, distributing materials about honey in the mail from state offices, and the printing of the Ohio seal on beekeepers' products as a promotional tool. Furthermore, the newsletter stated that "through [Meyer], the door to Governor Rhodes' office opened and the honey industry reaped the harvest of publicity."⁶¹

Later participants also engaged with legislators and other agricultural advocates regarding particular causes in the industry. Louann Hausner, for instance, worked to further connections between apiculture and agriculture in her conversations with public officials during her tenure in 1996. She enjoyed talking with politicians about supporting beekeeping and honey bees in their area, and informing them about bee-related issues that were important to agriculture. During her travels, Hausner also met representatives of other agricultural commodities, such as maple and cranberry industry advocates, from across the country. She recalled collaborating with these other young, passionate spokespeople to mutually promote their industries and generate excitement about agriculture. These partnerships, she shared, helped her address negative assumptions about apiculture and agriculture. Hauser recalled:

I think, sometimes, agriculture gets a little bit of a stereotype of not being something that's exciting and full of technology, and really full of life. And when I have the opportunity to talk about honeybees, people are fascinated to learn about not only the biology, but the science, and the physics that exists within the hive. So, I think it's really

⁶¹ "Queen Program Opens Many Doors," *Ohio State Beekeepers' Association News Digest*, vol. 7, no. 2 (October 1967): 1, <http://www.ohiostatebeekeepers.org/wp-content/pdf/history/newsletters/1967.pdf>.

awesome to have that opportunity to unlock that for people and make them get excited about agriculture, and hopefully have a stronger respect for agriculture and for where their food comes from. And more respect for the people that enable their food to be provided to them.⁶²

Young women such as Hausner entered the political realm using the Honey Queen platform.

Participants effectively promoted apiculture, established their own networks across agricultural industries, and ultimately acted as lobbyists for beekeeping at different levels of government.

“It’s a Natural Fit for Our Industry to Have a Queen”

Although participants were successful industry advocates, women involved with the American Honey Queen Program encountered sexism and often had to prove the value of a crowned representative to the public and the beekeepers they served. Since the early days of the program, some Honey Queens and Princesses experienced judgment from the public and non-industry peers due to the stereotypical perceptions of pageantry. Some were teased or referred to as ‘a honey’ or ‘the queen bee.’⁶³ Apiarist Tammy Horn has suggested that women have been socialized in the language of bees, and that this often-reductive terminology reflects cultural anxieties about women. For instance, referring to a woman as a “queen bee” insinuates that she “is powerful, a potential threat, and self-absorbed.”⁶⁴ Despite the robust education and advocacy campaigns carried out by participants, some faced harassment in response to their Queen title. In 1976, Tammy Inman told the *Kansas City Times* that she initially kept her crown a secret

⁶² Hausner interview, 24:39-26:35.

⁶³ Dion Lefler, “Honey Princess Stays Busy as a Bee in Industry PR Job,” *Daily News of Los Angeles (CA)*, October 15, 1986, sec. Neighbors. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.mcpl.idm.oclc.org/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/0EF51064081CE296>.

⁶⁴ Horn, *Beeconomy*, location 215-222

because being the Honey Queen was a source of teasing from her classmates. Inman reported that when some of her college peers found out, they put her in a trash can and pushed her into an elevator. She reflected on the embarrassing event stating, “I guess they figured I needed a throne or something.”⁶⁵

While participants faced scrutiny from non-beekeepers, misconceptions and disapproval also came from within the industry. Some of the women interviewed for this project recalled beekeepers underestimating their knowledge, while others experienced having their work viewed as frivolous. Karen Peterson recalled interacting with some beekeepers in 1968 and 1969 who did not see the value of having the Honey Queen help them promote their products. Their opposition was due in part because they viewed the Queen position as silly or “foo-foo,” even though, she said, “I wasn’t out there wearing [...] some kind of costume to get people’s attention.” Peterson approached these negative interactions with beekeepers by asserting the significance of the Honey Queens’ assistance. She explained, “you just tried to tell them ‘we’re getting out to the public and that’s what it’s about, is getting the word out to the public about the value of it [beekeeping]. And it’s also helping tell people and train people [about] the value of your work.’ It’s put[ting] the onus back on them.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Serrano, “Honey Queen in Clover,” 18.

⁶⁶ Peterson interview, 51:00-53:35.

Karen Peterson’s comments are particularly interesting in the context of the national discourse surrounding the Miss America Pageant in the late 1960s. On September 7th, 1968, members of the Women’s Liberation Movement staged a protest outside of the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey. They sought to draw attention to what they believed was the epitome of the objectification of women’s bodies, by hurling “false eyelashes, curlers, girdles, and bras into a ‘freedom trash can’” - which cemented the inaccurate legend of bra-burning feminists - and by carrying signs likening the pageant to the judging of livestock at agricultural fairs (257). These protests spurred national conversations about the purpose of pageantry, which might have colored the interactions that agricultural Queens like Peterson had with the public. Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*, 257-259.

Though there were qualms with the idea of pageantry, the gendered nature of the program was essential to the women's success as advocates for apiculture. Historians Sara Egge and Jenny Barker Devine posit that while farm and rural women tended to remain on the fringes of or outright rejected mainstream feminist movements of the twentieth century, they also "devised their own brand of feminism by developing an empowering rhetoric that incorporated agricultural work patterns and gendered expectations within farm families, while co-opting only what they wanted from national movements."⁶⁷ Though Egge and Barker Devine's work focuses on Midwestern farm women's organizations, the arguments that Program Chairs and Honey Queens have made about the validity of the program echo this sentiment. Patty Sundberg, who became Program Chair in 1994, argued for the American Honey Queen Program's value when people saw these contests as outdated or unnecessary. She asserted that it made sense for their industry to have a Queen, more so than other agricultural industries with similar programs. Sundberg explained that "if anybody can have a Queen program it should be the honeybee. They have a queen, she dominates the hive. She doesn't do all the work [...] but it's because of her success that the rest of the hive succeeds. So why not have that in a marketing program?"⁶⁸ Anna Kettlewell also mentioned this connection, noting that for this reason, the use of the Queen crown and banner was an intentional choice from the start of the program. Their arguments draw

⁶⁷ Egge and Barker Devine, "Putting the Community First," 16.

⁶⁸ Patty Sundberg, oral history interview by Kathleen Foster, October 10, 2020, video recording, remote via Zoom, 15:00-15:36. Interestingly, Sundberg noted that when the program first started, "it was very feminist or whatever you want to call it, as a girl going out there and doing that" (15:00-15:15), implying that these young women's actions were progressive for the 1960s. Her implication that it was no longer feminist by her tenure as Program Chair in 1994 reflects Claire Moses Goldberg's observation that by the 1990s, feminism was considered old-fashioned, as the equalities that Second Wave feminists had fought for had been largely absorbed into American culture. Moses Goldberg, "'What's in a Name?': On Writing the History of Feminism," 768-771.

upon the queen bee as an agriculturally relevant, gendered symbol, invoked to counter the seemingly “non-feminist” pageant appearance of the Honey Queen participants.

The second reason for utilizing a Queen as an industry representative was the attention that their appearance drew. The program has continued to be a successful marketing tool for over sixty years because, as Kettlewell explained, “as soon as the Queens start talking about the industry, people listen.” While some beekeepers were initially skeptical of the pageantry aspect of the program, they were swayed by the increase in sales they received after having a Honey Queen or Princess promote their product. These representatives drew interest and increased sales of honey, and enabled the public to engage with bees and honey beyond purchasing a product. Perhaps people were drawn to their presentation because of the young women’s royal appearance; but as Kettlewell suggested, the Honey Queens’ and Princesses’ ability to answer their questions kept them engaged.⁶⁹

The Queens and Princesses were acutely aware of the power of their platform. Some recalled how their title, as well as wearing a sash and crown, drew public attention. During Beverly Versfelt’s tenure, the Northeast Kansas Honey Bee Association worked with the Kansas Highway Department to erect signs on every major roadway declaring Kansas the “Home of the American Honey Queen, 1966.” While she laughed about the incident, and about one of the signs later showing up on her sorority’s front lawn, she shared that “back then, those kind of silly things [the crown and sash] – it did hold weight.”⁷⁰ This was especially true in the beekeeping community, because, as Versfelt reminisced, “when you would walk in with the sash and crown

⁶⁹ Kettlewell interview, 35:14-36:39

⁷⁰ Versfelt interview, 28:49-29:49

there was an appreciation and a sincere interest in those young women.”⁷¹ Queens’ and Princesses’ appearance also helped them connect with their audiences. For Louann Hausner, the crown and banner amplified the representatives’ messages and continue to help today’s Queens “cut through a lot of the noise” in an increasingly more distracting world. While their presence drew attention, she suggested, it was ultimately the young women’s public speaking skills and professionalism that enabled them to engage the public with bees and honey in a profound way.⁷² Former participants also discussed how their efforts were essential to supporting beekeepers who often did not have the time or marketing skills to promote their products. Hausner proudly shared that in 1996, her efforts generated \$97,000 in free media promotion for the beekeeping industry. She recalled, “I was able to earn that with no payment because people came to me and said ‘we’d love to interview you for our radio, or TV, or newspaper.’”⁷³ Participants understood that the gendered trappings of pageantry might seem outdated or outlandish in some contexts; but viewed within their own unique apicultural framework, the program elevated them as authorities within the industry.

By the 1990s, changes in program leadership offered Queens and Princesses opportunities to shape the program’s advocacy efforts directly. When Patty Sundberg took on the role of Program Chair in 1994, she noted that the committee encouraged representatives to promote causes they were passionate about. She recalled that while Queens still educated the public on basic hive anatomy as they had in the past, there was “so much more that the public didn’t understand about bees and their importance.”⁷⁴ The young women eagerly took advantage

⁷¹ Versfelt interview, 30:30-30:47

⁷² Hausner interview, 45:16-46:38.

⁷³ Hausner interview, 13:39-14:10.

⁷⁴ Sundberg interview, 17:55-18:51.

of this shift to raise further awareness about apiculture’s environmental and cultural importance. As Queens and Princesses took ownership of their messaging, they chose to focus on specific aspects of the industry, such as the role of bees in pollination or the versatility of honey products. This freedom enabled Louann Hausner to highlight the connections between beekeeping and traditional conceptions of agriculture for her audiences during her tenure in 1996. She also spoke with the public about careers and technological advances in beekeeping, and the importance of bees as pollinators of food crops like cranberries and almonds. Through her messaging, she sought to spark public interest in the industry and demonstrate the essential role that honeybees play in creating a balanced diet.⁷⁵ In advocating for their passions in the industry, Hausner and other participants expanded their areas of apicultural and agricultural expertise, and actively exercised their agency as industry professionals. As educators and advocates, Honey Queens and Princesses of the late twentieth century were able to speak with authority to a variety of audiences, and further developed the program as a vehicle for amplifying young women’s voices in apiculture. Some of these women, like Anna Kettlewell and Louann Hausner, continue to shape the program today as mentors and members of the Honey Queen Committee, encouraging the next generation to pursue their own apicultural interests.

“It Changed My Life”

For the women who participated in the American Honey Queen Program, their tenure meant so much more than a year-long position in the beekeeping industry. Serving as a Honey Queen or Princess was a gateway to unique experiences and opportunities for growth that influenced them for the rest of their lives. In newspaper articles, beekeeping association

⁷⁵ Hausner interview, 16:40-18:13.

newsletters, and my interviews, Honey Queens and Princesses spoke about the thrill of traveling the country, wearing bee beards, and meeting celebrities and prominent apicultural and political figures. Several articles even described Queens attending international engagements. In some cases, the Honey Queen platform allowed them access to prominent events, as was the case for Beverly Versfelt. During her tenure in the 1960s, she sang at the White Sox Stadium, attended the first International Apicultural Congress held in the United States, and exhibited an observation hive at what is known today as the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.⁷⁶ The oral histories also revealed that, at times, access to new experiences extended beyond program participants. Versfelt described how her chaperone, Thelma Saxby, a “little old country lady,” had the time of her life accompanying Versfelt on her trips. Versfelt recalled that “this was way beyond anything she [Saxby] had ever imagined, when we went sixteen, seventeen thousand miles together.”⁷⁷ The program afforded women, albeit chaperoned, freedoms beyond traditional gender roles and access to opportunities not readily available to women in rural areas.

During our interviews, I asked each narrator what participating in the program meant to them and how it shaped their lives. Several women mentioned kinship and sisterhood, as the program enabled them to forge deeper connections with beekeepers in their own families and within the beekeeping community. This was especially true for Anna Kettlewell, who shared that her continued connection to the American Honey Queen Program through her role as Program Chair has allowed her to cultivate stronger relationships with her “bee family.”⁷⁸ The themes that

⁷⁶ Versfelt interview and “American Honey Queen with Bee Hive at Museum of History and Technology,” Smithsonian Institution Archives, Acc. 11-008, Box 05, Image No. OPA-920, https://siarchives.si.edu/collections/siris_arc_371876.

⁷⁷ Versfelt interview, 15:43-17:40.

⁷⁸ Kettlewell interview, 46:51-47:17.

arose from the interviewees' responses also suggest that being thrust into such a demanding, public-facing position was a personally formative experience. Some became more engaged in the beekeeping industry, while others were inspired to pursue careers in marketing and education. Virginia Walker, Idaho's first Honey Queen, still embraces what she learned in her role in 1978. Today, she supports her family's beekeeping business as the self-proclaimed "Cox's Honey Queen," creating marketing materials and educational YouTube videos to promote honey and bee products. All project narrators emphasized how the program helped them gain confidence and made them more effective public speakers, something I experienced first-hand during my interactions with the former Queens and Princesses. Regardless of the year they participated, each woman easily delivered talking points about honey and apiculture, and approached the interview process with the poise of seasoned professionals.

For some women, the American Honey Queen Program transformed their lives. Beverly Versfelt offered one of the most compelling answers to my question, explaining that it would be interesting to analyze herself before and after serving as the Honey Queen because "[the program] changed my life." She reflected that being the Honey Queen gave her the confidence and knowledge to pursue other new experiences, such as hosting a talk show in Kansas City and being a meteorologist. These opportunities, she shared, were made possible because of what she discovered about herself while serving as American Honey Queen. Versfelt concluded, "I found my voice. I just found that piece of me that I probably wouldn't have found being a nice girl growing up in Kansas City, Kansas."⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Versfelt interview, 43:00-44:42.

Conclusion

The experiences of American Honey Queen Program participants also illuminate different perspectives of feminism in the latter half of the twentieth century. Too often, the histories of rural women, their organizations, and their participation in pageantry are dismissed as anti-feminist actions. However, scholars of gender and rurality have proposed that it is more fruitful to ask what these experiences can tell us about feminism.⁸⁰ When viewed through this lens, the stories of American Honey Queen Program participants offer opportunities to see the ingenuity, talent, and agency of women in twentieth-century agriculture. The stories of women who established and participated in the program reveal, for instance, how women in this niche industry built on apicultural imagery and traditional conceptions of femininity to create distinctly feminine platforms for their ideas and labor. As Karen Peterson explained, serving as the American Honey Queen “offered a platform for people to actually listen to me.”⁸¹ Gendered trappings of pageantry, like crowns and sashes, have continued to provide pathways to authority and women’s personal and professional enrichment. These seemingly antiquated representations of femininity also serve as symbols of empowerment in this particular apicultural context, demonstrating the fluidity of agricultural feminisms. By equipping young women with a crown and banner, the American Honey Queen Program embraced gendered notions of womanhood, queen bees, and pageantry as a uniquely apicultural means of elevating women’s voices and promoting their industry.

⁸⁰ Barbara Pini, Berit Brandth, and Jo Little, “Conclusion,” In *Feminisms and Ruralities*. Barbara Pini, Berit Brandth, and Jo Little, eds, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 195.

⁸¹ Peterson interview, 1:05:18-1:05:42.

TRANSCRIPTS

PREFACE

These transcripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History at the University of Missouri - Kansas City and the Library Archives and Special Collections Department at the University of California, Davis. The recordings and transcripts will be donated to the Library Archives and Special Collections Department at the University of California, Davis for inclusion into the Apiculture Manuscripts collection. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. The transcript may be read, quoted from, and used for research and educational purposes as long as this thesis is properly credited and cited.

INTERVIEWER

Kathleen Foster

INTERVIEWEE

Anna Kettlewell

DATE

October 2, 2020

LOCATION

Remote via Zoom

TRANSCRIBER

Kathleen Foster

RESTRICTIONS

None

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Anna Kettlewell grew up in the Milwaukee area of Wisconsin and is from an agricultural family, with grandparents involved in dairy farming and beekeeping. Her beekeeping grandparents, Esther and Henry Piechowski, founded what is today known as the American Honey Queen Program. Kettlewell served as the Southeastern Wisconsin Honey Queen and Wisconsin's state Honey Queen before winning the title of American Honey Queen at the American Beekeeping Federation conference in 1999. She currently serves as the Program Chair of the American Honey Queen Program.

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FOSTER: Alright. Today is October 2, 2020. My name is Kathleen Foster and today I'm interviewing Anna Kettlewell about the American Honey Queen Program. Anna, do you agree to be interviewed for the project and have the interview later archived?

KETTLEWELL: Yes.

FOSTER: Awesome. So I'm going to start - just to kind of center us to learn about you - can you tell me about where you grew up?

KETTLEWELL: I grew up in the Milwaukee area in Wisconsin. I would say it's an urban area where I grew up, but my family heritage has always been with farming. My parents are actually from Central Wisconsin, Waushara County, specifically in Wisconsin. And they both grew up on farms. So we'd spend almost all of our weekends growing up "up north," we always call it - In Wisconsin, it's always "up north" on the farm. So, I grew up with kind of both aspects in my life of farming and being in an urban environment.

FOSTER: So what was that like - the, kind of, doing both - what was that like?

KETTLEWELL: Well, it was weird when I finally realized that not everybody had a family with a farm up north and things like that. So, my experiences were definitely very different growing up than a lot of my peers' were. Once I kind of figured that out, I realized how special it was to have this part of my life in agriculture and then also having the city life too. Which I don't think a lot of people necessarily get. You're kind of classified more of, like, as an urban person or a rural person, and I really got the best of both worlds which, growing up, you may not have thought that was the greatest thing in the world, when all your friends were doing, you know, certain things. But, as an adult, I realized how incredible that was, because I have a really broad perspective on both urban and rural issues. So, that that was just neat, but you know, definitely different than where my peers were. When I was a kid, for sure.

FOSTER: What did you like best about the agricultural part of your life?

KETTLEWELL: Oh, gosh. It's so - it's hard to say because I think, you know, short of not knowing ag [agriculture] as a whole, you don't know how peaceful it is. You don't know how - I don't know. I guess we grew up with gardens and things like that. So I was always getting my hands in the mud and things and growing up, which a lot of people didn't necessarily picture me doing, but that's definitely how we grew up. So - Yeah. I just don't understand anything different, I guess. So, it's a really hard question to answer. But [pauses to think], what do I like about it? I like that it's peaceful. I like that it's nature. I like that I can see something from start to finish every year and be part of that, you know, be part of growth. And I love animals, so that was another aspect of it.

One of my grandfathers was a dairy farmer, one of them was a beekeeper. So, two very different industries. But, still people who just love the land and love being productive. So, that's just really ingrained in me. I still live in the Milwaukee area, I'm actually going to soon hopefully be moving out to an eight-acre property. So, I'm actually moving more toward - Yeah, I live in the suburbs or the city, but I really kind of want to get more to that nature. I look at my brother on

the flip side, he's very much in suburban-urban life. We both had the best of both worlds, but we both have always come back to having something where we can get our hands in the mud and, you know, make something grow.

FOSTER: So you mentioned one of your grandparents was a beekeeper. Is that how you became involved in beekeeping?

KETTLEWELL: Yep, absolutely. My grandfather [Henry Piechowski] was a commercial beekeeper. He started at the age of seventeen and, you know, had a hive of bees. And one of his brothers said, "You know, you're never going to be able to make enough honey off of that to feed your family." And he [her grandfather] said, "No, I'm going to make enough money to feed my family and I'm going to make it a business someday." My grandfather was, you know, very determined, and he certainly did. My mother was his child and is one of twelve children. They had a very large commercial operation for the state of Wisconsin at the time. They began migrating bees commercially to the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, so they were transporting bees throughout the country very early on. And yeah, that's definitely how I became involved in beekeeping, for sure. And of the twelve kids, I think, seven or eight of them are still somehow involved, whether they have one hive of bees or work on what was my grandfather's company still. So yeah, it's something that, you know, everybody loves their honey, everybody loves their bees still, but it's so ingrained in us to have that as part of our lives.

But my grandparents were also very instrumental in organizations like the Wisconsin Honey Producers Association, their county organization, and the American Beekeeping Federation. My grandmother [Esther Piechowski] actually grew up in the city of Milwaukee. And, [she] met my grandfather on a blind date, moved up to Central Wisconsin and married a commercial beekeeper - only to find out that she was allergic to honey bee stings. So, raising twelve kids and being around this, she actually had to find a way to help wherever she could. So her part of the business was more helping with marketing of products and doing things like that. And from her ideas stem this idea of "what if we had a spokesperson for the industry?" And that became the Wisconsin Honey Queen eventually and then morphed into state programs around the country, and ultimately, the American Honey Queen Program.

FOSTER: That is just so cool.

KETTLEWELL: [Laughs] Yeah, it's, you know, one of those things that growing up, we were around Honey Queens of every shape and size from all over the country, and there was always something to do. And the thing with my grandmother - and both of my grandparents not having a formal education past high school - they found all kinds of different ways to manage a business and make it very, very profitable without having that background, but then finding unique ways to sell their products and market their products, you know, in varying economies and things like that. And they just found that this program was a great way to get a lot of highlighted interest in a really small industry. I mean, beekeeping wasn't always cool. You know, growing up too, I mean - I also didn't understand that everybody's grandparent wasn't a dairy farmer or wasn't some sort of farmer, and then if I started talking about bees, they would just look at me like I was crazy. [Kathleen laughs] And it was definitely, when I was growing up, beekeeping was not a huge, big thing aside from the commercial aspects of it. Now that it's different, it's great, but

there have been different times in beekeeping that it was harder to be a beekeeper, and there were different challenges. So, the neat thing is, is that, tying this back to the Honey Queen Program, is it's lasted for a very long time. It's been an effective tool to promote for years and has had to grow with the industry.

FOSTER: So, I guess getting into the history of the Honey Queen Program, did your grandmother ever tell you any stories about the early days of the program?

KETTLEWELL: Oh yeah, absolutely. So if we're talking on the national level, because my grandmother did run the state program for many years, and then she moved on to run the national program. At that time, it was interesting. It was for the American beekeeping Federation, it's a trade organization, an umbrella organization that represents beekeepers of all different sizes. Anywhere from a hobbyist beekeeper to a commercial beekeeper, honey producer, a packer, a beekeeper that just raises queen bees. So it runs the gamut of interests. And in the early days of the program, you know, as cultures changed, only men were allowed to be committee chairs and things like that. So there was always a man who was the chair of every committee and my grandmother was actually the program manager for many years. She wasn't allowed to be the committee chair. That obviously has changed and evolved, so in my position, I'm the chair of the committee and running all the day to day operations. But that's basically what she did back in the sixties and early seventies.

And at that point in time the program was starting, she had a very strong core group of friends throughout the country. That's one of the great things about these national organizations is that you make friends in different parts of the industry and people you rely on, but just lifelong friends. So she had a core group of people she would work with, and they would go around and you know, send the Honey Queen somewhere, and they would drive throughout the country. And they would provide chaperones. My grandmother didn't have a driver's license, which I think is probably one of the most fascinating things in the world. There was one Queen, I think from 1969, and she'll always tell me, "your grandmother was so persistent. She would get in the car, she'd give me the map, she'd tell me where to go. I had to drive but your grandmother was telling me where to go. And then we'd stop in this state and she'd say, 'this is Esther and the Honey Queen is coming to your state, what are you going to do for her?' And all of these things would miraculously happen." I'm sure though - My grandmother did a lot of work to make some of those things happen. But yeah, I mean, it was traveling with the Queens and helping them along. Contacting legislators. I mean, she had one queen who met President Nixon. There were Queens that would be involved with meeting different legislators. They [Esther and her friends] were very involved in, not just the beekeeping industry, but with politics and with their church groups. So they were very civic minded and active people. They had lots of connections, but I think a lot of people then, at the very early ages - I think our country's maybe evolved that we're more into one, you know, we focus on one activity or we spread our [?] around among a lot of different activities. And they were very focused in many different areas of life that helped when they would run this program or their business. I mean, it was just fascinating how it's evolved.

Some of the other stories that I've been told is, they would have many women running for this position [the American Honey Queen] and you know, they could see what was going to be successful in somebody. They just kind of instinctively knew who was going to be better. I

mean, some of the positives are that the program has definitely evolved over the years. I would look back at old program books from the convention and, you know, sometimes they'd be saying, "okay, this candidate is five foot four with green eyes." Which obviously we don't worry about anymore, but at different times, that was just the culture and how things worked. It's just fascinating, because a lot of what they did to - with the program in the early days, are things we still do. So they found these effective ways of communication that are still valid today. Whether it's meeting with legislators. How do we advance laws that will help the beekeeper with their bottling, or their producing, or what types of things can help against pests and diseases? Or if it's talking to specific group, or to doing a promotion in a grocery store to help people buy honey. All those things are still effective today. So, it's fascinating that they could come up with some kind of marketing tool that could span time, if that makes sense.

FOSTER: Absolutely.

KETTLEWELL: Yeah.

FOSTER: That is really involved. And just, it's so cool.

KETTLEWELL: Yeah, yeah. I mean, it's one of those things that, you know, we'd always watch - with twelve kids, there were twenty-five grandchildren in my family. So every time - we call them Granny and Grandpa - so when Granny and Grandpa would have a Honey Queen, you know, we'd always watch the older boys to see, "okay, which one of them has a crush on the Honey Queen" and everything like that. But ironically, none of my cousins married any Honey Queens or anything like that. And very few Honey Queens, kind of, married into any of these big beekeeping families. There are a few, but, it's just fascinating to have seen how this has been such a big part of our lives from crushes, to inspirations. I mean, one of the reasons I wanted to be a Honey Queen was because I was very inspired by the 1987 American Honey Princess. She stayed with my grandparents twice, one in Wisconsin and one in Mississippi. And she just always treated me [pauses] very well. I was a little kid, I was eight years old, but you know, she would talk to me. She would show me what she was doing and stuff like that, and didn't blow me off. And that was very inspirational, that she was this great involved person, but she could make time for me as a little kid. And I always aspired to be like that. That, you know, I could do what Penny did because Penny was amazing, and she was this role model for me. And it's so silly, but my grandparents just had this knack of knowing which Queens would be really great like that. And then they instilled in me, you know, from that age on, "Anna wants to be a Honey Queen someday, right?" You know and I'm shy, and I don't know, but she was inspirational, because she made me feel like I could do something like that. So. Yeah.

FOSTER: What were some of your other memories of - I mean, because you mentioned that you had Queens in your life forever -

KETTLEWELL: Yeah.

FOSTER: What were some of your other early memories of those Queens?

KETTLEWELL: Yeah, I think it was that my grandparents were always busy doing something. Like there was always something that was really important. And I don't think I ever really understood how a Honey Queen was selected until I was probably eleven or twelve years old and my grandparents were going to a beekeeping conference that was held in Mobile, Alabama. And their winter home was on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, so it was this easy drive. And every year, we would go down to Mississippi to visit our grandparents during the winter when they were down there. And they convinced us one year to come and we would go to the convention for them. At that point in time, my grandmother was, you know, several chairs removed from the program, but she still supported it and still went to conferences. We had a couple hives of bees, we weren't very involved, but they brought us there. And it was kind of like the first time I ever saw that there was this competition for selecting the Honey Queens and what did they do, and that there were so many of them, and then you would get attached to some of them. So she kind of walked me through and I didn't understand everything, but I started seeing like, this is actually a big deal. More than what I ever thought it was and that they just didn't appear, there was actual work that went into being a Queen. You know, there was speaking, there was promoting, there was being a professional and everything. So, going to those conferences was really a big part of my life. I started doing that when I was eleven. [I went] with my grandparents a couple of times, but then after that, meeting their friends and meeting the people who were involved in making the program successful. And then what kinds of skills and attributes were they looking for people who needed to be part of the program. And so I think that was probably one of the things I really most remember.

I spent most of my time attending national conferences versus state conferences, I didn't quite get involved with the organizations until I actually decided I was going to run to be a Honey Queen. So I don't really have any good state memories, beyond working at state fairs with the national Honey Queen. I think there was one other one that I remember very closely, that I had seen her become the American Honey Princess. She was from Wisconsin and it was a big deal, because we hadn't had one in a decade or something. And she worked our fair. And I started realizing how they sort of would talk to people, and what lessons and things that they would tell people. Because you start learning all about the bees, but understand that you don't have to tell everybody everything that you know about bees to make it effective. And what will people remember? So spending time working with some of those Queens and saying oh, yeah. Now I know what I'm supposed to do in that kind of a role, or what they actually do do. And that they really take it seriously as a job, which not a lot of people think that. You know, from an early age, but I started seeing that. Realizing for me to be successful in the position I would have to really work hard, and make it a goal and strive for it. I spent a lot of times working in state fairs and trying to carry on my grandparents' legacy as much as I could. I think that was something that was really important to me personally, that, I wanted to make them proud for sure. And for my experience, my grandmother passed away when I was the Wisconsin Honey Queen. So she knew that I would have become the Wisconsin Honey Queen, which was great. My grandpa was still around and my grandfather knew I became the American Honey Queen. And he saw me through that whole year and everything. But it became even more important that I do what I can to honor their memory for sure, for me. So, yeah.

FOSTER: Can we talk about how you - your path to the Honey Queen? How did you - When was that and what did it look like?

KETTLEWELL: So for my state, and one thing to understand is that every state runs their programs differently. So some states would have - and this is back in the nineties- some states would actually have just a state competition, anybody who would want to apply to become the spokesperson could. And they'd select them based on their speaking skills or their demonstration skills. Then they would send them to a bee school or a bee college, whatever they want to call them. Teach them everything they need to know about bees and send them out to promote. Some states would say you have to become a local Honey Queen. So, the Whatever County Honey Queen, and then you could compete for your state Honey Queen position, and on, and on, and on. So my path was a little different in that the local Honey Queen competition usually was like [shrugs] where you were from. And Milwaukee County, very urban county, wasn't going to necessarily have a Honey Queen. And I worked very closely with the manager of one of our biggest supply distributors. Are you familiar with the different companies that sell beekeeping equipment? [Kathleen replies, "some of them, yes."] Okay, so it was our local Dadant branch, which is one of the big bee suppliers. The manager of that company was very, very pivotal in my becoming a Honey Queen. From a young age, he had encouraged me and he was that way with everybody. All kinds of youth programs, he would encourage youth to - whether they're starting beekeeping or being a Honey Queen, or - he just was very good at encouraging youth. So he said, "whenever you're ready to be a Honey Queen, I'll sponsor you," because you needed to have a sponsor. And I'm like, "okay, that's great," and I didn't know really what that meant at the time. But then when it was - I was of the age and I was ready to do this [short pause] Lee was like, "Well, what we should do - and my vision for this is that every one of our regions in the state would have a Honey Queen - so let's make you the South Eastern district's Honey Queen, we'll call you the Southeastern Wisconsin Honey Queen. And that way you can promote, not just in your own county, but this whole region of counties." Which was great. So, he took me to this meeting and said, "you know, this young woman is interested in being a Honey Queen and I think that this group should sponsor her to be the Honey Queen." Of course, they all had questions and "what is our responsibility, and how will we take care of her?" Eventually they agreed and, you know, it went from there.

And I started giving school presentations, or going to fairs and doing things, and I shadowed quite a bit with the state Honey Queen that year. So since I had that eligibility in our state, I had to be the local Queen and then I could apply for the state Honey Queen position which took place at our state convention, which was my first state convention. Which was kind of odd, but it was my first state meeting. And the selection process entailed writing an essay, and doing a demonstration for the crowd, having an interview, and then three panelists would observe me during the interaction of the state meeting to see how I interacted with the people. Could I hold my own conversation? Could I initiate conversation? Was I a wallflower? What needed to happen and everything. And then from there, I was selected to be the state Honey Queen. So that year entailed a lot of travel throughout the state. I went everywhere from the very tippy top of the state to the farthest corners of the state. Promoting at farmer's markets, fairs, festivals, doing radio interviews. You know, the State Fair, school presentations, all kinds of different things.

I'd say memorable for me, it's very memorable when you can speak to your cousin's school, and learn about history from your family. During that year I learned that two of my aunts had been the county Honey Queen in the county where my family grew up, one on each side of my family.

So one of my dad's sisters had been a Honey Queen, too. And, you know, learning through that year, when my grandmother passed away that the one aunt on the other side of the family, one of my uncles said, "I hope she went to your grandma's funeral because your grandma was very big in her life helping her succeed, because she encouraged her to be a Honey Queen because of her personality." So I learned even more about family history on both sides of my family, but then realizing that no matter what level of this program, somebody could get something out of it. Whether they were just the county Honey Queen, or just the state Honey Queen, or on the national level. There's some sort of element that somebody's gotten out of it. And, on top of that, that these women are promoting the industry for life. Whether it's in some small way. And that's what's so unique about this.

So from there, I traveled to Nashville, Tennessee and went to the ABF - American Beekeeping Federation - convention that year. The competition on the national level is very similar to the state level in that you write an essay, you perform a marketing presentation, you go through an interview. But, you go through a four or five-day period of people watching you, and observing you, and judging you. And you don't know who your selection panel is until you get into the interview room on the last day, and then you realize people you've been talking to for over a week have been secretly watching you and evaluating you the whole time. So it's somewhat nerve racking in that you never know if you're in an elevator with somebody going back to your room. You don't know who you're running into at the breakfast table, if that's somebody you're going to need to really impress. So, it teaches you very quickly that you need to always be on in the position, and tests you for that. Yeah, at that point time [I was] selected the national Honey Queen. And the year was amazing. I mean, I don't know if you want to get into that, but -

FOSTER: Yeah!

KETTLEWELL: Yeah. So, it was a great year, for sure. It starts out with some promotions and - for my year at least. And then we actually go through a formal training process, which I don't know that a lot of people fully understand that. You know, in any job, you need job training. We actually traveled to the National Honey Board to receive our media training, and marketing training, your presentation training. And what's remarkable is after you do the job for a couple years, and you get to this national level, you think "I've got this, I know what I'm doing. They selected me." Then you think, "Oh my gosh, they want me to change everything," and not in a bad way. They help you become more effective in your presentation. Because on state and local levels, you have different people of varying skills and abilities guiding you and mentoring you. And frankly, on the state and local levels, teaching you more of the mechanics and the nuances of beekeeping and the industry so that when you get to the national level, they can focus on the nuance of presentation and effective marketing and expected media relations. We actually went through a full training and then they sent us on the road to travel all over the country. I went to Alaska, to Florida, and promoted bees throughout the country, and honey. Tried amazing varieties of honey throughout the country. I rode in a private plane. I got to see glaciers. I got to see, you know, amazing things in Florida or east coast. I mean, the some of the states that you have great memories from are not the states you think you'd have them. I got to stay with one of the most renowned beekeepers - or researchers, beekeeping researchers - in the country at the time, which I think made most of the beekeepers in my state jealous, saying, "ask this, ask Dr.

Shimanuki how to do this!" And I'm like, "I'm not going to ask him if I'm entering into his home!"

But, the people you meet are lifelong friends. It just took everything from being a child in the industry, to then being a colleague of the people I'd looked up to, for so many years. You know, getting to stay with people that my grandparents got this program going with, I did that. And, learning their stories, or how their businesses operated, or the evolution of the program, working with them. It's just amazing to, you know, become friends with your grandparents' friends after an experience like that. So it was amazing. Even got to wear a bee beard, which was phenomenal. Would totally do it again. But yeah, it's a year I would never give up. And it's a year that definitely changed me and helped me grow as a person, giving me confidence that I don't think I could ever have. Being an incredibly, painfully shy child to being able to do this. So for me on a personal level, definitely, it shaped me for sure. But it also made me want to give back to the industry moving forward. And I can tell you from having worked with Queens for - I guess, now it's over twelve years as a national coordinator - I see that in all of them when they're done with this job. That they all will continue to be lifelong promoters, and will always want to get back. Which is incredible, and I don't know that you always see that in these types of programs.

FOSTER: Absolutely.

KETTLEWELL: So.

FOSTER: So you described a lot of the places that you went. What were some of the things that you were doing while you were at these places? Where were you going?

KETTLEWELL: Sure. So, it would be everything from working a state fair - so a beekeeping group would have an exhibit or a sales booth, and you would work the booth and try to entice buyers to come in and buy the product - to going into a studio for a radio interview. Sitting down at the TV station are doing a live TV presentation about the organization's exhibit. A lot of open houses, or fairs, or festivals where there'd be an educational booth. So you're teaching, you know, anybody coming by all about the beekeeping industry. Observation hive. Standing by an observation hive for hours, showing people where the queen bee is and talking about the inner workings of a hive. Just trying to think of some of the unique things. I spent one week in Tennessee with a teacher who wanted a Honey Queen to come visit her classroom. My chair at the time said, "well, I can't send a Honey Queen, pay for a Honey Queen to come to your state if it's just one classroom." She [the teacher] said, "well I want the Honey Queen. So what do I have to do?" And she [her program chair] said, "a week's worth of school presentations," and the teacher set it up. So I spent an entire week, school presentation, after school presentation, after school presentation to second graders. There was a lot of school visits - principally anywhere from kindergarten through high school - just teaching about why is beekeeping important? How is pollination important to our diets? How does the inner workings of the hive work? I'm trying to think what else, other types of promotions I had. But a lot of it was fairs, festivals, farmers markets, booth work, and then educational work.

FOSTER: Did you face any kind of challenges in your role? And if so, what were they?

KETTLEWELL: Well, some of the challenges - and I'll say this is probably not just for me - is that you're traveling for a very long period of time. So, it isn't just you go somewhere for a week and then you come home. You're on the road from state to state to state. You know, they're on the road at times for a month at a time without seeing family and friends and just being away. I was a college student when I was in this role. I was finishing up my last year of college. I actually graduated December of the year I was Honey Queen. So for me, one of my biggest challenges was how do I maintain being a college student and do this role? It's going to require me to basically miss college for months at a time. So for me that was a big challenge. How I overcame that was working with professors at a very flexible college, and actually received internship credits for being the Honey Queen, which was phenomenal at the time. So they recognized [that] the work I was doing involved program evaluation, and just life skills, and dealing with people, and all kinds of other stuff. Particularly notably for the program evaluation, because we were tasked, every time we would go to an event to evaluate the effectiveness of the promotion. Evaluate the value to the organization that we're representing. Should we keep sending somebody to this event? Or how are things changed? That that was a really important skill to take with me in policy analysis and public management, that this would be a good skill in life to have. So I got internship credits for being the Honey Queen.

And then I still needed additional credits to be a full-time student because at the time, if you wanted to have health insurance with your parents, you need to be a full-time student. So balancing that was hard. Working with a very flexible university, they allowed me to do a research project on the beekeeping industry. Specifically in that the American Beekeeping Federation, at one point in time was the only national organization for beekeepers. And at one point in time in its history, the organization split in two, for the American Beekeeping Federation and the American Honey Producers Association, two organizations that still exist today. So I actually did a research project utilizing the travel I was doing to meet with different beekeepers who are members of both organizations, members of one or the other. How did the split happen? Why did it happen? What are the benefits of each group and how does that work? So, for me, that was a challenge in that you're welcoming me into a home and now I want to interview you. And I want to learn all about why this happened. So I was taking a lot of what I was doing in lots of different ways. Not only was I there working, but I was also doing school stuff too. But also balancing that. Like how will that work out? A lot of women will take a complete year off or take a semester off of school. I wasn't in that position to do that. So that was definitely a challenge.

But also being away from home for a really long time at twenty and twenty-one. It's kind of hard when you've not done that. And I had traveled, but I've always traveled with family. So doing that travel by yourself and learning the ropes of doing that by yourself was definitely a challenge. Those I think were the biggest things. And then making sure that when you were in interviews and things like that, that people took you seriously. And thankfully, due to the training that we had received with how to handle those types of questions with the media, we had great answers and great ways to deflect and move into topics we wanted to talk about. So, I think those are probably the biggest challenges. A little bit of homesick at first, but then realizing it was an experience I was never going to get back. And then balancing, you know, real life and school. Then, at the end of the year, going from being a very important person, and being very scheduled

and having all kinds of things to do to all of a sudden: "Okay, I'm done with college, and I'm done with this. And what am I doing next?" Which I think is a challenge for a lot of the women who go through this program is what's next. And well, I can read a book now. I didn't have time to do that before, but now I can do something like that. But yeah, I think the benefits of being in the program completely outweighed any challenges.

FOSTER: You mentioned having people take you seriously [was challenging]. Why is that? What's that about?

KETTLEWELL: Sure. I think as a young person specifically, and at various times - beekeeping wasn't a big thing back in the nineties - to have information on that. So, making sure that you could get the right facts out and have people take you seriously as a professional when you're so young is a challenge that people have to overcome, whatever your field is. I'm sure you've experienced that when you want somebody to answer your question and it's "well, okay, whatever. It's not that big of a deal. You're young, you're fine. You don't need to know." Or even getting information from people that [suggest] is that really important for me to know? Yeah, it's important for me to know and understand. I think those are the biggest challenges that, you know, you're young and do you know what you're talking about? And once you start getting to those questions and learning how to shape your interviews that we've all been taught, we're able to quickly find that people do take you very seriously when you can show them how much you do know, and that you can frame it in the right way.

FOSTER: Did you ever have people misunderstand your role or think negatively about the pageantry aspect of it?

KETTLEWELL: Yeah. At the time that I was involved in the program, I don't know that I would say any sort of negative connotation. I mean, pageants weren't necessarily construed as being bad. But there was definitely, always a little bit of a hurdle to explain to people that this isn't the same as something that you see on TV. This is actually a job application process. So truly, once we explain how we're selected, and what work we actually do, people quickly realize that this is not the same as any sort of pageantry. So yeah, that may be a hurdle at times, but it's quickly understanding how to get the right message across and how to package something quickly. But there's always a little bit of a hurdle with something like that. But I don't know that it was ever construed negatively, at the time. One of the reasons we utilize the crown, the banner, and things like that was twofold and it was from the foundation of the program. Every hive of bees has a queen. So it was this natural fit. You know, you can look at different programs like pork producers, or the dairy industry. The Queen isn't as natural of a fit, as it is with beekeeping. There's a queen in a hive and that's basically how we come back to it. It's a natural fit for our industry to have a Queen. And frankly, it's something that has worked for over - I guess it's over sixty years now - getting attention for the industry. As soon as the Queens are talking about the industry, people listen. And it becomes compelling, because they were hooked in by something that attracted them to come to the booth. It's amazing when we send Queens to different areas, and maybe a group was slightly skeptical of it. You know, like, "Oh, it's a Queens pageant." It's not the same thing, but then they see their sales results from having the Queen at their fair versus not having the Queen from the fair. And I've had multiple organizations over the years say, "as soon as we have a Queen, our sales go up." And it's not because they're [consumers] just

attracted to her. It's because they're attracted to something to ask questions, and somebody's there to answer the questions, too. So. Yeah.

FOSTER: What is your favorite or your proudest memory of being the Honey Queen?

KETTLEWELL: I'm going to say it's - oh, geez, from being the Honey Queen? Wow. Oh. [Pauses to think] Well, I'd say for sure, it was knowing that I made my grandfather proud. Which probably sounds very corny and cheesy, but, knowing that he got to see and be proud that I was doing something good for the industry. Beyond that, probably doing my bee beard. And I say that simply because my grandfather, who passed away at the age of ninety-five and had been a beekeeper from the age of seventeen on, looked at my picture of me doing a beard, laughed and said, "I'd never do that." You know, the fact that I did something that he would never have done was kind of incredible, and something I've never done before in my life. I think of it for me as just the general things that, I did this. I conquered any fears I may have had about public speaking. And I know that I made an impact on the industry through thousands upon thousands of dollars of free media publicity for my industry. I taught thousands of children and adults all about beekeeping and why they should respect a honeybee. Those, those general things are probably what I'm proudest of.

FOSTER: That's really cool. And not at all cheesy about your grandfather. Not in one bit.

KETTLEWELL: Yeah. I was very close with him. So, yeah.

FOSTER: So a kind of similar question. Looking back, what did being the American Honey Queen mean to you? Or what has it meant?

KETTLEWELL: Yeah. For me, it meant serving an industry that has done a lot for me in life. Not only has it given me, you know, fruits of labor, a hobby, a passion. But there's so many people in the organizations that we serve, and throughout the industry that have amazing stories and unique businesses and being able to represent them was, was an honor in itself. That people that I respected so much would allow me to have that opportunity to represent them. So it's meant the world in that, I can never pay them back for the experiences they've given me. But it's a lifetime of friendships. So for me, it's meant friendship. It's meant family. There's people who, thirty years ago I didn't know, and now they're like my family. And it's important to me to keep this industry - with my grandparents, my aunts and uncles, my cousins who are so actively running commercial operations - to have a voice in the media, in the world, that correct information is getting out about our industry. So being able to do that and help further anybody's businesses, anybody's honey sales and help people is so meaningful. I mean, I look at my cousin who runs my grandfather's business now and he will say, "we rely so much on what the Honey Queens do, because they're promoting our product. And they're buying our products. They're showcasing our products when they go and do television interviews, or they're leaving our products behind when they're giving a radio interview. So people are talking about it on the radio, or they're doing things to find ways to sell our products." And, you know, helping people now, one of our bigger messages is habitat and helping people understand that the habitat's important. So they're [Honey Queens] taking issues that affect such a tiny industry and getting them out to a very broad sector of people. And having the opportunity to have done that, to

further an industry, is huge. It's such a big part of my life, and to have been able to serve is very important to me.

FOSTER: And you are still serving, because you're the program committee chair.

KETTLEWELL: Mm-hmm. Yep.

FOSTER: How did you come to that role?

KETTLEWELL: I am a crazy organized person. And on our state level, I watched our program maybe not do as much as it could do. So I volunteered on the state level to manage the program. From being in the program and knowing what's fulfilling in the role and what can be done after seeing everything I did on a national level - which is exponentially greater than everything you do on a state level - I just had an idea that I could do things better than what was happening in my state. So I volunteered, and I ran that program for about five years. In that time, I think two or three of my candidates became American Honey Queen or Princess from our state. And working with the person who had chaired the program when I was a Queen. She had been doing that I think for about fifteen years, and she was ready to be done. And frankly, because it's a lot of work. We talked, and she said "I think you're organized, I think you could do things." So I started getting more active in the Queen program on the national level just to see, is this something I could do. It was, and eventually she was ready to turn that over. And I have been managing that program on my own, well, not on my own, but I've been the chair on my own since 2008 of the program. So it's been a long time. [laughs] But I think it comes from the fact that I'm a highly organized person. And honestly, I feel like I excel better behind the scenes than actually as a Honey Queen. My mom and I had once talked about this, where she excels at like execution of an event where I excel at the planning of an event. So this actually for me is, it's exciting to manage from behind the scenes and let the Queens go out and do the actual work. I think it just evolved from there. So I saw that I could fill a void in my state, I was successful there. The national folks were like, "okay, you know, it's time to let Patty move on." And my former chair is very active now on the board of directors for the ABF, so she's still serving too. You know, it's kind of instilled in us. Yeah, I just come down to that I'm good at organizing [laughs], and I'm good at, you know, maybe badgering some people to get things moving. But, yeah. I had the energy and I was ready to do it. So, again, it probably sounds cliché but that's really what it is. And frankly, I hate to say it this way. I'm single, I've got my little dog sleeping over there [looks behind her and laughs]. So I have time too, so it's been a gift and a blessing. I don't have children, so I have a lot of adopted daughters right now who are great. So.

FOSTER: So what has been your favorite part of doing this role [program chair]?

KETTLEWELL: Seeing how much traction we are getting and how the promotions have expanded over the years. When I started, I think the Queens were traveling about one hundred days a year on average. And now we have the Queens - except for this year, because of COVID-19 - the Queens are averaging collectively about three hundred days on the road. So we've been able to exponentially increase their travel, their outreach, their media gain. Yeah, so seeing that product is amazing. And then also watching the women who are in these positions grow as spokespersons. You know, we can start out in training and there can be frustrations and tears if

we're recrafting messaging, and getting them to this next plateau level. Then seeing them at the end of the year and how more professional they are, how their skills have improved. And then also watching them all continue to be lifelong promoters. I actually can see that now because they'll come back to conferences. They're still involved in their states or they're still involved somehow, if they're hosting a Honey Queen or setting up promotions on their own, but how they see the benefit of the promotions. Or even some of them how, after, they've actually become [involved] in beekeeping, even if they're not from a beekeeping family. I just spoke with a Queen today who's setting up a presentation for the Queens and she's, I think, seeking out her master's degree in entomology now. Just from having been involved in our program that, that was never anything she grew up with, but she started getting involved in our industry because of that. And now is making a difference in all kinds of different ways. So those are the things I really love.

Just seeing - I just thrive on they've [Queens today] got to go to more places than I ever would get to go to as a Queen and that's great. And some of it's because of how our world is, it's so different than what it was in 1999. You know, the internet was just becoming a thing then and email was this new wave way of communicating, and now we're to the point that we're presenting to kids all over the country through video chat. That's crazy, what our reach can become and how it's evolved over the years. So, and it seems like it's evolving constantly. But yeah. I mean, since I've been running this program, we've been tracking how much we've been doing in a way that we've not done before. Just the dollar value of the promotional work that they do. It's amazing. So every time we see that, it's like this success, like, "Yes! [accomplished gesture] We're doing something good for the industry." I thrive on maps. And I thrive on seeing people enjoying using the program, enjoying their experiences with the Queens. People who maybe were reluctant to participate suddenly are avid fans of the program, that they can't wait to host a Queen every year. And that's really fulfilling. It also helps me forge more relationships with people in this industry. I probably have gotten to know more people just by running this program over the last many years than I did as a Honey Queen. Which is incredible. You know, people I didn't necessarily visit when I was a Honey Queen are now even closer friends because of my continued work with the organization. So, personally, yeah, it's getting time with my family, [in air quotes] my bee family.

But I love seeing the women's progression every year. And frankly, I said that they're quasi daughters to me at this point in time, but a lot of them are just friends, which is incredible. So, I mean, I'm really lucky. And on top of that, people say, "Oh, you're the coordinator, so you must do everything." But I don't. And I think that's a really important thing for the world to know, is that there is a committee. I'm a chair of a committee. And I have amazing people all over the country that do all kinds of different things for this, this isn't a one-person job. This is about a twenty-five-person job every year. And getting to work with those others is also amazing. I mean, I never thought in a million years, I'd have really close friends from Texas or Montana or all these other places that I do. But, getting to work with a group of passionate people is just amazing.

FOSTER: That is really cool. So, why has the Honey Queen Program been important for beekeeping and agriculture, kind of generally?

KETTLEWELL: Well, beekeeping for so long was just viewed as a very niche type of agricultural specialty. And it still is a specialty on agricultural commodities. So when you even go on to national statistics and things like that, you often have to dig - you can quickly find statistics on poultry, and cattle, and hogs, and all those other things - but you still always had to dig for something about beekeeping. And it doesn't get the spotlight that a lot of other industries do. We don't necessarily - there's not as many of us as there are in other industries, especially larger beekeepers, that [have the capacity] to be able to do national ad campaigns. And, you know, other kinds of outreach is limiting for this kind of industry. I mean, we have people who are beekeepers who have a hive of bees. You don't have a lot of farmers who have one cow, and that's their crop. So, it's so unique and so diverse that, to be able to do national scale promotions and things like that is very difficult.

So the Honey Queen Program was a great base that the beekeepers can use to get some of these promotional things that they can't necessarily get on their own. Especially in the early days of the programming. Now there's a lot more attention focused on bees in the media because of colony collapse disorder. From the 2000, late 2000, early 2000 - I'm sorry, like the aughts right? That's what they're called, the aughts. Those years, that's when there really started to become this focus on beekeeping and bees being important. But for many years, the only time that we would hear about the beekeeping industry as if there was a problem. So parasitic mites or Africanized honey bees, like those would only be in things because they're sensational on news. So the Honey Queen Program has really been able to allow beekeepers to get promotion out for products in a way that they've been able to by that kind of media [?]. They're not going to have a commercial on TV for honey, period. You're just not going to find that in general. So the Honey Queen Program was able to fill a void that a very small industry had to get out the word about the products and how they can use it. Honey is not necessarily the most universal - I know exactly how to use honey, a lot of people, a lot of consumers are very intimidated about how to use honey. You know, cane sugar is a way easier product, an accessible product to use. Honey is scary and different, and they don't know all its properties. So having somebody out there who can explain those things in different settings, and frankly, for the industry at a lower cost than hiring an ad agency, or however that may be, it's been really good for a small industry. And that's really been the neat thing about the Honey Queen Program is that it's been able to provide a lot of services for an industry that may not have the means to do a large-scale campaign on a national level.

FOSTER: What is the most important thing for people to know about the Honey Queens and the American Honey Queen Program?

KETTLEWELL: I'd say it's that it's a tool for all beekeepers, to promote beekeeping and to teach the public about the importance of beekeeping throughout the country. So it's really a resource for our beekeepers of all sizes, throughout the country, regardless of their affiliations. It's something that serves the industry in education, and promotion, and speaking with government officials. So it's a multi-faceted program that serves the promotion and the, frankly, well-being of the industry. I mean, it's a positive force for the industry to get positive press coverage on our industry and to teach people what's really going on with bees that makes it accessible to the public. And I think that's a big part of it, that this program is accessible to the public and easy to

understand. And they bring things to the consumer's level that can impart some importance of what - how this matters to the common consumer.

FOSTER: My last question - which is always my most important one - is there anything else you'd like to share with me or that I forgot to ask you?

KETTLEWELL: Oh, I don't think so. And I'm sure I'll think of stuff after we talk, "I should have said that. I should have talked about that." But no, I think you hit a lot of, you know, what this program is all about.

FOSTER: Well, and if there is anything that you think, of any stories, feel free to email me. We can always chat again too.

KETTLEWELL: Absolutely.

FOSTER: Because I've really enjoyed this, after I got over the nerves. [both laugh]

KETTLEWELL: So you were talking at some point that you were looking for other people- have you talked to anybody else yet, or?

FOSTER: Actually, here. Let me end this recording. So thank you for interviewing with me today.

KETTLEWELL: Okay.

FOSTER: I'm going to end our recording so we can chat a little more [about the oral history project].

KETTLEWELL: Okay.

FOSTER: All right.

PREFACE

These transcripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History at the University of Missouri - Kansas City and the Library Archives and Special Collections Department at the University of California, Davis. The recordings and transcripts will be donated to the Library Archives and Special Collections Department at the University of California, Davis for inclusion into the Apiculture Manuscripts collection. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. The transcript may be read, quoted from, and used for research and educational purposes as long as this thesis is properly credited and cited.

INTERVIEWER

Kathleen Foster

INTERVIEWEE

Louann Hausner

DATE

October 6, 2020

LOCATION

Remote via Zoom

TRANSCRIBER

Kathleen Foster

RESTRICTIONS

None

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Louann Hausner grew up in a rural community in Wisconsin and was first introduced to beekeeping by her grandparents, who were dairy farmers and hobbyist beekeepers. Growing up, Hausner was involved in agricultural clubs like 4-H and the Future Farmers of America, before becoming involved in her county Honey Queen Program. She then became the Wisconsin Honey Queen in 1995, and won the title of American Honey Princess in 1996. Currently, Hausner works in agricultural marketing, and is still actively involved in the beekeeping industry and the American Honey Queen Program, for which she provides training to today's Honey Queens and Princesses.

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FOSTER: Okay. Alright. So, today is October 6, 2020. I am here with Louann Hausner, and my name is Kathleen Foster. And we are talking about the American Honey Queen Program. Louann, do you agree to have our conversation recorded, archived and used in my thesis project?

HAUSNER: Yes, I agree.

FOSTER: Awesome. Alright, so we'll jump in with some questions about you, just to let us know who you are. So, can you tell me about where you grew up?

HAUSNER: So, I grew up in Wisconsin. I am a third-generation beekeeper. So, my grandparents were dairy farmers, who had honeybees on the side. And so I grew up working with them, selling honey at roadside stands, helping do honey extraction. My father also helped out with the bees. And then I became interested in bees when I was in 4-H [club] growing up, and FFA [Future Farmers of America], and saw opportunities to really learn to talk about honeybees and be an advocate for agriculture. And that's really where my work working in promotion and marketing for honey really started.

FOSTER: Very cool. And what was your life like growing up in that area?

HAUSNER: So, growing up in Wisconsin, I grew up in a very small rural community. And so being involved in things like 4-H and FFA, it was exciting in terms of that my - we didn't live on a farm, but my neighbors enabled us to work with their livestock, and to show them at fairs and take care of them. And so we really learned a lot about agriculture from that capacity. And that's really where, I think growing up, I knew that I wanted to - I felt like that was something that was important to all of us, we all need to eat. And it was important for me to - I really enjoyed how down to earth and honest I felt that people in agriculture were. So I felt compelled that I really wanted to make sure that my future career was connected to agriculture, but that I could help to be a good conduit for people to understand - I would always say "from farm gate to dinner plate" - understanding where their food came from, and the importance of it.

FOSTER: So how did you learn about the American Honey Queen Program? Was this part of your advocacy interest?

HAUSNER: Yes. So when I was young, when I was probably about twelve years old, my grandparents asked my older sister if she wanted to be the Wisconsin Honey Queen. And so that was my first exposure to learning about somebody that represented, was basically a state spokesperson for, the beekeeping and honey industry. I saw what she did for a year and I became very intrigued. And through 4-H I was very - I did a lot of public speaking, demonstration contests. And so when I became - I think around eighteen, my parents asked me and my grandparents asked me if I would be interested in representing our county. So I represented the county and I did promotions across our county. Then I competed for to become the state spokesperson. So I became the 1995 Wisconsin Honey Queen. And then I went and interviewed for the position of American [Honey Queen], and I became the 1996 American Honey Princess, representing beekeeping in all fifty states.

FOSTER: Very cool. What was that national competition like?

HAUSNER: Well, so to become the national spokesperson there is - it's both an evaluation of your public speaking skills, but also of your knowledge of the industry. And what I really enjoyed was connecting up with other representatives from other states and being able to share different, basically we shared marketing presentations. So I shared presentations about the versatility of honey and understanding how, depending on your lifestyle, if you're a college student looking for a quick and easy food that's going to taste like it's homemade, versus if you're an athlete looking for some quick energy, showing how honey is versatile for all lifestyles. And so I think from the marketing presentation, and seeing other states and their marketing presentations, I really began to realize there's so many different facets to how we can promote and talk about the industry. So there was marketing, they also evaluated us based on our knowledge of the industry, our knowledge of beekeeping. And then, you know, there was there was definitely a job interview, where they basically talked to us about how would you handle this situation? [...] How would you represent the industry in this scenario? Because it really is a job, an amazing opportunity, for a young woman to be able to travel across the country. So you not only learn about the US and the diversity of the US, but you also gain a lot of confidence in your own ability to traverse between different modes of transport, how to connect with different people, as you get to these states. How to meet new people with the beekeepers that you were staying with or meeting with, how to learn to be flexible in, everybody kind of has a different - you know, when you connect with the people and you stay with them, you really are - they're inviting you into their home, which is amazing. But you're also really learning about how diverse people are across the US too. And it's a great opportunity to learn how to connect with different people. So overall it was, I think, the evaluation process itself is pretty rigorous, because they really want to make sure that you're ready to be a national spokesperson. And to be a representative that is in a variety of situations. Whether that's a county fair, to a radio interview, to a national television interview, to an elementary school presentation. You have to be able to do all of those.

FOSTER: So you mentioned having to have beekeeping knowledge and knowledge about just bees in general.

HAUSNER: Mm-hmm.

FOSTER: What kind of knowledge did you need to have? Like, what did you need to know?

HAUSNER: Well, that's a good question. So I think the, one of the things they want to make sure is that number one, that you've got the basic biology. That you understand the roles a bee has in the hive in terms of from birth, all the way [unintelligible on recording] a field bee in the end of their life. What are the different roles? And then how does the process work? But really, the process is really it's - making honey is one element - but the pollination that the honeybees provide is probably the even bigger story. And as a spokesperson, they really want to make sure that you understand what's the relationship that the honeybee has to all of agriculture. You know, a third of the foods we eat require pollination and eighty percent of those pollinators are honeybees. And so it's really important to understand that for, when it comes to beekeeping, it's about much more than just honey production. It's really, so many different crops are dependent on honeybee pollination. [...] One of the key elements of making sure that you have the

knowledge to understand that relationship and understand also what are the threats to honeybees? You know, what are the dangers to honeybee health? What are the ways that people can get involved in beekeeping? So being able to have some of those basic talking points for somebody that's both like you, that's interested in beekeeping, but also something to be able to talk with experienced beekeepers, and to be able to let them know that you're a spokesperson for them. And so to be able to talk in the same, understand that you can both talk the same language, and learn more about beekeeping in their area.

FOSTER: Well, before we hit record, we were also talking about the brochures and the honey recipes. So you also need to know about that [the culinary uses of honey] too, correct?

HAUSNER: Correct. Yes. I think historically, with being the spokesperson, a lot of the promotion was focused around food, because obviously we're very excited to promote the use of honey. We're excited to give people different ideas and how they can cook with honey, and different ways they can substitute honey in for sugar. We always tell people that, or we tried to tell people that, you know, honey and sugar, they're both sweeteners, just like apples and oranges are both fruit, but they each have different properties. And so we tried to give people different ideas in how they can both use honey in different ways, but that they can also substitute honey in for different sugars to get a different flavor. So, I personally, I grew up in a family of many wonderful cooks. And so I'm not as strong of a cook. But what I find is when I cook with honey, it just - the food tastes, it tastes closer to what my grandmother would make, or my mother, because it just has a feeling of a home cooked meal. And so, I would really try to talk to people about how, when you cook with honey, it really can help to sweeten anything up. But it can also really help to give you, especially in your breads, it can help to really have something that tastes home grown and just really adds something special to any dish. [Pauses and smiles]

Feels weird talking about [laughs] cooking and food. But and also, I would say now, you know, people are very excited to talk about - foodies and different things - people are really excited to talk about how do you take advantage of all the flavors that we have in nature. And I think what people are so amazed to realize, that there are over three hundred different flavors of honey in the US, three thousand worldwide. And it's all natural. It's all based on the nectar, or the pollen from that flower. So it's a floral source. So what's amazing is, I think, talking to people about how you can take a bold, dark honey like a buckwheat honey. And when you cook with that it can provide a different flavor than if you cook with something very light, like a basswood honey. And so I think that, I really enjoy talking to people about that. About how honey is a lot like wines, that you really have different ones based on the different source in nature. And it provides different properties, different flavors, different smells even, to the food. And I think that's one of the most fascinating things about honey.

FOSTER: So you were the Honey Princess. What is the difference between being the Honey Queen and the Honey Princess?

HAUSNER: Well, I would always tell people that the queen bee is really in the hive doing all the work and I'm just the spokesperson. But really, every year we choose two national spokespeople, because honey is produced in all fifty states, and there's quite a bit of promotional opportunities. So it's really a great opportunity for two young women. So we choose the American Honey

Queen and then the American Honey Princess, because there really is enough promotion for two people. I was excited to have an opportunity just to really, you know, work with another person and share that experience for one year. It's a pretty unique experience. Not very many people can say they were Honey Queens. And not many people can say that they were paid to be a national spokesperson at the age of nineteen. So it's really, what I find - what I love, actually - about my experience is that I will list it on resumes and people say "Honey Queen?" But when I'm able to tell them, "Hey, I generated \$97,000 of media promotion, what would have cost us \$97,000 back in 1996, in order to purchase all that advertising. I was able to earn that with no payment because people came to me and said 'we'd love to interview you for our radio, or TV, or newspaper'." And when I was able to tell people that I went to over fifteen states within one year, then people's eyes just lit up in terms of the experience it provides to young women. And so I really enjoy having that opportunity to talk about what a unique and strong opportunity it is. And really to break down those barriers, where people look at a Queen and they think it - they sometimes think - "oh, it's just a figurehead and this person doesn't have knowledge of the industry." So that's what's so amazing, is when you capture their attention because you have the crown and the banner. You can cut through all the noise, capture attention, and then wow [emphasizes 'wow'] them with the information that you have about the industry. So for me, that was one of the most exciting things. Is to really be able to make that connection and then be able to leave them with something that they learned about the industry, and gain new respect for the industry.

FOSTER: In addition to the media work you did, what were some of your responsibilities as Honey Princess?

HAUSNER: Well. So as Honey Princess, definitely whenever there was opportunities to talk with educational groups. Whether that was schools, going into schools, but also giving presentations at different clubs - whether it's 4-H clubs, whether it's FFA chapters, whether it's at fairs - and being able to give demonstrations, not only about extracting, but cooking demonstrations. So really showing not only how the bees work, but also what you can do with the products. Really, a lot of education, but also a lot of promotion too. Working with beekeepers and being able to represent what they had, their portfolio of honey products, and helping them to market. And what was exciting for me was to connect. Going to state beekeeping conventions across the US, learning how beekeeping is different in different states, learning how based on the different crops that are there, the different practices. And then really learning about, something that I didn't know growing up, about commercial beekeeping. Growing up with grandparents that were dairy farmers who had bees as a hobby, they didn't look at that as their main source of income. And so as I became a national spokesperson, I realized that although we have thousands of hobbyists, really, what's fascinating is to learn about the commercial beekeepers, who really keep our industry going from coast to coast by transporting their bees based on what crops need pollination. For me, that was probably one of the most fascinating things to be able to share that message with people, because as a national spokesperson, I think a lot of people thought about people that had one or two hives and didn't realize that some people had thousands of hives. So that was exciting for me too, to be able to not only educate people about honey and beekeeping, but about the different, basically, careers that you can have through beekeeping. And understanding how does our food get on our plate? You know, what are all the things that need to happen for us to be able to have this balanced diet? Really impressive to realize that we wouldn't have almonds, we wouldn't have cranberries, if not for beekeepers bringing their bees to

those plants, and to those orchards, and to those bogs in order to pollinate. So it's really awesome to understand how that circle of life really connects, and the important role that honeybees play.

FOSTER: Absolutely. Did you have a favorite aspect of your role?

HAUSNER: Oh, I loved so many things about my role. You know, I really, I love traveling because I love meeting new people. I love learning about people. And so for me, that was the most exciting part, was having the opportunity to travel from Kentucky, to California. From Maryland to Arizona. Really to get a broad spectrum, and learn about not only how people are different, but how beekeeping is different. But as much as I talk about the differences, what was amazing was having that common link. So there's nothing like being able to sit down with someone and have an instant connection of something that you're both passionate about. So I really enjoyed that in terms of learning that, although we're different and we come from different areas and we had different backgrounds, you know, we can still find something in common. And I think that's a powerful lesson to learn about life. That, just because someone is different than you, doesn't mean that you don't have something in common. And so I really enjoyed, early on, understanding that you don't have to be afraid of meeting someone that's different. When you start to talk with them and find out what you have in common, it really is a way to build a really great relationship.

FOSTER: [Looking at her prepared questions] See, you answer a lot of my questions as you go!

HAUSNER: [Laughs] Well. And if you want me to make my answers shorter, too, I can. I know I get so excited. [Laughs again]

FOSTER: [Responding to Louann's offer to make her answers shorter] Absolutely not! You're just really good at this. [Louann laughs] Can you talk about some of the events and engagements that you were a part of as the Honey Princess?

HAUSNER: Yes! You know, probably what some of the most interesting ones - or events or engagements that I was involved in - involved having live bees on site. Because people are scared and fascinated at the same time with live insects. So what was great was, anytime I would have an observation hive where we have frames where you can actually see the bees in there working, you can see the queen, you can see how the bees crowd around her and make a court. So it was exciting being able to show people honeybees - behind glass - so they could come up close and see. That was exciting. I even had the opportunity to do a bee beard. I did two bee beards, actually. So I went to Ohio, to what was the Ohio Honey Festival. And typically, they had mainly had men do the bee beards, where they take a queen bee and they attach her, basically, to your chin [mimics motion of attaching queen bee to her chin], they have her in a box on some wires and attach her to your chin. And then they pour about ten thousand bees out on a board. And then through the pheromones, the queen attracts those bees up, and then they just hang off of your chin. And it's - It was so awesome. If that's what facial hair feels like, it feels amazing. [Kathleen laughs] So it was great. I did it one time and I loved it so much, I did it a second time. And what was exciting is I was only the third woman ever in Ohio history to do a bee beard. Because a lot of times typically women had been nervous about it, and had been apprehensive. But I was - I knew it was an opportunity that wouldn't come along often. And

what's great is that now, I think almost every year, our national spokespeople have the opportunity to do bee beards. What's great about them [bee beards] is just that it really captivates people's attention. And you have the opportunity for another person to share, now that they have everyone's ear, to talk more about the value that honeybees play in our society. And then it's also a great demonstration about how docile honeybees are. How honey bees definitely, you know, are not out to get you. They really, once they find out you're not a flower, they're really not interested. [...] It's an awesome way to convey that message without saying a word.

So, I think anytime that I had the opportunity to work with honeybees, whether that was doing a bee beard, whether that was with an observation hive, whether that was going out with a beekeeper. Out to their apiary, going out to their bee fields, and being able to check on their bees with them. For me, that was really exciting because you really get to - there's something magical, I think, that happens when you're working with honeybees. There's a hum, you know, there's just a feeling of calmness and serenity. But yet, a feeling of life. You know, a feeling - and I think the story of the honeybee's pretty amazing. How it takes twelve honey bees to make one teaspoon of honey, which is amazing. And a honeybee only lives about four to six weeks. So really, they all have to work together in order to make this work. To understand how it's amazing how that partnership - how they really - it's just a really, I think, a great lesson for all of us in life in terms of understanding when you work together, even if your contribution is small, when you work together, you can accomplish great things.

FOSTER: I really like that.

HAUSNER: It's true, too! [laughs]

FOSTER: You mentioned some of the opportunities that Honey Queens and Princesses have. What were some of the new opportunities that you got to embark on?

HAUSNER: Oh. So within, while I was the American Honey Princess, or? [Kathleen nods] Well, let's see. I'm trying to think, there's so many. You know, what was great was meeting public officials. That was a really exciting part that I really enjoyed, was having the opportunity to go meet with legislators in different states. I was presented with the keys to the city in several places. But just having the opportunity to talk with them about beekeeping in their area, about how are they supporting their honeybees, about issues that they should be aware of as legislators that are important to agriculture. So that, for me, was exciting. Also working with the other commodity representatives. What I think was great was, as I would go to different places, there would be sometimes a representative of maple syrup or a representative of cranberries. And what was great [was] to be able to talk with other young people who also had a passion for advocating for agriculture. And to be able to talk about, "hey, how can we do a promotion together? How can we both talk about our industries?" And be able to show people how amazing agriculture is, in terms of - You know, I think sometimes, agriculture gets a little bit of a stereotype of not being something that's exciting and full of technology, and really full of life. And when I have the opportunity to talk about honeybees, people are fascinated to learn about not only the biology, but the science, and the physics that exists within the hive. So I think it's really awesome to have that opportunity to unlock that for people and make them get excited about agriculture, and hopefully have a stronger respect for agriculture and for where their food comes

from. And more respect for the people that enable their food to be provided to them. I think it's, that probably is one of the most satisfying things. Especially when you talk with inner city kids, who maybe just don't have any exposure to agriculture in our larger sense. And they only think about a garden as agriculture. So really being able to expand their mind into agriculture and the important role, and where does their food come from? Doesn't come from a store, where does it come from before it gets to the store? And being able to share that.

So I think that's the great thing about being the American Honey Princess, was I had the opportunity to talk in - whether it was in schools, whether it was talking at community centers, with kids that were probably more at risk, and, you know, didn't have good places to go after school - but to be able to connect to some of them and have them get excited about agriculture was really satisfying for me. Having the opportunity to connect with people that were looking at how do you take products of the hive, whether it's beeswax and make that into candles? Or talking about propolis that bees collect in order to seal up their hive, and how you can take that propolis and make different products. Talking about cosmetics that can come out of products of the hive. So really, any chance that I got to talk about not just honey, but also the multiple gifts that honeybees provide to us was exciting for me. And just having the opportunity to meet people of all ages that were interested in beekeeping. You know, sometimes I think people think, "Oh, it's something my grandfather did. So I thought, okay, all beekeepers are old." But really, you see that there's a variety of people whether - what I think is exciting is now, in the times of COVID-19, seeing people that are excited about growing their own foods and starting their own garden. It's awesome to go to a store and see that seeds are sold out because people are planting their own gardens. And they want to learn about honeybees and what impact they can have, and how they can increase their own pollination in their garden. So, I think now is a time more than ever, that people are listening. And we have a great opportunity to build a stronger amount of respect, and also advocacy for, agriculture. Which I think is great to be able to seize that opportunity to talk about it.

FOSTER: What kind of challenges, if any, did you face in your role?

HAUSNER: Oh. Well, there was, there's definitely challenges. You know, there's understanding the challenge of travel, which means you have to be flexible. You have to make sure that you are quick on your feet. You have to know how to take care of yourself. Understanding - I think that's a really important lesson to learn, in terms of if you're going to travel, things aren't always going to go your way. But what are the things that you need and how do you express those to make sure that - because I think when you're eighteen and nineteen, you're really learning your way in the world. And so, it was a great opportunity for me to learn how to tell people what I needed. How to learn what was the things that I could be adaptable around. So that was a really important lesson, I think.

But other challenges. You know, I think people stereotyping and people thinking, because I was a woman maybe I wasn't very well traveled. Or because I was wearing a crown, not really knowing did I know about the industry or not. And so that was one of the most exciting things was to be able to walk up to somebody, confidently reach in there and shake their hand. Because I think the handshake is something that, once you can really jump in and shake someone's hand, I think, it connects you. And to that person, you really can say "I'm a professional, I'm here, and I

want to connect with you." So I think being able to do that, and being able to share information about honey with them, and really find out what they were interested in, and then be able to have an off the cuff dialogue, I thought it was - it instantly changed the tone of how they would approach me. So, I learned early, you have to really - there are stereotypes that are out there, but there are quick and easy things that you can do, [like] handshakes, making eye contact, connecting with people, that can really help to set you apart in terms of having that opportunity to earn their respect and earn their time. And I think that applies, I should say, I think that applies - I've gone on to work in a Fortune 100 company for the last twenty-one years after I graduated from college - and those lessons apply to me every single day of my job. So the lessons I learned from being an American Honey Princess are lessons that I still use today, and I try to convey also to other young women to ensure that their voices are heard, that they have a seat at the table. And that they understand that their contributions are valued.

FOSTER: That's so cool.

HAUSNER: [Laughs] I think so too. I think so.

FOSTER: What is your favorite or proudest memory from your time as Honey Princess?

HAUSNER: Oh. There's so many. Probably, my proudest memory is, is probably- so when I was in Ohio and I did the bee beard, I had lots of photos taken because that doesn't happen every day. And my grandfather took one of those pictures, and he kept that in his pocket over his heart. So, for me, that was something I was just - to have that connection with him [sighs and gets a little emotional] and just to really know, how I was carrying on something that he was passionate about. And I was able to continue that on and continue to pass it on to people that I advocate to about agriculture was really, for me, it's a very touching thing because I have a lot of respect for my grandparents. But I'm also so grateful to them for opening up this world to me because the people I've met in this industry are like an extended family. The people in the beekeeping industry I think are fascinating in terms of how they, you know - you have to be a good collaborator to work in beekeeping because you're constantly looking for how do I connect with a person that owns this pollen source or this nectar source? You have to be somebody that can work with others. And you have to be somebody that's flexible. So I think the people are just so genuine, so amazing, and really an extended family. So I'm so grateful to my grandparents for opening up this world to me, so that I can have a lifelong hobby of advocating for our "angels of agriculture," the honeybee. Didn't mean to cry. Sorry. [Laughs]

FOSTER: No, you're fine! So another big one. What impact did serving as the Princess have on your life?

HAUSNER: Oh, that is a big one. You ask the big questions at the end! [Laughs] Ah, you know, [sighs] it definitely had, being the American Honey Princess, had a profound impact on my life. I think it really combined my love of travel, my love of meeting and connecting with people, my love of agriculture, and my love of really speaking for those maybe who don't have the opportunity to share their message. It combined all of those. And what I found through doing this work was that it was, I think - I knew I wanted to work in agriculture, because I really loved how genuine people in the industry were. And I felt that was important work, because we all need to

eat. But I didn't - What I really loved was seeing the *aha* in people's eyes when they finally got it, when you were able to share with them. And I realized I wanted a career where I could connect with people. So a career where I was taking information and being able to share that. So I think, I know that being the American Honey Princess really gave me the confidence to say that. I definitely think I've had to work up my skills, but I think it helped me to uncover that that is something - one of the skills that is imprinted in my soul is that I want to be able to speak on behalf of those, and really, that can't, and share that message. And really make sure that people provide that respect. So I think being the American Honey Princess really helped me to see that, that was something that is not just a hobby, that is something that I wanted to do as a career.

FOSTER: Have you remained active in the beekeeping industry since your time as Honey Princess?

HAUSNER: Oh, yes. So, [laughs] after about a year after I was the American Honey Princess, our national chairperson for the American Honey Queen Program asked me if I would be willing to help her, to provide our training for the new spokespeople every year. And at first, I was providing, you know, perspectives from someone that had been in that role. What are some things you need to think about in terms of traveling? What are some things in terms of school presentations? What are some things you need to be aware of, in terms of how to be prepared for different situation? And I was so excited to have the opportunity to come back and do that training every year. Then as the years went on, as my career took off in working for John Deere, I came to have more opportunities within John Deere to talk with the media. And that was then when I started to provide additional training for the two new spokespeople in how to work with media. How do you effectively convey your message? How do you understand a soundbite? How do you handle a difficult interview where you don't know the answer? How do you engage with your audience or connect with your interviewer? And so since, basically, since 1998, I have been helping out with the media training that has happened with our spokespeople. So very excited, did that for the last twenty-two years. [Whispers] Wow! It doesn't feel like that long!

I've been supporting there as well, doing different - I do different presentations at state meetings, state beekeeping meetings, talking about how do you promote the industry? How do you train spokespeople? And then I also have the [with emphasis] pleasure of being the auctioneer. That only works for honey. And so basically I get lots of honey to keep my throat ready for auctioneering and I volunteer to be an auctioneer whenever needed at our national conventions. Whether that's an auctioneer for the honey show, or an auctioneer at our big auction, I really enjoy that opportunity to not only raise funds, valuable funds for the program and for our industry, but also to find a way to keep people engaged and get people excited about the industry. Because I think it's, you know, it's a fascinating industry. We have a diverse group of people, we're getting good groups of young people that are excited about really becoming beekeepers early on. So it's exciting to have an opportunity to connect with them. And even though I'm not a professional auctioneer, so I pale in comparison to some of the pros, I help out for a free fee, whenever it's possible. So, yeah. [Laughs]

FOSTER: That so fun.

HAUSNER: It really is fun, actually. And it's strange, because it's - I only auctioneer at honey banquets, or at honey events. So it's very - my skills are very limited to that group. [Laughs]

FOSTER: So, I've got a few more [questions], if that's okay.

HAUSNER: Yeah, absolutely!

FOSTER: Looking back, what did being the American Honey Princess mean to you?

HAUSNER: Hmm. [Pauses to think] Ah. That's a really good question. So, being the American Honey Princess, for me, it was really about [pauses] it was a realization that I had found my passion in terms of advocating for the industry. It was, for me, it was a huge, I would say pivotal moment in my life where I realized that for the rest of my life, I want to be a part of this industry. And I want to dedicate any time I can, not only to the industry, but also for the opportunity to develop young people. Because I know for myself, it had a huge, profound impact in my life. And if I can have the opportunity to connect with young people, encourage them, help strengthen them, help them find their way, and find out what their unique skills are, and really unlock that. You know, I think even if you don't choose to go into a career in agriculture marketing, there's a lot of life lessons that you learn. How to collaborate, how to be flexible, how to really be self-driven. So for me, this experience, the experience of being the American Honey Princess, really, it helped me to realize that being able to connect with people at that point in their life is a pretty pivotal time. And any [audio lapses briefly] can to really impact people, when they're at that point in their life, you've got to grab that. Because if you have the opportunity just to impact one person, you know, it's a huge, huge opportunity to give back.

So for me, it was a huge realization that I can contribute. But also that, I just I realized that sometimes you have to scratch a little bit further to find what's there. And I think on the surface, people think about bees and they think honey, but really when you scratch under the surface and you find, you know, about pollination services and beeswax products, and all of commercial beekeeping, and there's so many more facets to the industry. So, I think, it drove my natural curiosity as well, in terms of realizing that there's always something more. And maybe my journalism side to me was really excited about - learning about the beekeeping industry was my first time to really understand that those stories need to be told. Where we need to be able to uncover what drives people. So I think, for me, this role was the first opportunity I really had to do that. And to dig into something really deeply, and really be able to share it at a much deeper level.

FOSTER: Why has the Honey Queen Program been important for beekeeping and agriculture?

HAUSNER: Well, the American Honey Queen Program has been extremely important because of the advocacy that it has provided. And really, because there's a lot of noise out there, there's a lot of people clamoring for attention. We have constantly [...] people are vying for our attention, whether that's videos, whether that's you look [at] online content, and [snapping fingers] things are really quick, and fast, and grabbing your attention. Pop up ads. So we really need advocacy that can cut through that and really get to people. I think we have a unique opportunity with the American Honey Queen Program, in that having a crown and banner we can cut through a lot of

the noise. And then by having a media trained, educated, professional spokesperson that can speak about the industry, we really are able to not only capture their attention, but also capture their hearts, capture their minds, in terms of really being able to connect. So I think the program is pivotal in being able to cut through a lot of that and get to the heart of the message. I think also, a big part of the program is learning how to talk in sound bites. Learning how to capture what are your key messages? Again, there's so much competition for our attention. And people sometimes are yearning for "okay, you've got to break it down. What's the key message? What do I need to take away?" And I think with the American Honey Queen Program, how we train every person to really pick out three key messages that they want to promote for that year, and think about how you can connect back to that within every discussion that you have. And I think that's so pivotal in our current day. You know, you could have someone up there talking for thirty minutes, or even an hour about beekeeping, and they could be the most knowledgeable person, and people will tune out. But if you have someone up there saying "bees are worth billions when it comes to pollination," then instantly people are intrigued. What is she talking about? So I think the opportunity we have to create the soundbite that we train each of our spokespeople to learn how to do, it's imperative for us to be able to continue to make sure that we are connecting with people to let them know, how can they better support the industry to enable us to have a richer agricultural portfolio, if you will, of food, based on having a strong honeybee population. [Pauses] That's a really big answer. [Laughs]

FOSTER: I like big answers! So what is the most important thing for people to know about Honey Queens and the American Honey Queen Program?

HAUSNER: [Whispers] Wow.

FOSTER: Big Questions, big answers.

HAUSNER: I know, I know! So I think the most important thing for people to know about the American Honey Queen Program is that it's really an advocacy program about how to support one of our most amazing creatures that we have in nature, the honeybee. I think that what's amazing about, I should say, about the program, is really the pivotal role that it plays in terms of educating people about pollination. And educating people about the importance of protecting those pollinators, and the importance of supporting legislation for those pollinators, and the importance of knowing where their food comes from. So I think the program is imperative in terms of being able to connect to a broad audience, because I think when you have opportunities through media, and school presentations, it's much more effective than just a one-on-one conversation. And because the American Honey Queen Program is really trained and also focused on how do we optimize that media opportunity, I think it's a program that's imperative to make sure that our industry is well represented and that we create that advocacy out there in the public for the industry.

FOSTER: Alright, and my last one.

HAUSNER: Oh, so sad! [Laughs]

FOSTER: Is there anything else that you'd like to share with me, or that I forgot to ask you?

HAUSNER: Ah. [Pauses to think] Oh, so many things. Um, yeah, there's, you know. I think [pauses] agriculture is in real need [...] So, if you look at our world population, our world population is growing. If you look at urbanization, you know, in 2010, is when we really started to take the turn, and we've got more people living in cities than living in rural communities. And as you fast forward to 2050, seventy percent to eighty percent of the world is going to live in urban areas. And so, when you think about that, you realize that we're going to have fewer and fewer people that are living in rural areas that are connected to agriculture, and familiar with agriculture. So I think if I could - if there's anything in terms of about the program, I would say, it's really imperative that we continue to support our advocates for agriculture, because as our world is turning, we're going to get more people living in urban areas that are further disconnected from agriculture and we need to ensure that we're continuing to share that message. So that people can, you know, understand how we can best support our food supply going forward. Because we need to have food to survive. So I think being an agricultural advocate becomes even more important. So I would say, I think, although, previously this program was important, I think a lot of people had a base knowledge about the importance of agriculture, because they were maybe one or two generations removed from agriculture. And as we move forward, we're going to see much, much less than that, and we're going to have to produce even more food on even less land. So I think the importance of understanding the role that agriculture plays in our life, understanding how to support agriculture, is going to become even more important. And programs like this, where we have educated spokespeople that can convey that message are going to be even more important to support going forward.

FOSTER: Thank you so much for sitting down and talking with me today.

HAUSNER: Absolutely, Kathleen. Thank you for your enthusiasm and passion for the industry. It's exciting to see, you know, to see you're trying different things with beekeeping. So it was exciting to do that and thank you for allowing me to share my passion for the industry with you as well.

FOSTER: Absolutely. Okay, I'm going to go ahead and turn off my recording.

HAUSNER: Okay.

PREFACE

These transcripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History at the University of Missouri - Kansas City and the Library Archives and Special Collections Department at the University of California, Davis. The recordings and transcripts will be donated to the Library Archives and Special Collections Department at the University of California, Davis for inclusion into the Apiculture Manuscripts collection. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. The transcript may be read, quoted from, and used for research and educational purposes as long as this thesis is properly credited and cited.

INTERVIEWER

Kathleen Foster

INTERVIEWEE

Patty Sundberg

DATE

October 10, 2020

LOCATION

Remote via Zoom

TRANSCRIBER

Kathleen Foster

RESTRICTIONS

None

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Patty Sundberg grew up in a small wheat community in Montana, and began beekeeping after meeting her husband, who kept bees for a college 4-H project. Sundberg served as the Program Chair for the American Honey Queen Program from 1994-2009, and currently serves on the board of the American Beekeeping Federation.

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FOSTER: Okay, we're good. Alright, so Today is October 10, 2020. My name is Kathleen Foster, and I'm talking with Patty Sundberg today about the American Honey Queen Program. Patty, do you agree to be interviewed, have our interview recorded, used in my thesis project, and later archived?

SUNDBERG: Yes.

FOSTER: Awesome. So, just to kind of start and let us know about you, can you tell me about where you grew up?

SUNDBERG: I grew up in Montana in a little wheat community in, north of Great Falls, Montana.

FOSTER: And what was life like growing up there?

SUNDBERG: Pretty simple. [Laughs] Came from a teaching family, my parents were teachers. We did a lot of outdoors activities. And, I don't know, we had a great, great life.

FOSTER: So how did you first get involved in beekeeping?

SUNDBERG: I met my husband in 4-H [club], originally, and then we started dating in college. And he took bees as a 4-H project. So when we started dating and he took me home to meet his parents, we actually drove by his parents' house and went to the bee yard, and I met his bees first. So, kind of knew that if I was going to stay in that relationship, bees were probably going to be a part of my life.

FOSTER: [Laughs] So what were the first things that you did with bees? How did you get started in keeping them?

SUNDBERG: First thing I personally did was build equipment for the bees, for him [her husband]. The frames and the comb-honey boxes, did put comb-honey boxes together. And then when we would go out and work the bees together, I would smoke the bees, and then I would qualify for putting a super on the bees according to his instructions. He was pretty protective of them, and made me learn a lot before I actually had my hands [be?] in them. I actually worked for a commercial beekeeper that he worked for, for a while, also before we went solely on our own.

FOSTER: What was that like, working for a commercial beekeeper?

SUNDBERG: Lots of hard work, but I'd done lots of hard work in all my other jobs, so. I'm a - business management was what I went to college in. Lance went to college in fish, wildlife and forestry. Quit college to go back into bees. And, so, the business side of it was interesting to me, but mostly did lots of physical work. Extracting, long, hard days out in the bee yard. Long, hard days. It's a pretty labor intense job of ag [agriculture].

FOSTER: Absolutely.

SUNDBERG: Yeah.

FOSTER: I mean, we only have two hives, and you work up a sweat on two.

SUNDBERG: [Laughs] Yeah. So, the way it progressed to marketing for us is [clears throat], first couple of years we were in business, we had seven years of drought and grasshoppers in Montana. So we had to get pretty creative on some - how to make money. And we didn't make a lot of honey. So I sold it at little markets. I made honey butter, sold that. And we were active in the Montana State beekeepers hobby group that was not very far away, and helped a lot of hobbyists. That group did a lot of things for fairs, and festivals, and stuff to promote honey. And then both of us coming from a 4-H background, you just kind of do that naturally anyway.

FOSTER: So how did you get involved in the American Honey Queen Program from, starting from there?

SUNDBERG: So, we were members of American Beekeeping Federation. Lance had been a member since he was in high school. And when the hobby group that we worked with in Yellowstone County hosted things to come to Billings, then that's where we started bringing the Honey Queen in. There was a gentleman named Al Bell, who was a member of the American Beekeeping Federation and was very much into promotion of honey and honey bees. And so, he set up the first fair where we brought the Honey Queen into. Then we did the first Northern International Livestock Exposition when they added "Ag in the Classroom" to it. And so, he and I were the only two that helped with that, and we brought in the American Honey Queen for that. And that was over thirty-five years ago. So that was kind of our introduction. I was very - the first active things I ever did was, before I ever went to a conference, was help host the Honey Queen.

FOSTER: So, you ended up becoming the chair of the program. When -

SUNDBERG: Correct. Yeah. [Laughs] How did that happen?

FOSTER: Yeah. [Patty laughs]

SUNDBERG: Well [clears throat], I had actually been asked [pauses], the very first conference I went to, which was in 1987, if I would consider the position. I was like, "Um, no? I only know how to host them, this our first conference. I don't know anything about it." But, the - if you look at the history of the American Honey Queen Program, there haven't been very many chair people. People are, I don't know, maybe afraid of the commitment? I don't know. But - and it's volunteer, and it takes a lot of time. So, I said no, and that I would continue to help [clears throat] on the front end in Montana. And then, another gal did take the position. And her husband got terminally ill. And she needed to take some time off, so I agreed to co-chair for her to finish out the year that she was helping with her husband, and then she never returned. So I ended up being the chair. [Laughs] So that was in [19]94.

FOSTER: And how long were you the Honey [Queen] chair?

SUNDBERG: Fifteen years.

FOSTER: You mentioned a little bit about the history of the program. Could you tell me a little bit more about its history?

SUNDBERG: Well, the parts I know, I can share with you. [Clears throat] You know, when it first started, they used to have to have a [pauses] host go with them. So the chair traveled with the Queen and Princess when they went on things. So that limited how much you could do and how far you could go. And then it expanded from that. When I became chair, we had just - we were doing schools, but we weren't really pushing schools. There was media, but we really didn't push-push media. And we really started pushing both of those. To make sure we got things out in the news, and out in paper, and print. On radio, on TV. The purpose of the program was to promote and educate about honeybees. And so, one of the best ways we felt was to hit more schools. If you can get children more involved, then you're going to get more parents involved. So, one of the things that I focused a lot on was expanding the media and expanding the school presentations that we could do. And we started that by doing them at conference. So we'd have this big conference - because a lot of the members didn't know what the Honey Queen Program did either, our own members. So we would - first time, we went out to schools the first couple of years, and did promotions at those schools. And then we started bringing schools in, to the conference. And through a long process, we also ended up having what we call the "Kids and Bees Program" now in the American Beekeeping Federation. That was a program that started with the Honey Queens.

FOSTER: Oh, wow, I didn't know that.

SUNDBERG: Just another source that could get sourced out. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

FOSTER: So you mentioned a little bit about how the roles have changed for the chair.

SUNDBERG: Mm-hmm.

FOSTER: What were your roles as program chair?

SUNDBERG: Well, when I took over, the chair did everything. The chair organized all the promotions, we lined up all the transportation, we lined up all the house parents where people would stay, or if they were going to host them in motels. We lined up all the brochures. I did all the designing of the recipe brochures. You kind of did it all. And, so. Being - running our own full-time business, and then having three small children at that time [laughs], and trying to do all this volunteer work was pretty intense. So I did what I could. I had some great people. The current Honey Queen chair was one of my Honey Queens. And you just - as I got on farther into it, I started getting more helpers to help with some things.

FOSTER: Did you have a favorite role, a favorite part of it?

SUNDBERG: Hmm. I'd say just working with young women in general. Watching them from the time they compete at the national conference, to when they come back a year later, and how they grow and mature. And just working with them is huge. It was very rewarding.

FOSTER: What was that competition like?

SUNDBERG: So the competition is they have a - and it's very similar still. This year will be different this upcoming year. But, [it involves a] written application. An interview, a pretty intensive interview. Then they're judged for the entire four days of our conference on how they intermingle with people, how they react with people. They're set in positions to do different things, and so they're observed during that. They do a sales presentation that is timed. So it's a good program for, you know, getting a feel for how they're going to be and how, not necessarily their - the knowledge is nice if they have some knowledge on bees, but we can train that. We can teach that. So presence, maturity, and public appearance are big things.

FOSTER: What challenges, if any, did you face in your role?

SUNDBERG: Probably, originally, it was financially. The Queen program struggled a little bit financially. And so I helped change some things within the program. Got a set amount of the American Beekeeping Federation's budget, that would be allocated toward that Queen program. So we had that stable line. Then, from there, we did a lot of fundraising. So [at] our conferences, one of our huge fundraisers, we do a quilt raffle there. And that's a way we can - it's kind of used as a tool for the girls to get out and be able to meet people by interacting and selling, and can start a conversation that way. But we took that from making a couple of thousand dollars to be able to do ten thousand dollars with sales and that, and selling it off. Then we do some auctions. The American Beekeeping Federation also hosts a honey show for - anybody can send to it - and then that honey is auctioned off and that income goes to the Queen program. So while the girls work on the road they actually, at conference, are helping make their budget for the next year or so. But the budget is pretty sound now, we've got it more stable.

And I, also during my reign, we did a complete evaluation of the program. I might have mentioned that there was members that didn't really know about it, there was members that didn't really necessarily think it was that great. Thought it was - and we still struggle a little bit with this - thought it was outdated. You know, a Honey Queen and Honey Princess, why not an ambassador program? And when you're running a program and you're having to deal with those, it can pull down and drag on the program. So I was like, "let's just evaluate it. If it's outdated, let's move on. I'm not afraid of evaluations, let's evaluate it." So we did a pretty serious evaluation on it, contacted members. The Board of Directors was instrumental in running that evaluation. And they found out that it was really well-supported by the members and by non-members of the American Beekeeping Federation, by beekeepers out there that utilize the program anyway even if they weren't members, and how important they thought it was. So once we were able to get that evaluation out and in the public, then it really helps a lot. And we found out there was just little things that people didn't like. They thought that it drew too much attention to just the Queen program at conference. You know, just personal, people's personal views about the program. And we just tweaked those and made it where it hopefully wasn't

offensive to somebody. I think that budget speaks for itself. That's where it turned around and [shrugs] I think all evaluations are good for any program. So.

FOSTER: Absolutely.

SUNDBERG: Definitely showed that the membership wanted the program, so that was good.

FOSTER: How did you talk to those folks who thought that the program was outdated?

SUNDBERG: Usually, you just really try to find out what it is that they're thinking. You know, they have a - I mean, granted when it first started, it was way different. It was very feminist or whatever you want to call it, as a girl going out and doing that. But for us, it's like, if anybody can have a Queen program, it should be the honeybee. They have a queen, she dominates the hive. She doesn't do all the work, she lays the eggs, but it's because of her success that the rest of the hive succeeds. So why not have that in a marketing program? [Shrugs and laughs] So. And the other way you can do it now is, a lot of the boards [of local beekeeping associations] that have tried Ambassador programs didn't work that great. [Laughs]. So.

FOSTER: Do you know why that is?

SUNDBERG: Personally, I think it's a lot of work and a lot of commitment. And you have to have a real drive for that. For the Honey Queen Program, one of the things that we've done is we've really changed our scholarship, also. With the budget getting better, we've been able to give a way better budget [scholarship]. Because you're asking young people to take a year off of their college, and their life goals and go, "okay, we want you to promote honey all year. And we want you to be available to do that." And so, it just changes that commitment.

FOSTER: You mentioned that the program was very different in the beginning. Why was that?

SUNDBERG: I think just because of times. I think women couldn't travel by themselves. I think the opportunities to be on media wasn't as big. I think, I mean, in a lot of ways, it was probably pretty [pauses], [a] pretty big deal for it to even get started. There was a lot of Queen programs, obviously, especially in ag[riculture] boards. You know, there's a lot of ag[riculture] that has Queens for them. And so I think between, you know, the money and the expense of doing that, and then somebody being willing to take that time to do that. And I think the states, as a whole, there was way more state programs. Now we're actually seeing the other side of that, where there's fewer state programs and they're kind of relying on the national program. But we need the state programs to draw our candidates from, so.

FOSTER: Right.

SUNDBERG: [Laughs] Yes. Just goes through its changes.

FOSTER: So, when we spoke on the phone earlier this week, you mentioned that the program made a big shift in the [19]90s. Can you tell me about that?

SUNDBERG: Yeah. So, one of the big things we went to, like I said, was the media, and [emphasis] really letting people know how important media is, and getting out on TV. And we also [emphasis] really focused on, "you guys need" - the Queen and Princess need to have a key message about the industry. And everybody has a different passion in it. All the girls have different passions. So if you want to have your passion be the one that talks about pollination, where every - one out of every three bites of food we eat is due to honeybees, then you focus on that. If you want it to be that honey is versatile, and you can use it for more products, then you do that. But every time you're in front of anybody, you make sure you get a key message out to the media, especially [?] to your audience so that they know that, you know - Before it was more geared toward maybe just the education of the hive, I guess you'd say. "Here's the queen, here's the drone." And we still do that. Don't get me wrong, we still educate on that. But there's so much more that the public didn't understand about bees and their importance. And so that was part of the justification, also, for continuing the program. We need these people out there doing that. [Pauses] And hopefully increasing the consumption of honey.

FOSTER: What is your favorite or proudest memory from your time as Program Chair?

SUNDBERG: Boy, I don't know if I have a favorite. I've never really thought of that. Hmm. [Pauses to think] I guess, probably, one of the most challenging years was a year we only had one contestant, and still made her go through the competition. She didn't just get an automatic win. And how she took that year, and really flourished and grew. I think that was challenging for her and myself. And, you know, talk about people going "wait a minute, obviously we don't need this program anymore. There's only one person who wanted to apply for it." It was a challenging year. But it was rewarding to see how well it turned out. And probably one of the most - it's not just an individual moment, but, all of these young women are [emphasis] extremely successful in their lives as US citizens and continue to promote bees and beekeeping. And, you know, it's just great to see that faith in the young generations as they come up. That they are there, and they continue to strive and do that.

FOSTER: Why was there only one contestant that year?

SUNDBERG: So, well, here's one of the other things that changed was, it was definitely, you don't get to pick if you're going to take this semester off, or - you're going to. And so you find that - at that time, we didn't have very good scholarships, really. There was other scholarships out there for girls that were way better, there still are. If they happen to be in a nursing program or a medical field at all, they can't take a semester off, they get bumped out of their programs. And it was just more of a timing issue of the other contestants just couldn't compete. More than that they didn't want to. Which was something that all the states had been working on was, you know, "we want somebody in our state program that's very professional and going to move on and forward." And when you get that, then you start [pauses] I guess you could say limiting, because they pick other roads that they might be traveling that they want to proceed for their future. If that makes sense.

FOSTER: Absolutely.

SUNDBERG: Yeah. So.

FOSTER: So, you have definitely remained active in beekeeping after your time as Program Chair. You're now a board member of the American Beekeeping Federation.

SUNDBERG: Yep. [Laughs]

FOSTER: How'd that happen?

SUNDBERG: Um, well, it was kind of funny, actually. They wanted me to run for the president position, and I go, "I can't run for president." They're like, "well, why not?" And I go, "I've never served on the board and the bylaws say you have to be on the board." So the next thing I know I was on the board. [Laughs] So. Which is fine. The - as far as the Queen program, though, I still am very active with them. Help with the fundraising, and active on the committee. But yeah, that's how I got on the board.

FOSTER: So, looking back at your time on the Queen program, what has being involved in the American Honey Queen Program meant to you?

SUNDBERG: For me, it's, obviously, I want to support and educate as many people as I can about bees and beekeeping, and honey, and get good information out there. I think it's even more important now, with all the social media availability and stuff. You know, people used to have to go look up things in an encyclopedia, and now you just can click whatever. And there's YouTubes, and there's Wikipedias written. And there's all kinds of things that, do we know if that's a reliable source? Is that good information out there? And so to be able to have a program that's backed by an American federation, that we know is putting the good information out there is very important to me. But the other thing I have a lot of pride in is, I feel that if you talk to the candidates that have served, that every one of them have benefited very - a lot. For their life and their future, from that time of serving. The maturity level that you get having to be - a lot of these [young women] have never traveled until they went to a conference to compete for the American Beekeeping [Honey Queen contest], other than in a car going to different things within their state. So the amount of [pauses to think] independence, the amount of confidence that they build, it's, it's just wonderful to see them and know that we're helping put wonderful, great young adults out into society.

FOSTER: How has the program changed over the years?

SUNDBERG: Well, Anna's taken it - Anna Kettlewell, the current chair - has taken it to a whole other level. She has the girls working almost year-round, which is phenomenal. Before we were only really able to get in fairs and festivals. Schools, we pushed for schools a lot. During my reign [cellphone rings] when we thought of - excuse me - during my reign is when we started working on government and getting them out speaking to the legislators and stuff, and they do a lot of that now. But the amount of increased travel and the professionalism. She's so organized. And we've been able to get the Honey Queen board committee way more active. So she doesn't have to design the brochure, she doesn't have to, you know, she's not doing the media. She has some great past contestants or Queens and Princesses that are helping with that. So yeah, it's just really, in my opinion, it's a growing promotion board, not one that's going backwards.

FOSTER: Why has the Honey Queen Program been important for beekeeping and agriculture?

SUNDBERG: Mostly we've been - so basically, there's the National Honey Board, the American Beekeeping Federation, the American Honey Producers Association, and then the Honey Queen Program that all help, when bad information gets out there, try to help get that turned around to "this is what's accurate. This is what's happening. This is - " Because, it's just like anything else. There's rumors that go around and if we can - and so all of us help do that. But the Queen program we really try to focus on, "Here's honey, here's what it's good for. Here's bees, here's what they're good for. Do you like flowers? Do you like foods? Do you like fruits and vegetables? Do you like variety in your life? If you like all those things, then you like honey bees." And so, ways that you can help honey bees right now, because there's lots of things that are hurting honey bees. It's pretty simple. Find a beekeeper local, buy some honey, and plant some flowers that attract honey bees. And those are all things that are simple that every single person can do. And so we focus on spreading that word.

FOSTER: What would the beekeeping industry be like without the Honey Queen Program?

SUNDBERG: Well, I don't think you're gonna - that'd be hard to evaluate for one thing. [Laughs] I mean, we can - we do, when we do evaluations, we go through and figure out how much every inch of advertising is worth, and how many minutes on the radio is worth, and how much the news is worth. But in the big picture, how does that impact people? That's hard to evaluate. So, we know from words, from people that we've reached out to, that it's been very informational, and they learn a lot, and they like it. I think. [Pauses] I think that it would be - there's already so much misinformation out there, that there would even be more, I think we do a good job of. But it's - that's a tough one to evaluate, I don't know, that'd be tough. [Laughs]

FOSTER: What is the most important thing for people to know about the Honey Queens and the American Honey Queen Program?

SUNDBERG: For me, the most important thing is, is that they get out there, and they are there to educate you, and help you learn more about bees and honey. And, so I think that's really important.

FOSTER: Do you know if there's any other programs like this outside of the country?

SUNDBERG: Honey Queen programs?

FOSTER: Yeah.

SUNDBERG: Yes. Other countries have Honey Queen programs. And they actually have a - there's an international organization called Apimondia that hosts the competition. It is more political. Via you know, which country's most popular, and, yeah. We've been to it a couple times. Not a focus on education, and that. A whole different focus. But yes, there are lots of Queen programs in other countries.

FOSTER: Interesting! [Pauses] That is the end of my questions apart from if there's anything else that you'd like to share with me, or that I forgot to ask you.

SUNDBERG: I don't know if you forgot to ask me anything. I guess my question is, what do you hope that this interview and project will do for the Honey Queen Program?

FOSTER: I hope that it will highlight the importance of the program. Not just for the young women who participate in it, [but also] for what it's done for the industry in terms of promotion and highlighting an industry that's not often seen as agricultural in the same way as something like dairy or [Patty: Right.] crop growing.

SUNDBERG: Yeah, bringing the knowledge to people that honeybees are ag is always kind of intriguing. [Laughs] "Well, what do you think they are? They're, [laughs again] they're not industrial." But, so yeah, that can be interesting. And for sure, for beekeepers, beekeeping is long hours, a lot of work. And for them to be out doing promotion is hard and this is a great tool for them to use as a resource.

FOSTER: Absolutely.

SUNDBERG: So.

FOSTER: Thank you so much for sitting down and talking with me.

SUNDBERG: Thank you and I look forward to seeing your results.

FOSTER: Absolutely.

SUNDBERG: Alright. Thank you.

FOSTER: Thank you.

PREFACE

These transcripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History at the University of Missouri - Kansas City and the Library Archives and Special Collections Department at the University of California, Davis. The recordings and transcripts will be donated to the Library Archives and Special Collections Department at the University of California, Davis for inclusion into the Apiculture Manuscripts collection. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. The transcript may be read, quoted from, and used for research and educational purposes as long as this thesis is properly credited and cited.

INTERVIEWER

Kathleen Foster

INTERVIEWEE

Karen Peterson

DATE

October 21, 2020

LOCATION

Remote via Zoom

TRANSCRIBER

Kathleen Foster

RESTRICTIONS

None

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Karen Peterson spent her early years on a farm, but grew up and attended college in Corvallis, Oregon. Peterson competed to become the first Oregon Honey Queen in 1968, before winning the title of American Honey Queen at the American Beekeeping Federation conference in Portland, Oregon in 1969.

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FOSTER: Alright. Today is October 21, 2020. My name is Kathleen Foster and I'm here with Karen Peterson. And we are talking about the American Honey Queen Program. Ms. Peterson, do you agree to have our conversation recorded, used in my thesis project, and later archived?

PETERSON: Yes.

FOSTER: Awesome. Then we'll just jump right in. Can you tell me about where you grew up?

PETERSON: Yes, I grew up in, basically, Corvallis, Oregon. And my family came out on the covered wagon, and I'm very proud of that. Lots of strong-willed people that chose to do that. And so, I went from first grade through college in one town, which, kind of unheard of then, and as well as even now, so very proud of that.

FOSTER: What was your life like growing up?

PETERSON: Well, we certainly had a lot more freedoms, but also our parents were a little stricter than what you see now. I was telling my daughter the other day how, like in the summertime, if we wanted to visit our friends, we just got on our bike and rode to their house. Or maybe their parents brought them to ours, or, you know, we had parents take us to their house to play. Whereas, kids today, basically, it's kind of scary just to walk down the street by yourself, and so kids have to be ferried with their parents almost everywhere. So we slept outside in the summertime with our dog and looked at the stars. So it was a lot more fun and even, [cellphone noise in background] I was telling my daughter, we used to go get pollywogs. You know, bring them back [cellphone noise] and watch them grow. And so we just kind of had a Huckleberry Finn [experience] growing up. It was really very enriching that way, you saw nature as it really was. Didn't have to get it all out of a book, which then was reinforced in a book later on. So, you know, the practical and the academic part. I was blessed to have both parents and I had grandparents - although both of my grandfathers had died early when my parents were small - and had strong grandmothers. One, shortly after women were allowed to vote, she ran for public office, got it and was in it for years and years, was reelected every year. Got her kids all through college on her own. So, a lot of strength in my family in that respect. I had a good childhood. We had a lot of freedoms [adjusts camera] the kids don't have today. But our parents had rules and we abided by them. You're told not to do that, you didn't do it. So there wasn't a lot of, you know, bucking the situation. You knew there was a consequence if you did. I think in a lot of ways it had, [we] had a lot more respect for each other and other people's opinions than we do now. So.

FOSTER: Were you involved in agriculture growing up?

PETERSON: When I was very little, we lived on a small farm. Although my dad worked as an accountant in the city, he got up early in the morning, milked the cows. And then later on in the morning, my sisters and I would go out. We'd gather eggs and feed the ducks, and the chickens, and the pig, and the cow. My grandmother had a ranch and I can remember when we would go cut - they'd go cut - hay, and I loved riding around on the big truck. And then taking the hay to the baler and then [...] it would be put on the shoots to go up into the barn. But I moved away from that when I was about four or five, but I do have really good memories of it. But I lived in

the suburbs, basically the suburbs, it was like a mile from the city center. Corvallis was really pretty small in those days. It's not now, but that was - so I had early beginnings on a farm, but not later in life.

FOSTER: So how did you get involved with beekeeping?

PETERSON: Well, when I was in college, my father developed a very rare blood disease. My parents were running out of money for two girls to be in college and I had run for some pageants, should we say, and my dad saw an advertisement to run for Oregon Honey Queen and it was there to be their first one. And they had scholarships available. So I did run for it. But I immediately just started studying all I could about bees and agriculture, the impact of bees on agriculture. And I won. I was the first Oregon Honey Queen. Then after that, then I started working with - there was Heinz Honey Company, was like Oregon's largest honey company, and they were not too far from where I lived. And so I would go work in their factory. Then, of course, did a lot of visiting beekeepers. So - Oh! And then since I was living in Corvallis, that's where Oregon State University is, I worked with a Dr. Stevens, he was an entomologist. And I remember going to his lab one day because I was trying to glean everything I could about bees, and I saw my first cockroach. Where he had these experimental trays with different sized cockroaches and breeding cockroaches. And that was my [laughs] first time seeing a cockroach. [Laughs again] So anyway, I did get my scholarship, so I was able to pay for another term. I worked as well. But, my dad - it felt very - my father was, wanted to make sure we just continued on without having to drop out of school. And then of course, then when I got nationals [American Honey Queen], I got another scholarship to pay for my senior year, the rest of my senior year. So I got it. I entered it under financial need. [Laughs] And I was up against women who all were from beekeeping families, so felt very fortunate that I won. Because I was up against a couple that were from, you know, nice families that had been in the business for a long time.

FOSTER: What was that like, being the Honey Queen at the state level?

PETERSON: Well, it was very, very busy. Right off the bat, I was, you know, was going to different fairs. But one of my most monumental ones was right after I was crowned. [Begins looking in her Oregon Honey Queen Scrapbook] And I was crowned in Salem. I was asked to do a presentation - it was a political year. Let me see if I can find a picture of it. I was asked to make a presentation to Robert F. Kennedy. And I know you only know that from history books. But he was running for president [computer noise in background] and he, you know, his brother had been killed in - [pauses to look at scrapbook] Is this it? His brother was shot [19]63. So in [19]68, when I was running - [looking at scrapbook again] Let's see where it's at - I was asked to make a presentation to give him honey on the porch of the courthouse in Corvallis. And so I stood up there with my tiara and my banner, and I presented him with a jar of Oregon honey. And, you know, had a few other nice little words for him. He looked at it kind of funny, and then he smiled and thanked me for it. And then immediately, the Secret Service pull it away from him, as if I had some poison or a bomb in it. I remember standing there and thinking, "what if someone shoots him and they miss and hit me?" I guess very narcissistic here. One week, I think to the day, he was shot and killed in Los Angeles. So, I had that premonition - but I still have a big picture - I've got my scrapbook. We were required to keep these big, huge scrapbooks and I

had little things to say about each one of them. Let's see if I can find it for you. I don't know if you're interested in me holding it up to the screen or not. [Kathleen affirms she'd like to see it] But I made that. Now, on a sidelight there was - I had a chaperone that I think was trying to relieve her early youth, because she got pregnant early, and she had to stay home with this new baby. Well, she has on her [cellphone noise in background] Facebook - we reconnected a few years ago - that [in a deep voice] she made the presentation to Robert Kennedy. And I thought, "you know, the picture shows you didn't, you were standing in the background." But [pauses] it ended up that when I got nationals, that I requested that she not go with me. I just couldn't tolerate her anymore, because she wanted to be in the limelight. You know, I was kind of to go along as her, "here's a face and here's a crown, but I'm going to tell you what it's all about." And so, she was relieved of her duties. And I had another wonderful, wonderful lady that was my chaperone. Well, I'm not finding that picture, unless I pulled it out for somebody to see. You would be able to go into the *Corvallis Gazette Times*, and you'd be able to find that if you looked up "John [Robert] F. Kennedy Visits Corvallis nineteen -" [Looking through her scrapbooks] Okay, this is probably in the other book - "1968." [Continues looking for the photograph] That was probably my most notarized. I mean, not everybody makes a presentation to a running candidate, who then is murdered a week later. So that was quite a thing for me. Well, I bet - If we have time, at the end I'll look through each page, to see if I can find it.

I made a lot of - I worked at the fairs. I worked in a grocery store [in a funny voice] selling Heinz Honey. And because they have a union in the grocery store, they made me join the Teamsters union. So I was a member of the Teamsters union for a short period of time just so that I wasn't competing with somebody? Now, there wasn't anybody else that had my title, and there wasn't anybody else selling honey. So I thought that was really bizarre. So I was a member of the Teamsters, simply so I could, you know, put some honey on a cracker or some bread. And [laughing] that kind of thing. [...] That summer, as state [Honey Queen], I worked - I was working at the medical school hospital in dietetics. And I would start work at six and get off at two. And sometimes I would have to get on a bus, downtown Portland, and go to Salem, or go to Hermiston - I remember, that's in Eastern Oregon - and make a presentation, get back on the bus, get back to Portland, and then be ready to go to work the very next day. It was pretty taxing on me for a while. But I got through it. I got through it. So now, did you want me to talk more about - Oh, I met, one of the people that I just dearly loved was Senator Mark Hatfield. He was very prominent in the sixties. He was the Oregon governor and then he went on to be a senator for many, many years. Very, very well respected by both sides. And what was kind of neat when, at an agriculture convention, he was there. I talked to him briefly and he and my mother went to grade school and high school together. I mean, they were also in the same church youth group. And he remembered my mother very well. So that was very nice.

But I enjoyed going out - there were several beekeepers that really embraced the Honey Queen program. And then of course, there were others that did not embrace it. So the ones who did, I really got a lot of support from them. And I remember, there was a couple, their name was Ramsey. And now both husband and wife used to go out and put beehives out, so it wasn't the traditional [does air quotes, and in a deep voice], "where the man drives the truck and puts the bee hives out, and then the woman's back there, you know, getting ready to clean equipment and process." So they were very nice. And another couple that - the wife worked for the newspaper in Albany, Oregon. And so she was able to get a lot of coverage for the Honey Queen Program.

Then I had one cute picture she took of me holding a little bee out in a clover field. And that was one of my more favorite pictures that they did take of me to promote beekeeping and the pollination process. So even though it was a little fake bee, it was better than trying to say, "you know what a bee looks like? It's a tiny - Well, here's this big bee." And that was good. But I did go to a lot of fairs. I was booked for just about every little fair. It's surprising how many communities have fairs. And then they have their special little things in between. It's, you know, it's maybe like the Tualatin County Fair, but then they have the Crawfish Festival. So you're expected to go there too! But I shared a space - [...] we got a lot of, not notoriety, but we really got out. And I think a lot of that's what you had to do in those days. There was TV and radio, which I did both. But it was also face-to-face with people. And I enjoyed at the fair working lot of times with children, showing them, "where is the queen. Let's try to find the queen. What do we know about the queen? Well, the other bees are around her to protect her. And so let's see if we can find something in there where we see a lot of bees around a larger bee." And so they would be - you've got to perk the interest of the young, and know why they're [bees] so important. And also what are the enemies to bees, whether it's manmade, or naturally occurring. Molds, moths. So, that was enjoyable. It was very tiring at times. But I'm glad I had the experience. I don't regret any of it.

FOSTER: So you were also the National Honey Queen in 1969.

PETERSON: Yes, yes.

FOSTER: [Difficult to hear on audio] What was the competition like?

PETERSON: Well, I'll tell you. [cellphone noise] When I got nationals - originally it was supposed to be in Florida. But, you know, sometimes beekeepers are really headstrong about opinions of things. And so that year they decided to have a split. It was like the North versus the South. And so, I didn't get to go to Florida. Here I am from Corvallis, Oregon, 90 miles from Portland, and they decided to have the nationals in Portland, Oregon. [Laughs] So I went to Portland. Then when I relinquished my crown, I went to San Diego. [Kathleen laughs] And so it was just straight up and down the coast. Now in between, when I was American Honey Queen, I did a lot of things in the Midwest, so, but never anything in the South. There was kind of like the Mason Dixon Line. And so we didn't - They didn't have me go anywhere beyond Chicago, Wisconsin, Illinois. I went to the Dakotas. Oh, I did go to Hawaii. See, it's all West Coast! [Laughs] And I don't think the southern group believed in the Honey Queen Program. Now that is not why they split, there was a lot of other politics that were involved. There are some people that still remember that split. And obviously, years later, they reconciled and became the American Beekeeping Federation again, because there were two associations at that time. But when I went in there was one, when I got nationals [laughing] there were two.

And it was interesting, they certainly didn't have very much money. For the Honey Queen Program. Sometimes I would be at an event, they'd take up a collection to pay for my airfare back home. [Laughing] "We need fifty dollars more! Who's going to put in the money?" And now, I mean, there's so much emphasis and respect for the Honey Queen Program. At least from what I've seen. Because I went well, in [...] in January [20]19 I went back to Myrtle Beach [for the American Beekeeping Federation Conference] - in what, South Carolina? - and there was lots

of money. People talking like "\$10,000, I'll put \$10,000 in," and I'm thinking, here they were trying to get \$110 for me to go fly an airplane, you know, fly back home. So, big changes, big changes. One of the things that came up at [the 2019 convention] - we were to bring our big notebooks. I can just kind of lift up, the size of mine for you. It's huge. [Presents scrapbook to camera]

FOSTER: Oh, wow.

PETERSON: This was just one of them. And so we had to have those in those days, it was all, you know, put everything together. I remember, it seemed like a lot of money to buy the notebooks in itself. And I brought that and people were surprised that I had such a beautiful notebook, But that's what we were - I guess I was scrapbooking early in life. And oh. Here's the picture of me with Robert Kennedy. I'll show you that in a little bit. Oh, where I was going! Somebody said, "Well, when did you get your telegraph?" I said, "Oh, I had kind of forgotten about that." And some of the younger girls [asked], "what's a telegram? What's a telegraph?" Well, they had a thing called the telegraph in those days. We didn't have email, and we didn't have cell phones. So somebody would send a congratulations via a telegram. And so that was a big thing. Now another thing that girls noticed about us older ones, we always wore gloves. And that was a time when we had to wear gloves and if you traveled, we were expected to wear a hat. So things have changed. And, so, anyway. And of course, I would never wear pants unless I was working in the beehives. So, or [in a silly voice] working as a Teamsters union person [laughs] in a store.

FOSTER: Do you remember what that national competition was like?

PETERSON: Yes. We had to give speeches. And then we were graded on how we interacted with people. So we're put into a social situation and moving around to talk to people. And I kind of, I think [pauses] I fit the bill, pretty much for what they were asking. I certainly didn't think in my mind, "let's see, I've got this. I've got - checked that I did this." Just more - I am social, but I also believe in education, and I treat everybody with dignity and respect. I think they told me that I was more mature than some of the other girls. That's probably what helped me get nationals. But I do remember, after, you know, mingling, we had different things that we went to each day. You've heard of the moms that really push their kids to be on rally? Well, [changes tone] we had a rally squad mom in the group. [Kathleen laughs] She was from Kansas. And I remember one morning, I guess her daughter had forgotten something, she knocks on my door. I hadn't put on my makeup. I had, I think, my pajamas on, and she says, "Oh, you sure don't look very good without your makeup." I just left it at that and smiled. I thought - and she was so angry when her daughter didn't win. But I do remember when we were lined up. And they started announcing who was third runner up, second. And I started looking down the line and I thought, "Well, who would it be? Who would it be? They've already named the ones I thought it would be." And then they announced my name. So I really wasn't expecting to get it. I was, you know, honored that I did. And I was really not expecting it. Anyway, at the convention, I remember being - socializing and mingling with people, and you know, speeches, and then our notebook at that time was part of it. Having a good, shall we say history, and I had everything in chronological order. Everything was labeled and framed. So I think - I could just show you this picture here [reaches for scrapbook]. When I went to the nationals in January of [20]19, on the airplane, one of my

notebooks, the binding of one of my notebooks broke. Okay. [Turns scrapbook to the camera to present pictures] This is Robert F. Kennedy, and there I am giving him the honey. The lady in the background was the chaperone. And then here he is, again with that great big Kennedy smile. And those are Secret Service in the back.

FOSTER: That's so cool!

PETERSON: Yeah. So, and there he is looking at the honey. [Laughs] So that was quite a highlight for me. But then he [unclear on recording]. So I mean, I remember when Kennedy was killed, and then his brother is shot. And then I think it was a month later Martin Luther King was shot. So there was all these people being killed that were prominent in our political system at the time. So, anyway.

FOSTER: Did that political context make it hard to be the Honey Queen?

PETERSON: [Pauses to think] I don't think so. It was, that was, there were so many - They think there's rioting now? In the sixties, heavens! There were schools rioting and the big thing was Kent State, where kids were shot. But there was also a lot of mis - kind of like today when they say fake news? One day, we had four black students from Seattle, that were standing on the MU steps. And they were trying to get people to listen to them talk about their issues. Well, on the news that night, they said, [in menacing voice] "there's rioting at Oregon State University." They had all this, you know, blah, blah, blah, blah. My mother calls, and went, "Karen Are you alright?" I said, "What do you mean?" [cellphone noises] She said, "the news says they were having riots on the campus. Are you okay?" I said, "Mother. There were four boys up there talking about their social issues. There was no rioting." So there was rioting in some places where people were killed, and then there were places where people were just talking. So. Yeah.

But I never was scared. Except at the bus stop when I'd have to get on the bus in Portland late at night or arrive there early in the morning. That's the only time I was a little, you know, felt a little scared. But you walk with confidence and you know where you're going and you just go. So. But. [Pauses to think] Yeah, all in all, it was a good experience. I did do well as American Honey Queen, I traveled by myself. Of course, I was 21. But I traveled by myself. I didn't have a chaperone. Now when I arrived somewhere, I had some great people. Now there was a family in Wisconsin that I kept in contact [with for] many years. And when I went in January [20]19, one of the daughters was there. Oh, here's another event that happened while I was American Honey Queen. I'm at Mrs. and Mrs. Henry Piechowski's house, they have twelve children. And they don't have a little refrigerator, they have a milk dispenser in their place to get the milk. You know, it's the big things that you see in the restaurants bringing the milk down. Well, I remember washing my hair, putting it up in rollers. And the big event was the moon landing. So we sat around this little twelve inch black and white TV, watching them land on the moon and take the first moonwalk. So I experienced the death of a presidential candidate, but also the moonwalk. Big, big things in those times. So, yeah.

FOSTER: And you mentioned Mrs. Piechowski. She was the head of the program at the time, right?

PETERSON: Yes, yes.

FOSTER: What do you remember about her?

PETERSON: Oh, she was a dynamic lady. I loved her. I think she knew every political person in the state of Wisconsin. She got me into go see - Newsome? No, no. Anyway, I've still got one of, he gave me this little tile, you know, you can put your hot things on? I've still got it somewhere. I met him and then the Director of Agriculture. She got me to several openings. I remember, there was a name of a dress store, it was called Honey's. And so they gave me the ceremonial scissors that, you know, are probably two feet long to cut the ribbon. And got me onto TV, radio. We just traveled all the time. But she really knew her stuff and was well respected. Not just, "oh, there's Mrs. Piechowski," but "wow, there's Mrs. Piechowski." Then her daughter, her first name escapes me right now, she's very involved with it and I even think there's grandchildren that are involved with it now. So, yes. The daughter that is involved, she remembers us sitting around [laughing] that little TV watching the moon landing. So, yeah, that was a good trip. That was a good trip.

And then we went to Wisconsin Dells. And another little thing on the side. I remember sitting on the boat in the Dells, I don't know you're familiar with the Dells? [Kathleen shakes her head] It's a beautiful - well, it's landscape, park. You can rent boats and go out on this huge lake. I remember this, we sat across from this little boy and his mother. He just was glaring at me and he wanted my phone number, he wanted to be able to write to me. And I said, "That'll be fine." So I did. And then, that was in the summer. Well, around Christmas time I sent him a Christmas card. And I heard back from the mom telling me that she was so glad I wrote because he was very ill. [Visibly upset] And I never heard back from him again. And I thought, I didn't want to say, "well does he have cancer?" I suspect he probably got leukemia, and he - I never heard from him again. But then another little boy, at the nationals in San Diego, he came knocking on my door, [in a funny voice] "Can I come talk to you?" [I said] "Oh, sure." [And he asked] "Do you have a boyfriend?" He's about eight years old. I said "no, I don't." [The boy replied] "Will you be single when I'm old enough to marry you?" [Laughs] "Well, I don't know about that. You know, you've got a lot of, probably, kids to be around your age." [And the boy said] "But I want to marry you." [Laughs] And his family let him write to me and my mother suggested that I think of him as a little brother. Well, I'm sure that didn't go over very well. But it finally, it faded away.

So yeah. This is a lot of different sidelight things that go on when your Honey Queen, it isn't just show up with a smile and talk or give a food demonstration. You never know what kind of questions people have, or hopefully you spark enthusiasm for them to use more honey in their food processing. In the sixties, we probably didn't use much honey in cooking. It was really promotion of Hawaiian sugar for everything. But now, I mean, starting probably the seventies, we started putting more emphasis on healthier foods, healthier living. There was still that dynamic, there's "Oh, just buy this," you know, it had lots of preservatives in it. Whereas, then there's the other side is that gradually we've gone, where now we call it organic. So anyway, I think we're trying to eat better than we did in the sixties and the early seventies. So. But yes, I did a little pamphlet for recipes. This is another thing. They asked me to gather up my recipes, well I did. And when I turned them in, they said, "Oh, no, you've got to format all of this." I had - and I mean, there was no such thing as a computer, then. And so I'm having to type up things,

trying to get them into the space that they wanted. Cut and paste. And then turn that in. And then somebody retyped it. That part I was not very happy about. I was not happy about that at all. I thought, you know, this really is not my job to be an editor, to be the journalist and an editor for it. You want my recipes? Here they are. And you get professionals to put it together. But I was compliant. I did what they asked me to do. So. Yeah.

FOSTER: What were some of the other things you did as national Honey Queen?

PETERSON: Hmm. Well, I did a lot of - like I said, I had a lot of things that I had to go to. It was promoting honey, again, going to work in stores to put Honey on a cracker or rolls. Often I had a little oven with me and I would just, you know, heat up some rolls. And then going, again, going to all of the fairs. [Clears throat] Now, I did go to California one time and that's where I met the Secretary of the Agriculture in California in Sac - excuse me - in Sacramento. And from there we went to a convention over in Reno, Nevada. And as a sidelight, we went to where they filmed Bonanza. You've probably heard of that. And that was a big, big show in those days. And I loved that. It was my first time to gamble. I got five dollars in nickels and I put that in, and when I started to lose, I stopped. [Both laugh] But that was mostly meeting people. Oh, California doesn't have a Honey Queen Program, but they had a Honey Advisory Committee. And I think it probably still is. And I met a lady that I stayed friends with for a long time, because I was a home economics major and she was too. Her emphasis was dietetics and so she was on the Advisory Board. Fiery little girl. But we got along great. And she wrote a lot of honey books, honey recipe books. So, she knew her way around, too. Which people have the most influence for whatever and for what we wanted to accomplish. But, you know, meeting the Secretary of Agriculture. California, it's not just Hollywood. It's a huge agriculture state. It's [a] huge agriculture state. Most of, basically east of Los Angeles, is all agriculture. In fact, this weekend, I think I'm going to go to the apple festival up in the hills. And then a little farther east of me here in Palm Springs, probably about twenty miles away, that's where mostly your lettuce and crops are grown. Then you go and head north, all of San Joaquin Valley, that's all crops. In fact, you drive down the freeway you see probably several hundred miles of almond trees. Which used to be orange trees, now they're almond trees because everybody wants to drink almond milk. So it was a big deal to see the Secretary of the Agriculture for that area. And I don't remember too much else. But it was jam packed with activities. And so, California obviously supported the northern version of the American Beekeeping [laughing] Association.

FOSTER: Were there any other particularly memorable experiences that you had on the road as Honey Queen?

PETERSON: On the road to what?

FOSTER: On the road as Honey Queen?

PETERSON: Oh, on the road. Let me look at my book, see if I remember some of this stuff. [Takes a few moments to look at her scrapbook] Oh! Well, one thing that was really nice, they felt, at the Oregon level, that you should be refined to be this. And evidently, they thought I was trainable. And so they sent me to modeling school. I remember, I really loved the owner, she was just fantastic. So I ended up getting a few little gigs of modeling after that. Nothing, I

couldn't take pay for it. But, you know, I would be, "here's the Honey Queen, and she's modeling blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." So, that. [Looks through scrapbook] Oh, yeah, here's some things from WEAU TV in Wisconsin. Another letter from the Executive Secretary for [turns away from camera, difficult to hear]. Anyway, I met so many, I mean, governors, and - [looking at scrapbook] Oh, I'd forgotten about this! I did go to a camp for disabled children. That was really interesting. I never - it was in Wisconsin. I really don't know what the connection was. But maybe it's because nobody ever goes to visit them. I'm looking at this picture now, it was Camp Wawbeek. And there's several children in wheelchairs. I'd kind of forgotten about that. And then from then on, we traveled to other places. But that Wisconsin trip was really concentrated. And in Minnesota. [Pauses] I would meet some of the other Honey Queens that were the state Queens when I would go visit. I'm looking at this, the girl from Minnesota was a very cute girl and a nice lady. Of course, I always had to give a talk to somebody. And, let's see. [Pauses to look through scrapbook]

Oh! I remember meeting Tom McCall. He was the governor of Oregon when I was American Honey Queen. Back in the day, he was very controversial. And he said, you know, he came from his heart whether you wanted to hear it or not. But I had a lot of respect for him. And there was a lot of problems going on with Californians coming up to buy farmer's land at, "Oh, you know, I'll give you \$10,000 for your hundred-acre farm." Well, it got to be a real problem because people were losing so much money. And \$10,000 wasn't going to go very far. So he put up signs at the border [saying], "if you're a Californian, don't come to Oregon. You're welcome to come and visit, but go home." Those were [laughing] right on the border. So that led to some laws and legislation after that. So I had a standby recipe, they were called "honey candy bites." They were pretty easy to make, they were with Rice Krispies and honey. And I brought along like a little cooker, to heat it, because it had to be heated. And I remember one time, I couldn't figure out why it wasn't heating up, I forgot to plug it in. [laughs] And I had my little cheat sheet of all these little facts to use [laughing] when I was talking. And so, that is [looking at scrapbook] about it. I think, the little gal that I met - Yes, I'm looking at - the girl that I met in Minnesota when I was American Honey Queen, she was the next American Honey Queen. I'm looking at her [picture] right now. We were visiting some places in San Diego. So, she was very outstanding.

FOSTER: What were some of the challenges that you faced as the Honey Queen?

PETERSON: I think scheduling, trying to get to all the places. And sometimes, you know, I was afraid to say no. And so I finally, for my own sanity, had to say no to some of the things. I cannot physically be here at ten and there at twelve when they're 120 miles apart. That probably was quite hard, with those kinds of challenges. And then my chaperone was an issue. Like I said, I finally, I talked with my parents, and of course, they were always saying "just be nice." But I talked with my modeling school teacher, and she gave me some tips in trying to talk to her about, "well, this is what I'm comfortable doing. And these are the things I'm not comfortable doing." And then finally, I think the president of the Oregon [Beekeeping Association] had to talk to her about [it]. Because he started noticing that she tried to be the shining person and let her be the Queen. And, I think that was the heart - that really had more heartache on me sometimes than anything else, was she wanted it really for herself because she missed out on her late teens and early twenties. You know, because she was tied down with a child. And, so. At least I had

support on all sides for me. And like I said, then I finally said no, and [...] when I won American Honey Queen, we were to leave for Hawaii. I just told all involved, "she's not going to be my chaperone. She's not going along. She will not go with me." And I stood up for myself. And she didn't. So, she could have paid her way to go. Because if she went as my chaperone, she got a free trip. Yeah. So, but she and I [...] when I went to the conference in [20]19 - somehow, I ended up talking with her. She wasn't there, but she had called and you know, we were very cordial to one another. Kind of picked up where things should have been. And that was good. That was good. Anyway.

FOSTER: Did you ever experience people who didn't understand your role or thought negatively of the pageantry part of it?

PETERSON: Yes. Oh, yes. There were people that, [puts on an angry voice] "we don't need a Honey Queen. You don't need anybody like that. You know, we can just sell this honey." And they just didn't see the value in it. I mean, there weren't a whole lot that approached me about that. But there were some that did approach me, just said that "I don't believe in this program." And, you know, you just tried to tell them [...] "we're getting out to the public and that's what it's about is getting the word out to the public about the value of it. And it's also helping tell people and train people, [about] the value of your work." So again, it's put[ting] the onus back on them, we're helping you with your work and educating people about the value. I mean, if you want to be continuing to eat pears and almonds the rest of your life, we have to have the bees. We can't be out there pollinating each one of those little blossoms. There were certain areas, it seemed like certain areas that really supported it, and it was agriculture areas. But then people that maybe weren't, I take that back, it kind of was drawn down the line. Now people that were processors, they supported the Honey Queen Program because we were cheap to go out and work, in a store and promote their brand. So that was good for them. And then going to, you know, working the fairs was really good. A lot of people were approached there. So, and then of course, a little TV and some food demonstrations on TV. Or a food demonstration in the booth. And I did food demonstrations for the beekeepers, too! So, yeah.

But yeah, there were people that did not believe in the program. You know, "we don't need that." For some people, if anything is *foo-foo* you don't need it. From their perspective, if it's *foo-foo* we don't need it. I wasn't out there wearing, you know, some kind of a costume to get people's attention. That brings up something else. When I got Oregon Honey Queen, there was somebody that wanted me to dress up like a bee and ride on the back of their truck. And I said, "I'm not going to dress up like a bee." They wanted me to wear bee wings and some other thing. And I said, "I'll wear a yellow dress with my crown." And I happened to have a dress that had kind of [pauses, mimes sleeve shape] there was a very flowing sleeve. And that's what I wore. Because I said, "this is not about being in a costume." And I did sit on a chair and drive on the back of their truck. You know, they did the best they could to decorate it. But it was a lot nicer to drive me in a car. I didn't feel safe, number one, sitting on a chair on the back of a truck. Because if you had to stop fast, there's only one way to go. [Laughs] And luckily I didn't have any falls [laughing] from that. But I think it was such in their infancy, people were just going to do anything they could if they believed in the program. So, there was pluses and minuses in that.

FOSTER: How do you think your experience is different from some of the later Honey Queens?

PETERSON: I think more money was allocated for the program. So they didn't have to, you know, have everybody put money in the hat. There'd be money to get me somewhere, but not get me back. So I think there was - it started growing and realizing there is value to this program, monetarily to them, if we educate the community. Whether it be through food or through [pauses] other uses of honey. They talked at one time trying to do some salves. Well, people weren't into salves in [19]69. But now they are. There's a lot of people making honey salves, scrubs, you know, moisturizers with honey. There's so much more. And I think those early days really started opening up some minds for that. I think the early days, you know, we're probably like the pioneers, but you hang in there and you just keep moving forward. And, then that's what we did. Now, did I answer that enough for you?

FOSTER: Yeah! Any answer that you give me is enough of an answer.

PETERSON: Oh, okay. Alright.

FOSTER: What was your favorite memory from your time with Honey Queen? Either state or national.

PETERSON: [Pauses] I always go back to that little boy on the boat. He was so sweet, and very caring. And I just always wonder, whatever happened to that little boy? But also on that trip, sitting there in my rollers watching the moon landing. [Cell phone noise in background] You know? Then as - actually [pauses to think] - I mean, those really stand out. And then, I think being at the Oregon State Fair one time, I spent quite a few hours there, and had a lot of children around that were curious about the bees because we had a demonstration hives. That was good. And talking with people about different things you can do with honey. Those were good. [Pauses to think] Oh, gosh. I think, I remember, [best?] things. Well, I went to Hawaii. That's where I turned twenty-one, so I was able to have a drink with those others that were over twenty-one, which were most everybody. And going to - we did go out to the pineapple fields. Then we did see some sugar cane. But we really weren't going to emphasize that too much. Then going to the - I know this doesn't have anything to do with honey - but we went to the Polynesian Cultural Center. I remember that very, very well. The different groups of Polynesians, then they would present their dances and had the big luau there. But I think my trip to California as American Honey Queen, meeting those officials, and then also the ones in Wisconsin and Minnesota. And that was very, very, very memorable. Those main trips. And Oregon, just, you know, going to everybody's little fair. But you're reaching out. You never know, that one person, you may have a big impact on their life. Maybe somebody I talked to became a beekeeper. Maybe somebody went into nutrition, and really their emphasis is going to be the use of honey and research in that area. So, getting out and just talking with the public is so important.

FOSTER: What impact, if any, did serving as the Queen have on your life?

PETERSON: Well, it gave me a lot of confidence to speak in front of people. I really hadn't been in that role before. And so, it was a real quick, quick training to start showing confidence and not act like you're scared. And even if you are, you don't show it. And so, a confidence builder. And studying up on things so that you are not making up something that you think might be true, you

need facts to back it up. So, that was something I really learned quickly. And statistics. And the statistics of certain things that are associated with the food or with bees. So, learning to get facts to back up what you're going to talk about. And confidence.

FOSTER: Have you remained active in the beekeeping industry after your time as Honey Queen?

PETERSON: Kind of on and off. Now in the very beginning, I moved from Oregon to take a job in Los Angeles. When I graduated from college, I went to work in corporate management with Penny's. And so I was there for about seven years and then moved back to Oregon. And then I started getting kind of involved with some of the people that I'd been associated with, even socialized with them. And then [sighs], they had a couple of people [Honey Queens] after me. Then they dropped it [the Honey Queen Program] for a while then they started to bring it back. And I remember, they had one girl that couldn't get along with her chaperone. We had a little trend here. The chaperone was very religious, and the girl they chose was a little more free-thinking. And they clashed all the time. So the girl finally quit. And then they asked me to be on, to be a judge, for another one. And they got somebody that was good. For a while. But then it just phased out. Nobody really, you know, there wasn't the support. I recall, by then, some of the key players had gotten older, and just didn't really get in there and support it. And they weren't bringing up people that did support it. So it kind of fell apart. So yeah, I don't know if it was - maybe it only lived for about ten, fifteen years. Then after that I [pauses] - Oh I know. They wanted to do - I collected honey pots. Every time I went somewhere, somebody would give me a little honey pot. And so there was a group that came to take pictures of all my collection. [Coughs] I really don't know what they did with that. So, but I still have them. And one that I was given was at nationals. It was a Wedgwood that was from England, and then they said there were only a few made. And so I'm very honored to have that. So it's a lot of value in it to somebody who's interested in beekeeping or bees. [Coughs] Sorry. But it has more value to me, you know, not a monetary [value]. Yeah, I don't know what - it just kind of fizzled out because it really didn't have the support and they weren't bringing up people that supported it. Bringing them up through the line, shall we say?

FOSTER: Looking back, what did being the American Honey Queen mean to you?

PETERSON: [Pauses] Oh. I felt - felt honored. I really felt honored. And it offered a platform for people to actually listen to me. Because if I just was, you know, Karen Peterson, trying to tell you about honey, it wouldn't be as meaningful as somebody that has been selected to represent their national organization. That has more credibility than just somebody standing at a booth, or at the grocery store, handing out honey. There's more credibility when you have the support of a national organization behind you. And you're there face-to-face with somebody. I think having that support was very meaningful.

FOSTER: Why has the Honey Queen Program been important for beekeeping and agriculture?

PETERSON: Because they have that person that's out there. And, I mean, certainly they [beekeepers] can't get around all - think about it. Summertime, where are the beekeepers? They're working in the fields or moving their hives. They certainly don't have time to be on the

road between fairs. And they certainly don't have time to go do TV and radio to be talking about it. They're working their backside off. And so they need a spokesperson. Not maybe - you know, it could be the Honey Queen, but it can be some other people that are speaking up and promoting it. Rather than - I mean, they can't do it all. They need a helper. And being the American Honey Queen, or a state Honey Queen, you can be doing that moving around. And now, since we're in this pandemic, I know [...] the national Queen has been doing a lot of Zoom. I even talked to her about my grandson. When he was down here working, one of his little lessons was about bees. So they had to do some - and so then we made a little thing with some rocks and water in it so that the bees could come and drink water. And I suggested to her, I said, "get a hold of the schools. If this is probably one of their main science things for second and third graders, see if you could do a Zoom with some of the schools." And I know that she has done that. But she's done other Zoom meetings.

So again, is the beekeeper going to be able to have time to do that? Probably not. Some would be comfortable doing it and others are not comfortable with it. Is an entomologist going to have time? Maybe at the convention, they'll have time for it. But they're usually doing research at a university. And, then there are people that are kind of in between, that maybe have other jobs. And they have a hobby. Now they can do some promotion work. But I think all of it combined helps. But the beekeeper in the spring, and the summer, and fall? They don't have time to be going and talking about the importance of bees and pollination. And what is society doing to kill the bees? And how are we going to stop certain bees coming from other countries? I mean, all those questions. Now the entomologist can help with that. But [as Honey Queen], you're kind of on the front line and your time is more available or accessible than what the beekeeper can do. So. [Pauses] I believe that, you know, there's a place for everybody. And I know that when I did work at the fairs, we usually did have one or two beekeepers there. Or maybe their wives were there. Because otherwise they were out working the fields or driving a hundred hives to someplace, or going to pick up a hundred hives and move them to somewhere else. So, yeah.

FOSTER: What's the most important thing for people to know about the Honey Queens and Honey Queen Program?

PETERSON: [Pauses] You're going to be out in front of the public. And what you say and do has an impact on people's thinking of honey, and the people in the business. So you always want to have your best foot forward, and always treat everybody with dignity and respect. [Pauses] I think that's kind of [it] in a nutshell.

FOSTER: So, my very last question. Is there anything else that you'd like to share with me or that I forgot to ask you?

PETERSON: What got you interested in bees? Who is the person that got you interested in bees?

FOSTER: So, my grandmother always used to tell me about her Aunt Lizzie, who was - she did everything. She kept bees, she butchered her own meat, she raised a huge family. I never met my Aunt Lizzie, my Great Aunt Lizzie. But she was my hero. And, so I never got the chance to keep bees or anything growing up. But when I moved out here [to Kansas City], I started working at an urban farming organization, just right in the heart of the city. And there was a fella who lived

in our neighborhood and said, "If you guys give me the space, I'll give you the bees to keep bees at your little urban farm." And so last summer, we got our first chance to keep bees and I fell in love. So when I started my master's program, I thought to myself, "I'm going to study women who keep bees," and I found there was not a whole lot [of research available on the topic]. And so in my research, I found the Honey Queen Program and - what the women who have worked in the Honey Queen Program have done to promote the industry and to teach people about bees and beekeeping, and the importance of it. Just - it blew my mind. And so [Karen exclaims 'Yes!'] talking with you guys has been just the - it has been the highlight of my whole year. It's been really exciting for me.

PETERSON: Good. Again, it's just reiterating. It's somebody that can speak for the industry, when the industry doesn't have the time to go talk to the people.

FOSTER: Absolutely.

PETERSON: So yeah. Good. Well, that's wonderful. So what do you plan to do after your master's degree?

FOSTER: Not sure yet.

PETERSON: [Laughs] Well, maybe you go work for the American Beekeeping Federation.

FOSTER: That'd be fun. Maybe they pay me to do oral histories!

PETERSON: [Laughing] Maybe, don't count on it.

FOSTER: I appreciate you sitting down to talk with me.

PETERSON: Oh, I appreciate you, Kathleen. It's been delightful. So, I wish you well in your endeavors and your master's program. I think that will be beautiful. And I hope you get a good paying job out of it.

FOSTER: [Laughing] I hope so too!

PETERSON: Okay!

FOSTER: I'm going turn our recorders off.

PETERSON: Okay. Bye. Bye.

FOSTER: Bye. Thank you again!

PETERSON: Thank you. Bye, bye.

PREFACE

These transcripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History at the University of Missouri - Kansas City and the Library Archives and Special Collections Department at the University of California, Davis. The recordings and transcripts will be donated to the Library Archives and Special Collections Department at the University of California, Davis for inclusion into the Apiculture Manuscripts collection. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. The transcript may be read, quoted from, and used for research and educational purposes as long as this thesis is properly credited and cited.

INTERVIEWER

Kathleen Foster

INTERVIEWEE

Virginia Walker

DATE

October 24, 2020

LOCATION

Remote via Zoom

TRANSCRIBER

Kathleen Foster

RESTRICTIONS

None

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Virginia Walker (née Cox) was born in 1959 and grew up in Shelley, Idaho, where she and her ten siblings helped with their father with his beekeeping business, Cox's Honey. In 1977, she approached members of the Idaho beekeeping industry about starting a state Honey Queen Program and in 1978 she became Idaho's first state Honey Queen. Today, Walker still supports her family's beekeeping business and continues to educate the public about the industry as Cox's Honey Queen.

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FOSTER: Okay, so today is October 24, 2020. My name is Kathleen Foster and I'm here with Virginia Walker. And we're talking about her time as the 1978 Idaho Honey Queen and the American Honey Queen Program. Mrs. Walker, do you agree to have our interview recorded, used in my thesis project, and later archived?

WALKER: Yes, ma'am.

FOSTER: Awesome. You don't have to call me ma'am.

WALKER: [Laughing] Okay. Kind of a Southern thing, huh?

FOSTER: So to get started, can you tell me about where you grew up?

WALKER: I grew up in a little town called Shelley, Idaho. It's actually the capital of potato producing of all Idaho. And, in fact, my school has a mascot of the potato. My dad was a beekeeper there. And he started with a log house and each time a kid was born, he built on. And we all worked in the beekeeping industry with him. So.

FOSTER: What was that like, growing up there?

WALKER: It was a very, I think, perfect American dream. You know, you just, everybody knew everybody in the town. You walked to the school. Of course, you had all four seasons there. So you shoveled snow, and yet in the summertime, you had water fights and everything. And everybody - because it's close to Halloween [at the time of our interview], I was thinking about this - we all, everybody, came out walking in the town to go trick or treating. Everybody. All ages. We were all walking in the town. Very small. Everybody knew each other. I come from a family of, there's eleven children, I'm the baby of the family. And so, a lot of expectations there, because, "oh, you're so-and-so's little sister" or "oh, you're the daughter of," you know. So there was a lot of expectations. It was a faith town, of many church-going people. So there's a lot of high values there of family, and community, and hard work. I think hard work was a big thing of the town. Everybody hired teenagers and young kids to work because that's just what you did.

FOSTER: So you mentioned that your dad was a beekeeper.

WALKER: Yes.

FOSTER: Can you tell me a bit more about growing up in a beekeeping family?

WALKER: I didn't know there was anything different [laughing] [than?] a beekeeping family. When I came into the family, of course, that was his [her father's] most productive years. The [19]50s were really good. I was born in [19]59. And so a lot of pictures are me, I'm actually - he should have been retired because he was fifty-eight when I was born, but he just loved to work in the bees. So I remember going out with him to the bee yards. And I didn't necessarily work in the bees when as a little kid, but I would just play by the roadside while he did the beekeeping. But I knew what was going on. As I got older, I had jobs I had to do and we weren't paid. That was just, you just did it because you are part of the family. As I got older, of course, then a little

payment came in. Like "oh, here, you can have something to go and, you know, go to the hamburger joint down the street," or something like that. But it was never - I wouldn't say it was where there was a bad feeling that you were being like, child labor or anything like that. He made it fun. We worked hard. We'd go to the bee yards, we worked hard, and then we'd go afterwards swimming in the hot pools or something like that. We never worked on Sunday, though. We always took that day off to have family time. So I appreciate, I have good memories of that. And I actually had fun with the beehives. I would build houses with them. When my sister was working on the frames, I would set up the beehives to be like little stands and we'd do go-go dancing with my friends. A lot of people would come by, and I remember working and selling the honey in our front - we had a honey stand out front - we'd sell some of the honey. And people would kind of say, "aren't you too young to be selling this [laughing] to me?" But I was really good at math and I loved the exchange of money. I think I picked up a bit of my dad's entrepreneurship because I really enjoyed - I could sell ice cubes to Eskimos. I mean, I loved selling things. I just really enjoyed that. Almost more than the actual beekeeping. I think each of my siblings, we took a spot that we liked. So.

FOSTER: How did you get involved with the Idaho Honey Queen Program?

WALKER: So, I was three years old. My dad took me to Texas, it was San Antonio, Texas. There was the national beekeeping convention. He went every year, he usually represented Idaho. I was three, I was very impressionable and of course, the Queens were walking around. The American [laughing] Honey Queen and the state Honey Queens, and I was just in *amorado* [love]. I wanted to be one of them since I was three. Idaho never had a program. And so I approached them in 1977 with the possibility of doing that. So they set up - my brother at that time, one of my older brothers, was the president of the Idaho honey industry. He, with another lady, they set it up and I was interviewed, and I did a talent even! I played the organ! Woo! [Laughs] And they said, "okay, you're our first Idaho Honey Queen." And they got me a sash, a crown, and had my pictures taken, and made a brochure. And I went around to all - of course, being [a] rural town, we all had parades and everything. I went to every parade, every fair, and promoted honey. Of course, I met some cute boys along the way. Of course [laughs]. A unique story is, when I was twelve years old, my mother was asthmatic and she was stung by a bee when we were going in the truck to go shopping. And she had an anaphylactic shock. And I didn't really know what was happening, but she stopped breathing, we brought her back home. And my brother - everyone tried to give her the bee venom shot, at that time it was a shot kit, but nobody knew how to use it. They didn't have epi-pens or anything. And then she stopped breathing, my brother just picked her up and put her in the car. And my sister-in-law gave her mouth-to-mouth all the way to the hospital. They kept her alive for about three days and then she passed away. And I had a hard time at first believing it really happened, because it's just such a shocking experience. Traumatic for that age. But when I got a little older, I decided to turn that around and make it a sweet experience instead of - and I could actually help other children who had lost parents be strong, that you can overcome it. And it is ironic that it would be beekeeping, but I thought, it's nobody's fault really. It wasn't my dad's, because he thought he got all the bees out of the truck. And I decided to use it more of a sweet experience, and that you can overcome hard things and make a good thing out of it. I think my mom would be really happy that I'm promoting honey, that I actually learned more about the product and the bee itself, and made it more of a positive thing than a negative. Long. [Laughs]

FOSTER: Well I remember from - I watched your [YouTube] videos - I remember your mom was also really involved in the marketing.

WALKER: Yes! She was very clever. She always had clever ideas. I think, I'm not trying to brag, but I got some of those ideas too. Like things will pop in when I'm in the shower, or I'll get up in the morning and think, "I need to do - this is how I need to promote it." And she came up with the - things were in a lull there in the sixties, were a little tough years. And it [honey] was not selling as well. And she said, "maybe we should make like a gift box." So she's the one that came up with our gift box, that still sells today. It's still our number one seller. And she also came up with the slogan or logo, or whatever you want to call it, "Let us be your honey," and put a bee in there with honey. Or, "We love to serve you honey." And so my dad had signs made up. I mean, back in those days there was electrical signs, you know, with the neon and everything. And people remember those signs. We had a lot of signs that went up. So that's how they - It was like a landmark. We lived on the Yellowstone Highway before the freeway went in. So everybody had to go by our honey stand. And that's where a lot of business became. Also, I don't know this is a good time to interject, but my dad came up with creamed honey. He had always tasted it and he wanted to perfect that. And so it was in the forties that he did that, and so we were known for our creamed honey. That's the biggest seller. In fact, there's been two taste tests just this year given, and it was voted number one for the creamed honey. So I had to put that out there a little bit. Amazon was one of them, All Spices and Sprouts was the other taste test. So, kind of interesting, it's still, today, that's what it's known for. But my dad is most proud about that because he went and tasted other people's, he did all these different things. But he took an old mill, like a wheat grinder mill. And he turned that around, so it went through it just whipped it super fast. We still use that same mill. That's one of my number one YouTubes, actually, is going home and visiting it. I was afraid something might happen to it. So I thought I better record how they do it. And it's still the same mill. And it feels just so awesome to go back and go "I'm home, they're using the same thing." Anyway.

FOSTER: That is so cool. [Pauses] So how did you turn those experiences of your family into the Honey Queen Program? How did you use those experiences in your role as Honey Queen?

WALKER: So, I would go around promoting the honey, and back then it wasn't as popular to save the bee. But I would educate people because I think a lot of people had misunderstandings. They didn't really know the real story behind how honey was made, and how bees came in to the part of it that, if we didn't have them, we couldn't live. And so I don't think it was as popular back then. But I did a lot of taste testing. We had an observation hive, where they could observe the bees. And I would go into the schools, which I still do today - of course, I substitute teach, but I also will, upon asking, I'll go in and tell the kids about bees and educate them that we need them. And we need to be very wise with our earth. It rings a bell because today it's very popular. But I used that, during that time, to educate people because they weren't educated. They didn't see the role. A lot of people didn't know cooking with honey was actually such a thing. And they didn't know how to do it. So that was a kind of a cool thing, that I could waltz in and I - I do love to bake. That's kind of my forte, is baking. And so I know how to make it work. And I teach people just the basic things like lowering your temperature, extending the time. When you add honey, you've got to increase your dry ingredients. It's kind of like chemistry. And I never took

chemistry in high school, but I found out I love it. I always liked mixing things and coming up with new recipes. And I remember being the cookie baker, for when my brothers were working and I wasn't working that day, I would make chocolate chip cookies with honey. But they were oatmeal chocolate chip cookies, and I perfected it. And it was just a thing. So I didn't know people actually used sugar [laughing] a lot. Until now, nowadays, I've seen that people want to replace it, and now they're watching it and they're learning. But all that time, during that Honey Queen time, that's what I spent a lot of time [doing] was teaching people. Probably, I did more with cooking than I did with the bees. Because I don't think as much was known about them at that time. Today, it's way easier to educate people about the bees.

FOSTER: So you mentioned also that you taught people at schools and fairs. What were those events like?

WALKER: Usually, you showed up and you were on the parade. And they always had like a float made for you. There were all different types of floats. I don't know if you saw any of those pictures. But there were several floats, and then you get off a float and they would have like a little booth set up for you. And you'd have your observation hive, you'd have products set out there. Like bees wax. Comb honey was always so interesting, and people always want to try that one. And then you'd have to talk about the different flavors, because of course, even within Idaho there's different flavors, just depending on where you live. One of the coveted one, being in Southeast Idaho, is clover honey. You get the clover. It's a lighter [honey] - it's easier to bake with, easier to use, easier to store. So it's quite a seller. But then you get the darker honeys. It takes a little to work with, but I always tell people those are great for marinades and things like that. So they would set up - and sometimes we'd have food for them to taste. But usually it was the comb honey and the actual honey itself for them to try. And then we had some handouts and some little, sometimes there were pens, sometimes paper, little notebooks, things like that. So it was really fun. I love meeting people. I think that's one of my things I really like doing is meeting and learning about people. And so I would ask them a question that was open ended, so they can't say just yes or no, and by then the conversation would turn and it became quite a popular booth. Not only with the honey to taste, but people like to talk about themselves. [Kathleen starts to ask another question] One thing I want to add on to that was, I also would promote whatever beekeeping there was in that community. Because there are all sorts of beekeepers in every town, and my job was to promote [with emphasis] them, and what they were doing.

FOSTER: How did they feel about that? What was your experience working with the beekeepers?

WALKER: Open, open arms. My goodness. When we would get there, they would offer their best room for me to stay in and home cooked meals. That's a big thing about Idaho, everything's real beef, real butter, real honey. Everything's got to be real. Real potatoes. And so there was like this, just sense of part of belonging. And so they would open it up, they would have everything pretty much set up. I would bring my things, but usually, they had it set up for me. It was very exciting. I did feel like a celebrity, even though I [laughs] probably wasn't a celebrity. I do have one picture where the military guys that were there also, they came over and they asked me to shoot their - I think they're called M-16's? I don't know my guns real well anymore - but, people

can't believe I have that picture today because I don't think you could even [laughing] own those today. But I have a picture of me shooting it. So there was a sense of this belonging and everybody wanted to, there was, it was just - it felt like your "our town" type thing.

FOSTER: Was there a favorite event, or a particularly memorable event?

WALKER: Probably the one I went to [in] Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, which is up the panhandle. I had never been there. And the drive up there was spectacular. I took a friend with me, and her mother didn't want us to go alone, [laughing] so she went with us too. But we stopped at every little thing along the way. And it was just the beauty of the nature up there. Then we get up there and I discover, you know, so many things to do up there with the lakes being up there, and the ferries. And lots of different, more of a, not a touristy city type thing, more of a outdoor touristy type thing. And I was just in *amorado* with the city. I just fell in love with it and wanted to, didn't want to leave. It was just so welcoming. And everyone there was just so kind. That one stands out to me probably most just because I met - it's like I took home another family with me. Just staying in touch with them and everything.

FOSTER: That's really nice. What were some of your responsibilities as the Honey Queen?

WALKER: My responsibilities were to go around promoting, of course, the beekeeping and the honey. I did a lot of interviews. I remember my first interview on TV. The guy asked me a question, he held up the microphone, and I just grabbed it [laughing] from him. I didn't even realize I did it! But I just felt very comfortable behind the camera, I don't know why. Because I didn't really have experience, but I just felt very comfortable. So I was to do interviews. I did quite a few interviews, newspapers, answered questions. Of course, attend any of the affairs and events that were going on. A lot of those were more in the late summer to fall, because that's when the honey is extracted. So I did a lot of that and in the winter time, it was more of the, talking to newspapers, and TV stations, and things like that. And also to prepare for the National Honey Queen convention. Which being the first one, I was like the pioneer, because I didn't have anybody training me. And so I go to this national convention - the first one I went to, the main head of the National Beekeepers Confederation, he actually crowned me for Idaho's Honey Queen. And then I got to hang out with all the Queens and I was just like a little Junior Queen. I didn't really compete that year or anything, but I got to go with them to Disney World, because it was in Florida. It was in Orlando, Florida. Which is like a dream for someone from Idaho because it's so cold in January! And they included me in everything and I learned a lot being with them. But I actually competed the following year, which would be 1979, in San Diego. And I did not know what I was in for because there was no preparation. But the Texas Honey Queens? They knew, because they've been around for quite a long time. Ohio, Pennsylvania, there's some [state programs] that have been for years. And so they - but you know what? They all treated me like a sister. They really did. I can't say I had any bad experience at all. I felt a little unprepared. But I think it prepared me for future things in my world and my life. I think that was my basic responsibility was just to educate people, go around touring and talking to people.

FOSTER: So, I've got to know. What was that national competition like?

WALKER: The first one or the second one? The one I actually competed in?

FOSTER: The one you competed in, yeah.

WALKER: Okay. So we stayed with, you stay with certain other Queens, and I made lasting friendships. All the girls were Miss Congeniality, they were all wonderful. But they were way more prepared than I was. I was just a really country bumpkin in that one. But I enjoyed it. We actually sang a song, I still remember singing the song and dancing. And I made friends that we actually stayed in touch, even when we got married and had kids. I think my dad, he was, I think his buttons were about ready to burst. He was so proud. I did not get any prize whatsoever. But I think the prize I walked away with was more lasting friendships, and also a learning experience that was a stepping stone for me to do other things future in my life. There were no hard feelings with any of the Queens. We all got along. And in fact, afterwards we did some touring down to the beach. Of course, you had to go to the beach when you're in San Diego. But it wasn't like, "Oh, I lost." It wasn't like that. It was like, "Oh, another thing happened. Let's just move on, move forward." And we were happy for the ones that did win. I think there was like a, in that year, there was the American Honey Queen and then there was a runner up is what they called it. I think they call them a Princess today. And then there was Miss Congeniality, the one that everyone - and it was hands down, you know. Everyone was really good, but hands down it was this one girl. I still remember that. But yeah, we really got treated as royalty. We really did. By the, whoever was in charge of the Confederation. They were just wonderful and made sure that we - but it was grueling, because they did interview you. I remember, they took us in this room and they asked us so many questions about beekeeping. And I realized, even though I grew up doing it, I didn't know a lot of the answers. I think it was not necessarily lack of experience, as [much as a] lack of the knowledge of the language of it, and educating people. And that's why I decided that - I later on got my degree in teaching. And I taught, I think it was like thirteen years before I stayed home as a stay-at-home mom with my children. But I always incorporated a section, a lesson on beekeeping, because I thought, "I know it now. How it's supposed to be." And I learned from that experience, so I had no hard feelings whatsoever. But more that, now, I captured on it. And I use it in my YouTubes, and also in any - I go around the valley here doing free demonstrations. I live in the Las Vegas Valley, actually in Henderson. I call it the "Henderson Hive." And I go around the valley teaching other groups how to use honey, how to cook with honey, other resources that you can do out of beeswax. I mean, it's just about forty-five minutes, I've got it just mastered. But I actually bake rolls, I make rolls and I take them there and I show them how to make them, using a sugar recipe, how to convert it. And we also make honey butter. I pass around the butter and the honey I have them all mix it. By the time it gets to me it's perfectly mixed for honey butter to serve on top. Sometimes I do other things, but it's usually those two things that I'm big about, because people are really into the more natural things. So I've built on that.

FOSTER: That seems to be a theme in your life, taking things and turning them around. I think that's really cool.

WALKER: Wow. I hadn't thought about that, but that's probably true. I'm now going through a season in my life where I'm calling it "Pollyanna-ism." I don't know if you know what that is. [Kathleen indicates that she does not] So there's the movie back, that Disney did, *Pollyanna*. It's

actually from a book, *Pollyanna*. And she had what was called "Pollyanna-ism," she always found the silver lining, she always found the positive. And I thought, you know, that's what we need to have more of [in] this world, we need to find the good. Yes, there is some negative. And yes, you have to agree it's there. But you don't have to be right along with it and be negative yourself. And so that's what I kind of try to spread is, yeah, you can do better. There is something good in everything. And that's why I capitalize also on - I know people don't like the social media. But if I can't say something nice, I don't say anything. I've tried to say only the positive. If I do say something that can be a negative, I turn it around, like "this many bees are dying this year." Okay, that's a negative thing. But I turn around, "here's what you can do to save the bee." And I think, I'm going through my head already that I'm going to - I have all these, things come to me all the time. And everyone says, "Are you going to get tired of posts? Are you going to exhaust?" I have lists. I've got a book full of things. Of YouTubes I want to do, of posts I want to do. And now my big thing is our Save the Bees Day is coming up in 2021. And so I've got something going through my head. And I've already got a T shirt being made and everything out. You'll have to wait, because it's a surprise. [Laughs]

FOSTER: You'll have to keep me posted!

WALKER: I will, Kathleen, I will.

FOSTER: Did you have any new opportunities serving as Honey Queen? And what were they?

WALKER: Afterwards, I actually did. This is - I'm trying to make this a short story. But after I finished school, I decided to serve a service mission for our church, which is helping other people in another country, and I was called to serve in Chile. And so I went down there and I actually found out they - we get a lot of their fruits and vegetables. I don't know if - you need to check your grocery store, but a lot of them come from Chile because they have the opposite season that we do. And so I had the opportunity, many times, to help people understand the role of the beekeeping down there. Grapes is probably their biggest production down there. Of course, if you look on your grapes, if you're in the wintertime, they'll say from Chile. And so I got to do a lot of opportunity with that. Another thing was in the school teaching, once again, anytime swarms came into town or something like that - because there's a swarm season - I got to educate people on what to do with that. And I have very good friends that now collect swarms where I'm at now. And so I promote them. "Don't kill the bees. He can save your bees." And we've had a great friendship. He does get honey from them [the captured swarms], but he'll buy honey from me because he says it's one of the best he's ever tasted. So.

FOSTER: What kind of challenges if any, did you face in your role as the Honey Queen?

WALKER: Challenges. Probably balancing school and doing the Honey Queen, because I was going to college at the time. I didn't want to really quit. And so I tried to always keep - I'm a kind of type-A personality - and so I would try to do it all and keep it all in a row. But I think it paid off, because it seems like busy people get more things done and you do better. I don't know why that is. But somehow I was able to balance everything with that. So that was one of the challenges. Another challenge was probably trying to help my family with the beekeeping, because, [...] that was the same time they were thinking of going to California to winter the bees,

because they could get paid to pollinate the groves down there. For example, the almond groves, that's a big thing. And so, that was kind of a scary part. And that was a challenge. But somehow our family was just blessed because our bees increased, our honey increased, plus we got paid for the pollination. And we were helping with that. And now, they still do it today. I mean, it is just part of the - it's probably becoming separate. My nephew, that's taken over as president of Cox's Honey, he told me that they're separating the beekeeping and the honey now. It's going to be separate. Because it's gotten so big. It's not as big as the other companies that are huge, like that you see in Costco and Walmart. But we are in all the local stores. We're in Amazon. And so, it's gotten so big that someone has to handle just the beekeeping, and someone else just the honey. So that started back in the eighties, when they decided to do that. So that was a challenge. Another challenge is probably keeping everything as still, a mom-and-pop shop. I think too many times we get big and we forget. And some people have been adding, you know, water to their honey and things like that, because they can make it stretch further and that. I think that's been a challenge. We've had to keep everything very natural, and pure, and raw. And keeping up on all the federal things that change all the time. All the rules and regulations. That was always a challenge.

I never forgot being a Honey Queen. I think that's part of - my husband actually was the one that nicknamed me "Honey Queen '78" because that was the year I was Honey Queen. When emails first came out - see, I didn't even have that before. We did slow mails, I call them "bee slow mails." So. He gave me that handle and it just kind of stuck. And then my family got their own domain, and that's how I got to have an email that says "honeyqueen78@coxhoney.com." And I decided to keep that, I thought - and I approached them [her family at Cox's Honey]. Just recently, like three years ago, I approached them, I said, "I think I can help promote your honey but also educate people." And I said, "I really feel strongly that my daddy's speaking to me from the grave telling me, 'don't forget this. Don't forget that'." And so I did my first YouTube, you probably watched the very [laughing] first one. There's no music in it. There's no sound, there's no zooming in. My daughter, who was thirteen at the time, was my videographer. I mean, I've come a long ways if you watch them today. But it was basically to promote that thing that was going to be lost. And then it became, now they're thinking of taking their logo - my logo is a queen bee. I don't know if you saw the logo on there, but she's a queen dressed as a bee. My niece drew that. She's a great artist. And now they're thinking of actually changing their boy bee to the girl bee because most bees are female. Most [are] underdeveloped female. So that's another thing that's come out of it. We've kind of helped each other. They were amazed how much honey I actually go through, and I sell, and it becomes bigger. Because people want the best, but they also want to know the story. And the other thing is, I think people like it when you listen to them. Most of my recipes I've gotten from customers. They said, "Oh, I'm making," for example, "diaper cream out of the beeswax," and I'm like, "that is really interesting." And so I would talk to them, interview them, call them, get their recipe. Now mine's a little different, because I always do a twist on everything. I always have to experiment. And I usually set up like my beeswax products - which aren't on my website yet, just local people know about it, or people that know me or on my Facebook page - I set up several recipes and I have friends try them out, or customers, and I want their total feedback. And that's how I usually come up with things, is I listen to what they want. Somebody told me once they want more recipes, well books aren't as popular, this year, on recipes. They're just not. But I did find out on Amazon, you can make a recipe book for real cheap. So I'm looking into that. But people like to see it. YouTube is super

popular right now. I didn't know it's gonna be that big. But it's a thing that even the teenagers watch. And they like to learn things. I can see where people are watching my YouTubes from. I can see when they go my Facebook page where they're from. I can see when they go on my website. The analytics behind the whole thing is pretty amazing. Now I don't use it to gather people's information or sell it or anything. But I gear it to what are they looking for? What do they need? What age are they? What gender are they? What are they looking for? What do they want? And so, it's kind of like that *Social Dilemma* on Netflix [laughs] now. Because it can be used for bad, but it can be used for real good. I hope that answers your question.

FOSTER: Yeah. Any answer you give me is the right answer.

WALKER: Okay, I like that. Positive.

FOSTER: Jumping back just a little bit - because I'm going to come back to Cox's Honey Queen. But jumping back just a little bit, did you ever have anyone who didn't understand the pageantry aspect of your role or were -

WALKER: Oh, absolutely. In fact, the most recent one was one of my friends. She did not know I was - I mean, we're probably more cordial friends at school and stuff like that. We have kids in the same grade. She came by to get some honey, and we were talking about it and she goes, "so the Honey Queen is a real thing?" I said, "yeah." And she said, "I've never heard of that." So she started researching it. And she actually writes for a magazine. And then she says, "I want to interview [laughing] you." So she did this story. But she, in doing it, the same as you're doing, she did some research. And she's like, "I had no idea that all that was behind there." And she wrote the most beautiful article. I just thought she did a wonderful job because she did it from a reporter, where they take both sides. It's not just one side. I like where you're not bias, where she looked at all aspects, that she did her research before she actually interviewed me. And I think a lot of - I tell people - that's why you have that joke. It's better than Onion Queen, or something like that, which, Onion Queen is okay! I don't want to discount all the Onion Queens out there. But I think it makes people a little more relaxed that it's a real thing. And I work that into almost every one of my talks. Also when I teach school, I'm a substitute teacher now. I do bring that up, because I have a collage of my likes and interests. Because I introduce myself, and then I want them to introduce them. But to relax them, I have a picture and I have the beekeeping up there. I should send you that collage. But on there, I have a picture of me, crowned as Honey Queen. And one of the kids said, "that's a shameless plug, Mrs. Walker, a shameless plug." I didn't even know what that meant! I was like, okay, that's a new saying of the times. Someone told me, "oh, that just means that you're just, you're putting yourself out there. You're promoting [laughing] yourself." And I'm like, "Oh, I didn't mean it like that! I didn't mean it like that!" But anyway, that's, yes. There have been a couple people. Well, there have been quite a few people.

FOSTER: How do you handle that? When people come to you and have a negative view of it? Or a misunderstanding?

WALKER: I try to handle it with humor. I think humor is the answer in that. I even make fun of myself. I'm at that stage of my life. I don't care anymore. And I even make fun of it. I said "oh yeah, I used to wear the crown around and my little antlers [antennas?]." And in fact, Halloween,

I dress up as the Honey Queen and I give out honey sticks to the kids. I don't know what's going to happen this year, we're kind of waiting to see what our community does. But it's [the honey sticks] sealed, so I should be able to hand it out. Maybe I'll have to put it out in a - I have a lot of beekeeping - if people don't know what to get me they give me something with bees and honey, so I have so many things. That I've actually, I've dreamed about building a hexagon casita and then putting all my [laughing] paraphernalia in there. But we recently, we bought a cabin, and part of this cabin had a little tiny shack attached to it. That's what, like 500 square feet? We call it the "Honey Shack." [Kathleen laughs] I started putting my pictures in there and all my stuff, and I actually store the honey that my family drops off there, because it's up in the mountains, it stays cold. And cold is good for honey, because I live in the desert where it can get to 120 [degrees Fahrenheit] some days. It has a few days. So it's tricky to keep the honey in good condition here. So I have that little Honey Shack and now that's where I'm putting all my stuff. [Laughs] So I handle it with humor. Back to your [question] - I'm a random girl, so I kind go off - but I handle it with humor. And I try to listen to what they're really saying, and it doesn't bother me anymore that they kind of make fun of [it]. Because it ends up coming back to my good, because they will say, "You're the Honey Queen!" And they call me that! I have, my friend made me vinyl that's on my car that says "Cox's Honey Queen." She's got a little bee on there and everything. And it's amazing how many people comment on that. I just, gotta own up to it, that's what I'm going to be known for. And I have a little grandson. He just turned four, but he said, "Why do you like honey so much?" [Laughs] Because I'm always talking about honey and things like that. And I've included them in some of my YouTubes because that's, you know, that's what it's about. It's just family, and, making it - that's my legacy. That's my thing now. [Pauses] I've embraced it, I guess is what I'm - I've embraced it.

FOSTER: What was your favorite or proudest memory from being the Honey Queen?

WALKER: I think it was when they first said let's do this program, in Idaho. When I was sitting and - I played the organ. I wasn't even that dressed up. I still remember I had a [laughing] sweatshirt on and pants. But that's what you wore back then. I was not a girly-girl. I was more of your tomboy. I climbed the trees. I had the piggy-tails and everything. And so I, I think that was my proudest moment is because it was something I'd always looked forward to doing. And they said, "Now, okay, you're Idaho's Honey Queen." And my dad - I wanted to make my dad proud too, because we got very close after I lost my mom. We were very, very close. And I decided at age - it was shortly, actually it was a couple years after that, I was probably about twenty-three - I decided to interview my dad and write his autobiography. Because I thought, if I don't write his story, who's going to write it? It's kind of like the Hamilton thing. If somebody doesn't write your story, who's going to do it? So I interviewed him. And I also went through all his journals. And that was one of the things I asked. I said, "when you pass away, I would like the pictures and I would like the journals. I will make sure everyone gets a copy if they want. But I think I should be in charge of them." And so he did. That was one of the things in the will, that I got his pictures and his journals. But I used those to write an autobiography. And I realized, making my dad proud at that moment, because he overcame so much. He got married, had a baby started the bee business, during the Depression! How many of us can say that? And so, I think it was that moment, is when I became the Honey Queen.

FOSTER: That's awesome. And that is so cool about your dad.

WALKER: Yeah, and somebody had said once, that somebody, if they were born in 1900, here's all the things they overcame. And he was born 1901. So I listed all the things he overcame, and I was in shock. All the wars, all the conflicts, [laughs] all the things in the nation. So if he can overcome that, why can't we do that today? Why can't we come together? You know, and I, I have hope for the future. I really do.

FOSTER: What impact did serving as Honey Queen have on your life?

WALKER: Oh, definitely a lot. I think it taught me poise in front of people, and cameras, and speaking. It has taught me the hard work that goes behind it. And I think to be a better listener, because I think sometimes in this world we're too quick to just tell everyone what we've done. And so I like to be listening. Because if I have a story, someone else has a story. And every time I give, I do give these little - I don't know what you call them, trying to think of the word - like, little lessons or whatever you want to call them, there's always somebody that comes up to me has to tell me their experience with bees or honey. And so I've become the listener of them. And sometimes I incorporate it in my little spiel I do. One lady had been a nurse for years. She was probably in her seventies, and she came up to me and she goes, "well this is why, when the doctor couldn't find anything else that would work, he would have us put honey on sores." She said, "because it does the healing." Well I use that now in my lessons when I talk about the healing properties of honey, that even nurses are told by doctors to put it on the sore. And now it's on the Band-Aid! Which I don't know why you would pay for that, when you can just do it yourself, but. So things like that, I think that's helped me.

It's something that gave my kids an identity with [unclear on recording], believe it or not. We're a very involved family in music and sports. And so, every time I go there, I'd take honey sticks [laughs] for the kids for after they'd run, or after this and that. So I was known as the "Honey Mama," you know. And I do make these awesome breadsticks. I will brag a little bit about that. That they just loved it. And something with sports, they usually have to fill up with pasta and breads. And so I would make these breadsticks, but I'd make them from honey instead of sugar. So everyone's just like, "she made these from honey!" And so it really helped to, you know, put that in there. And my kids have always done that. They've always been - I have five children. They're all helping me with this, this journey I'm going on right now. My sons help me with my spreadsheets. My other sons are coders and help me with my website, which, I have learned - I've come so far on that! Because I did not know anything about coding or behind the scenes. They'll give me advice. They won't do it for me. They'll first say, "Mom, have you googled it?" But they're the first ones to like my YouTube or any of my Instagram posts, or anything like that. They're the first ones that do that. And so I think, it's become part of them, too. That's what they'll know me for. I don't know if they'll take over it. I don't know. We'll just see what happens. But it's kind of a neat [thing] that I have my own identity that way.

FOSTER: Looking back, what did being the Idaho Honey Queen mean to you?

WALKER: I think, when I was younger, I wasn't as vocal about it. I was a little more shy about it. Not so much embarrassed, but just shy about it. But as I've gotten older, I'm a little prouder of it because, I think it's great that I'm from a small town. I think it's great that I was in Idaho. I

think it was great that was raised by a beekeeper, I learned so many things from that. And maybe, my goal when I substitute teach or when I'm giving these lessons, is to walk away, and hopefully have made somebody else's life better or sweeter in some way. Touch somebody some way. Because I do speak Spanish - I probably should do a YouTube in Spanish, it's on my list to do - I've been able to reach out to those Spanish speakers and educate them about honey, because sometimes they don't know, they haven't been brought up with it. Because they'll be from other countries. Right now we in this community, my family - my husband and I, and my daughter that's left at home, everyone else is gone - we are working with the Latin community, because we speak Spanish. And we're helping them to higher up, in other words, to find how to get educated, how to get legal in this country, how to do immigration and things like that. But I use the honey a lot of times too, because I'll work that in. I do a lot of promotions, a lot of giveaways, especially to people that are less fortunate. I tried to - my first experience with that was with a school I went down to substitute teach, and I had no idea that fifteen minutes from my house, there were one hundred percent people on free lunch and free breakfast, and the free program with the food out. And I was like, I can't believe this exists. I live in a pretty affluent area. And so I decided, you know what? I need to give back. And so I would tell people, "when I sell this much, I'm going to give this much honey away." I probably do not make very much money on my honey at all, but, I give a lot of it away. But I feel like I've made somebody's life better in that way. So I think that's one of the things I've been trying to do with it. So I'm proud of it today. I'm a lot more vocal about it. And that's one of the first things I'll tell the kids, where I don't think I was, when I was younger.

FOSTER: So you are Cox's Honey Queen. Can you tell me more about that?

WALKER: So when I wanted to break off and sell it as a business, because before - it all started when I would take Christmas gifts to people. I would bake bread, little loaves of bread. And I would take that and I would take either the little honey bear, or the small creamed honey that my family produces. And we would give that for Christmas, to all the neighbors. And we'd sing to them. We always caroled because our whole family can do harmony. And they fell in love with the honey. And they couldn't wait for - I didn't know this - but they were waiting for me to bring that honey. They didn't know where I got it from. Because of course, we're down here in Nevada, and they just really hadn't heard of it that much. And they said "can we buy it?" And I go, "Oh, I guess. I'll ask my brother." So I asked my brother at that time, he's retired now, but I asked him and he said, "sure, I'll just do a write-off trip. I'll deliver it all the way down. And I'll bring you some." I think my first order was two hundred [laughing] dollars. I easily sell probably twenty thousand now, in a year. Yeah. But I just do it on the side. I don't do it, it's not like huge. But I decided to do this about three years ago, getting very serious, and do a website, because it was just by word of mouth. And a lot of people that have moved from Nevada and moved to Nevada, because a lot of them are transplants, have heard of Cox's Honey. And so it was pretty easy to sell it. And then I told my family, I said, "I think I want to break off and be one of your little appendages, and just help promote the honey, but preserve some of the history. And I want to do a website, and I want -" you know, I was telling them all these dreams. But I felt like it was like, I don't know, like my daddy talking to me from the grave. Telling me, "you need to do this. And here's" - it would just come to me in the middle of night and [I'm like], "I've got to write this down." I'm a morning person. So I get up, in the shower like, "Oh! I've got this idea to do this, and do this," and friends would give me ideas too. And before I knew it, I said, "okay, I've got to

have a handle. Something that people call me. And everyone's trying to think, but I felt kind of like pressure. I thought "well, I'm kind of like Cox's Honey Queen, I'm kind of like your Honey Queen." And that's how it came to be. And it's just stuck. It - everyone [calls me], "The Honey Lady," "Cox's Honey Queen." They all know me, they don't know my real name. [laughs] They really do not know my real name. So that's kind of how it came to be.

And, I was giving a talk once, and I talked about how a lot of people talk about the bee. What about the keeper of the bee? So my whole talk is on the keeper of the bee. And what I learned from that keeper of the bee, which is my dad. Somebody came up to me afterwards, and that's, that's where I really got pushed with the idea. They said, "you need to roll with this, you have something. It's a family story. People love it when it's family. And it's true, and it's unique." And so, they met with me and were consulting me. It turned a little sour, because I found out later they were just like, trying to get money from it. And that was really sad. But I don't hold any hard feelings. And I've moved on from that chapter. I look at it like, I actually paid that person to learn these things. Even though they said they were going to do it for free, it ended up not being for free. And then my sons told me, "you've got three coders, we can help you with it mom!" [Laughs] Okay. And then my daughter said she would be the videographer. She really has an interest in that kind of thing, she goes to an art school here. It's called Las Vegas Academy of the Arts, here, school. And they do, they are an awesome school. They're the number one art school in America. So she got a lot of experience from that. And also, kids these days with Snapchat, TikTok, and all these things. They know how to do it. Although she's very careful with it, she doesn't go overboard into it. But she's the one that said, "Mom, let's do this on it. Here's how you zoom in on things." And then one of her teachers called me up, he does it at school. One of her teachers said, "You know what? I can help you with the - give you some advice on the [laughing] videography." He said, "I can't do it for you now, I'm just too busy." And you know, I have a low budget, [laughing] I don't have very much money. So I said, "okay." And so we would meet at McDonald's, and he would say - he would teach me two new things, over McDonald's. You know, we'd have French fries and a coke or [laughing] whatever. So it was just kind of interesting how it's grown. And I've learned so much. It's just amazing what you can do with movies. I mean, I'm not there yet. It takes a lot of time. Behind those YouTubes, it's a [with emphasis] lot of time. [Laughs] But that's how I kind of got started [with] that. And it just rolled with that. It's Instagram, I have - you know, I think for honey, it's pretty good - I have like 450 followers. Facebook is a few more. My group is like over one thousand. I do have a group that's separate, that people that don't want it out in public. And so I do keep - that's a lot of work to post on those every time. People don't realize the behind the scenes on that. And then I was sitting in another, I was sitting in a conference somewhere, and the girl next to me, she had Instagram, and we were both posting things that we were doing. And she taught me how to do hashtags! I didn't even [laughing] know what hashtags were for! It's like, I've wondered why everyone was putting that on there. But that's, I'm just open to learn new things. And I love reading the new articles. But I don't want the media to control me. I want to still control that. And I wanted to still be a small enough thing that it doesn't lose the purpose of it. The purpose is to educate people and help people, and not for me to get rich on it. I'm not going to get rich on it, but I really enjoy it. It's fun.

FOSTER: What has the Honey Queen, or, why has the Honey Queen Program been important for beekeeping and agriculture?

WALKER: Oh my goodness. I think if you watch the *Bee Movie*, it explains the whole thing. The first time - my family, we go to a movie every Christmas. That's what they take me for my birthday, my birthday's right by Christmas. So they always take me to a movie and it's usually *Star Wars* or something to do with bees. I'm serious, there's so many bee movies out there! But when we went to that one, I seriously cried during that movie. I know it's just a cartoon but I cried! Because I saw that happening. People not caring for the land, not worrying, you know. And I don't know if you watched the Zac Efron - he just did a thing called *Down to Earth* on Netflix. But he did a beekeeping one, and on there he talked about in New York, how they started beekeeping on the tops of the cities and how important it is. And so I think that that was where I really saw a change in what it is all about. And if that little bee did quit, we would cease to exist, we really would. Something that small, is that important.

FOSTER: What is the most important thing for people to know about the Honey Queens and the American Honey Queen Program?

WALKER: Well, for example. They have been doing it every year, for I think it's like fifty years now or something. I think it's more than that. [Kathleen agrees] Might even be sixty years, something like that.

FOSTER: I think so.

WALKER: But last year, I really enjoyed the Queen because she did, she did these YouTubes. And she spoke Spanish. And so she did them in Spanish and I could share with all my Latin friends. And I think that was just so important. Because she did little short ones. For example, what to do if a bee stings you. What to do with it. They're just really important things. And then this year, of course, with a pandemic going on, they've had to get creative. And she's gone from state to state, highlighting honey, which I thought was really good for the beekeeper. See, people forget about the little guy. Now, where I live, it's very important for people to do local honey. It's very important. And a lot of them will tell me that, that's going to help them with their allergies. Now research shows - and now here's something I don't know if, I learned something with that - is any honey will help with your allergies. Everyone - it's local, local, local. But if you look at it scientifically, and you research it - and if you want any of that information, I can send it your way - there's a lot of universities that have done research on that. And they would do one group local honey, one group out of state honey, and one group Manuka honey, which is from New Zealand. Which is one of the most healing honeys. And the groups that did the honey every day had less allergies. So it's really the answer is honey. But because they are into really local honey, I don't discredit it. I really try to support that, your local beekeeper. I promote them on my site the whole time. All my friends that do beekeeping, I try to have a connection with them. If someone needs them, I give them the number. I don't feel like it's a competition. I feel like we're in this together. So I think the Queens are really important in that part.

I love it when they go into the schools. Of course, right now they can't, but they can virtually. So there's a reason for all these wonderful things being invented, and we need to use them. And so they have been using those. They used to go around to the fairs and help people there. The bee beard is a big thing at the fair competition, where they put on the bee beard, and that attracts a lot

of people. It's just getting the interest of the public, because I think, sometimes, it's just lack of knowledge. It's, you - I don't want to say the word really ignorant, but it is. It's an ignorance to it. And that's not a bad thing, it's just that it hadn't been exposed. And so the more we expose these people, the more educated, I think, the more that they will use the honey in their home. They'll see - I just did a YouTube this week on [how] you can use honey in your hair as a moisturizer. I can't believe the amount of emails I got, people saying, "I didn't even know that! I didn't know I could do that!" There's so many things to educate people on the use of honey, and beeswax, and things like this. But also on the role of the bees in your community. We need to have them. If you see bees in your yard, that's a good thing! I'd say, "Yay! You're going to have a great garden that year." I had a super, super great garden this year, but I had there - the earth somehow is healing itself by us not [audio cuts briefly] out there with it. I don't know what it is. But I had way more and a better garden this year. The year before, hardly anything. And I didn't see the bees. So that's kind of my role, is if you see the bees, you're in good shape. [Laughs]

FOSTER: So my very last question. Is there anything else that you'd like to share with me or that I forgot to ask you?

WALKER: Boy, I think you've covered everything. [Pauses] I think you've covered everything. And I would just encourage people to read your thesis. I think this is awesome. I'm excited to see how you put this all together. And it's something I would definitely promote.

FOSTER: Thank you so much. I have really enjoyed talking with you and I'm excited to work on this. I'm excited to share these stories.

WALKER: Well thank you Kathleen, for your time, and for all this preparation you did to get this together. That was awesome.

FOSTER: I appreciate you taking the time to sit with me. I've - I have really enjoyed this.

WALKER: Well, I feel like I have another friend in Kansas now. Are you from Kansas?

FOSTER: No. I'm from Maryland, actually.

WALKER: Are you really?

FOSTER: I am, yeah. I'm a transplant.

WALKER: That's okay. That's okay. Maryland's very beautiful, very beautiful.

FOSTER: I miss it.

WALKER: Oh, I'll bet all the green and the -

FOSTER: It's very open in Kansas and Missouri. I miss the forests.

WALKER: Yes, yes, it is. My mom was from Kansas City, Missouri. And so we took a train back there once. And, oh, my goodness. I couldn't - the sun never set, it felt like, because we grew up with the mountains. And so you always watch for the mountains. And there was always that - it looked like an egg [laughing] on the horizon. Because it was always there. But it's like we say when we're in Nevada here, when we have people from Kansas move out here, we're like, "You're not in Kansas anymore." [Laughs] So yeah, enjoy that. That's, that's really great.

FOSTER: Thank you again.

WALKER: Okay. Well, you have a sweet day.

FOSTER: Thank you, you too. I'll be in touch.

WALKER: All right. Take care. Bye, bye.

FOSTER: Bye.

PREFACE

These transcripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History at the University of Missouri - Kansas City and the Library Archives and Special Collections Department at the University of California, Davis. The recordings and transcripts will be donated to the Library Archives and Special Collections Department at the University of California, Davis for inclusion into the Apiculture Manuscripts collection. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. The transcript may be read, quoted from, and used for research and educational purposes as long as this thesis is properly credited and cited.

INTERVIEWER

Kathleen Foster

INTERVIEWEE

Beverly Gibbs Breckenridge Versfelt

DATE

October 27, 2020

LOCATION

Remote Via Zoom

TRANSCRIBER

Kathleen Foster

RESTRICTIONS

None

EDITING

Transcript includes minor clarifying edits upon request of Beverly Gibbs Breckenridge Versfelt.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Beverly Gibbs Breckenridge Versfelt was born in Kansas City, Kansas in 1947, and grew up in a musical family. Versfelt served as the Northeast Kansas Honey Queen and Kansas' state Honey Queen before winning the title of American Honey Queen at the American Beekeeping Federation conference in Chattanooga, Tennessee in 1966. Following her time in the American Honey Queen Program, she decided to study television, radio, and film marketing, which she pursued as a career.

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FOSTER: Alright. Today is October 27, 2020. My name is Kathleen Foster and I am here with Beverly Versfelt. And we are talking about the American Honey Queen Program. Mrs. Versfelt, do you agree to have our conversation recorded, used in my thesis, and later archived?

VERSFELT: Yes.

FOSTER: Wonderful. So, to get started, can you tell me about where you grew up?

VERSFELT: I was born in Kansas City, Kansas. In 1947. Kansas City, Kansas at the time, probably would have been considered rural. Although now it's probably considered a little more suburban. But I was an only child, and we lived out in the country. And it was me and the animals. [Laughs]

FOSTER: What was that like growing up there?

VERSFELT: It was nice. Like I said, I was outside a lot. And I had a lot of animals. My mother was very supportive. And, we were a musical family. Dad had a lovely bass voice and mother played the piano and the organ, and we were deeply involved in the church. So I started singing solos in church at three years old. And she gave piano lessons. And so music was a big part of my life. That and being out with the ducks, and the rabbits, and the horses. So, I spent a lot of time by myself. But I also had these tools, these gifts, that my mother was very helpful in perpetuating. And so, it got to the place where music was a big part of my life. And I took that into school, into high school, and became involved in the music programs there, and ended up being in a lot of theater there. But, it was a nice, it was a simple time too, you know. Sometimes people say, "well, when you look back, everything seems like it was simpler." It was simpler [...]. You know, we, we didn't have social media, we didn't have mechanisms, like we do now. We didn't have Zoom. And so conversation, and correspondence, and having time to really, kind of think through things, was kind of a part of our lives. And so it was - my dad had been in World War Two, and came home with some of the issues that men that had been in the service came home with. But mother was just this constant source of support. And, really everything that I end up showing you today, it's all because my mother followed my life with such detail and lived every, every moment of these things that I was able to do, when I was in, like Honey Queen. So, it was it was a very pleasant childhood.

FOSTER: So, you mentioned to me before our call that you weren't involved in beekeeping growing up.

VERSFELT: No.

FOSTER: How did you get into it?

VERSFELT: [Laughs] Yeah. How did, how did I get into that? That's a really good question. My father, who was very charismatic in personality and very outgoing, had become involved in local politics in Wyandotte County, Kansas City, Kansas. And he loved it. I can remember he grew a goatee and he was very flamboyant. Mother was the quiet, supportive one and Dad was the, you know, "get out there and get it done" guy. So he was at a lot of events. And at one of these

events was a couple. I remember their names were Clifford and Thelma Saxby. And Clifford and Thelma Saxby were beekeepers. And I had no idea what that meant. You know, I just, I'd had no experience with beekeeping. And Dad became friends with them. And as time passed and I got older - because I met these people like when I was, oh, ten or eleven years old, actually - as I matured into a young woman, the Northeast Kansas Honey Queen contest came up one year, and Thelma thought, "Beverly would be a perfect contestant in that contest." So for the first time, I was invited to a beekeeper meeting. And I found them to be a genuine and kind, [pauses] a pleasant group of people. Who all of them loved what they did, or they wouldn't have been doing it, right? And it was just a fascinating thing. I mean, the honey bee - and I if get into this pitch, I gotta be careful - but, you know, the honeybee is just like, enormously essential to our lives. And people don't even seem to understand that. So, anyway, it became something that fascinated me, and so when the time came, I decided that I would run for Northeast Kansas Honey Queen. I think there were, actually I wrote down - I wrote down several things, I was just really into this whole thing - seven contestants. And at the Wyandotte County Fair is where I was crowned Northeast Kansas Honey Queen. I seem to remember I got a honey bee pin, a lot of honey, and all that. But it was just delightful. It was a lovely experience. It was a reinforcing experience for me. And because I was singing a lot at the time, and I was able to use some of my talents for them in places, it just seemed to enlarge the whole thing.

So the time came [for the] Miss Kansas Honey Queen [contest]. And, [lifts a photograph of herself as the Kansas Honey Queen and presents it to the camera] and you're seeing this Kansas Honey Queen there? [...] There were five of us in that. And again, I got to go places and do things that - the perspective now is so hard, because in 1965 when I was becoming those new things, I had never even thought about being on a plane [...]. My parents, for whatever reason - Dad worked in the steel mill and Mother didn't work - I think we took one vacation our whole lives to Colorado Springs and Pikes Peak. I remember it like it was yesterday, because it was the only one we took. So to have the exposure, that it started giving me, I mean, it just fed all of this internal desire to perfect the tools that I had. And I was with people who were pleasant and cordial and not, not in any way like some of the Queen systems are, and have been, at least in the past. And so, it was a delightful time. It was a wonderful time. And needless to say, then that led to becoming the American Honey Queen. And I think there were eleven of us for that, in Chattanooga, Tennessee. And that was just mind-blowing to me. I mean, we still drove. [Laughing] We didn't fly to Chattanooga, we drove to Chattanooga. Which was our second time to go somewhere. And well, it really changed my life. [...] And in 1965, I had entered the Miss Kansas City, Kansas pageant for Miss America, because my life dream had been to go to Vietnam with Bob Hope. That was right up there on the old bucket list. And I wanted to sing with him, and I wanted to play off of him, and I was ready. And, interestingly enough, I was runner up to a young woman named Debbie Bryant, who eventually became Miss America, and so at the time I became Miss Kansas City, Kansas. And a couple months later is when I entered the Northeast Kansas Honey Queen contest. But all of that started feeding me with information that that was a direction maybe that I should go. [After a pause, Kathleen starts asking a question] Just let me know if you need to cut me off on any of this, because I can just drift through this.

FOSTER: Absolutely not! Everything you tell me is important.

VERSFELT: Okay.

FOSTER: So, what was that national competition like?

VERSFELT: First of all, I do want to show you this, because this will blow your mind. I said Mother kept a scrapbook, right? [Lifts her scrapbook, titled "A Honey of Year 1966." Her husband, off camera, offers assistance.]

FOSTER: Oh, wow.

VERSFELT: Mother kept - [her husband says, "show the front of it."] Yes. Yes. [Her husband takes her scrapbook off camera, and she holds up an itinerary] Yes, I have an itinerary of every television show, convention, ribbon cutting. I have down to, Mother even kept track of travel mileage, 16,757 miles. Total radio time, 837 [minutes]. TV time, 1,618 [minutes]. This is a plethora of names and places of Honey Queen stuff. I mean, it's crazy. Mother - what can I tell you? She had a lot of time on her hands, obviously. And bless her heart, she was willing to do it. [Presents a photo of five young women in crowns, sashes, and long gloves to the camera] This was those - that was that at the event, when the 1965 Honey Queen crowned me in Chattanooga. It was, some of the women were involved in beekeeping families, yes. Some of them I think were there for the same reason I was, because I was looking for scholarship money, because no one had gone to college in my family. And I was determined to do that. So that was kind of really, the primo reason that I had gotten involved. That, and the fact that the whole experience, you know, had been so pleasant thus far. But it was, it was so interesting to be with people from all over the country, who had come together. Because, beekeeping, you just think of as a certain way, especially when you have limited knowledge of it, like I did. And here, you know, there were people from Maryland and Oklahoma, and everyone had their own philosophies. And, it really, at the time that I received the title, I never imagined that I would be exposed to all that I was exposed to. I was able to sing at White Sox Stadium. You know, I was able to go to an agricultural congress, that was international, and speak. I was able to go to the Smithsonian Institute, and talk with people by an enormous hive for days as a representative. I mean, there were Legion conventions, and ribbon cuttings, and events, and radio interviews, and television. And it really solidified - at the time, I had been in music at KU [University of Kansas], just starting into all of that, when this all happened. I had graduated high school in [19]65, and [19]66 I had already started college. And I changed to television, radio, [...] and marketing, because I became so familiar with working with a camera and that process. So, it [pauses and sighs]. Besides for feeling like we were really accomplishing something that could benefit the world - because beekeeping is so essential, and so understated, and so unknown. So kind of pushed to the side as being something as an interesting hobby to have [laughs] - it also gave me an arena. I mean, I was flying places, you know, for days at a time. I was on a plane all of the time, it seemed like, for several months. And so it just opened up the whole world. It opened the whole world to me. So it wasn't a very, it wasn't a minor experience in my life, to say the very least.

FOSTER: Do you remember Esther Piechowski?

VERSFELT: That name is very familiar.

FOSTER: The program chair at the time.

VERSFELT: Yes, she wrote an article somewhere. I had met her, yes. I can't say that we had a lot of time together, but I do remember her name because it was kind of an unusual name. Yes. How long was she Chair of the of the Queen committee?

FOSTER: Through the seventies, I understand.

VERSFELT: Interesting, interesting. [Picks up a copy of American Bee Journal and presents it to camera] Don't you love all the stuff? This book has four or five articles in it and I think one of them was written by her, talking about, she listed all of the places that I had been. You know, the Honey Institute was in Chicago at the time, on Michigan Avenue. Which was so fascinating because back then, they put ropes down Michigan Avenue because the wind and the cold blew so hard through there, which they may still do, I don't know. But the Institute was very supportive and this *Bee Journal* had a ton of information about all that was going on in the area, and I believe she might have written something for that. That's interesting. She did that quite a while then, didn't she?

FOSTER: Mm-hmm.

VERSFELT: I know, my chaperone, just loved the job. You know, she was hired to be my chaperone, right? And she was just this little country lady. And, man, she thought she, you know, hit the lotto when she got to go on all these trips. Because you had to have a chaperone in 1966. You know, you couldn't go to the bathroom without a chaperone.

FOSTER: Can you tell me about your chaperone?

VERSFELT: My chaperone?

FOSTER: Mm-hmm.

VERSFELT: She, well, it was Thelma Saxby, because that's - she was the same lady that got me in Northeast [Honey Queen Contest], you know. So the beekeepers in Kansas decided that Thelma should be my chaperone. And [can hear husband talking in background] - Thelma was just a little country lady. And this was way beyond anything she had ever imagined, when we went sixteen, seventeen thousand miles together. But she was supportive. And [laughing] she was an interesting woman. I, what can I say about Thelma? Other than the fact that Thelma was very kind to me. And, I think had the time of her life, because it was just so wonderful to go. Because people were so nice to us. They were - looking back through all of this [sighs], you know, like, I would do an interview on some show, and then somebody would take me to their house for dinner and introduce me to their family. Or, if there was a weekend involved, somebody would take me to their church, because I was in town doing a convention, or a conference or something. And they just all genuinely seemed happy that somebody was out there, just kind of talking about what they did, and what, the importance of what they did. But Thelma was, she got me there and she got me home. And that's all really you could ask for. Sometimes I'd say "Thelma, why don't you stay here while I go over here?" Because every once

in a while, I would see somebody or something, I would like to be a little more involved in, but no. Thelma was a good [laughing] chaperone.

FOSTER: What was some - What were the kinds of knowledge and skills that you needed to be the Honey Queen?

VERSFELT: [Thinks for a few moments] Well, I think just generally, anytime that you're asked to be a representative of a group, it's essential that you are able to form your thoughts quickly. You know, that you're extemporaneous. Because that's essential. Because you're constantly asked questions, you have no idea what's going to be asked. You have to have the ability to want to learn as much as you can about that subject that you're representing, so that nobody ever looks at you and wonders, "so you're the one who represents this person? You know, this company?" So, I think you really have to have kind of a desire to really become at least knowledgeable, if not expertly knowledgeable, of what you're out there talking about. And in my case, because I didn't come from a beekeeping family. That probably was the biggest limitation that I found, was that I think a lot of those folks, especially the beekeeping, but the general, secular public, just loved the whole - you know, I think the AP [Associated Press] once picked up a picture of me holding a hive at the Smithsonian. I mean, everybody just loved the idea of the American Honey Queen. That was a cute idea - and it got us on a lot of television, and radio, and all that. But the beekeepers probably would have loved it if I could have said, "you know, when I go in and get that honey comb." And, I didn't have that. I didn't have that, that history. So I mean, I don't think it would hurt to have more knowledge than I did about beekeeping. Although, I think that anyone that really sincerely would like to do their best job would make the effort to learn about all of that. Because, I mean, they ask - something like that, anytime that you're any kind of representative for a large group of people, people are going to ask you really logical - "What's the difference between clover and another kind of honey? And why is that honey so dark? And why does it taste so different? And what does it do for me?" You know, so you had all of that stuff that you really did need to have an answer for or you shouldn't be doing the job. So. And I was in so many places talking about the beekeeping industry and honey, so I did learn a lot. I learned a lot from the beekeepers that I went to work for, in all of these places. So, I think that - and of course, anymore with the whole Queen thing - I think that you have to have an acceptable appearance. It would be interesting to me, actually, because I honestly have not thought about being American Honey Queen for quite a while. It would be interesting to me to see if, what kind of physiognomy, what kind of young woman is perceived as a visual representative of the Honey Institute these days. I'm sure that the expectation has changed. I mean, you know, what you would wear? What you would have them do in a contest would surely have to change. I think it's, do they still do it? I don't even - do they still do it?

FOSTER: Yes, absolutely. Yep. They're still going.

VERSFELT: You know, and that's crazy that like, because I mean, I'm pretty alert to noting things like that in news or whatever. And I would have - I'm surprised that I haven't seen someone, golly. Maybe the last one I noted was, oh, quite a while ago. And you'd think there'd be something they'd be in. You know, that something would get picked up. Especially with social media, for pity's sake! Yeah, [laughing] I think, wouldn't - there'd be a lot going on, right? With

that whole thing. So, well, that's, that's wonderful. I'm glad to hear that. Is it supported well by the beekeeping associations, and all of that?

FOSTER: As far as I've heard from some of the other folks I've interviewed. And the Queens actually have their own YouTube channel.

VERSFELT: Wow!

FOSTER: Yeah, it's really cool!

VERSFELT: Oh, that's cool! That's very cool. So like, just, what's it called?

FOSTER: I think it's just - I think if you just look up American Honey Queen, it comes up. And they've got a YouTube channel, they've got a website. Yeah, they're still going pretty strong. They've adapted pretty well, yeah.

VERSFELT: Well that's awesome! Well, that's wonderful. Wow, wow.

FOSTER: Well, moving from what they do to what you did, what were some of your responsibilities?

VERSFELT: When I was American Honey Queen?

FOSTER: Mm-hmm.

VERSFELT: Well, I think, one, they were excited that I was able to sing. For some reason they really capitalized on that. So I was able to perform at a lot of places that maybe I wouldn't have been able to. Like I said, I did a lot of radio and television. We opened a lot of supermarkets. We opened a lot of nature food stores. I did radio, a farm program in Washington, DC, in the Pentagon, actually, for several months, for them. The Smithsonian. A lot of parades, a lot of bee conventions. And that international agricultural convention, where people from all over the world came, was just phenomenal. It was very informative, and as far as I can tell, not something that's done all of the time. What else did I do? [Pauses] I met a lot of people, a lot of people in, also in casual settings. I went to a lot of beekeeper meetings and they would always invite me to hayrides, and potluck dinners, and all of the things that went along, you know, with beekeeping associations. Went to a lot of hospitals. I saw a lot of kids. When we - honeybees, you know, people are so afraid of honeybees and yet intrigued by honeybees. [Laughs] And so, you have this - and a honeybee is just a cute thing. So, many places, people would give me stuffed animal honeybees and little bee pins. You know, for years I had these things sitting all over the place. And so I was able to talk to a lot of children. [Dog barks] Right, Buster. I was able to talk to a lot of children. And the story of honeybees. It's a delightful story. And people always seemed interested in it. [Laughs] I wrote articles as Bev Bee, and she had a boyfriend, Don Drone. [Kathleen laughs] And yeah, I did. Of course, I was young. But anyway, I was able to just do a ton of things, and people just - Oh! And Washington DC. I can remember meeting with, the gentleman's name was Senator Carlson, and he took me to lunch with Fulbright and all of these people that, at the time, I didn't even have an appreciation of who they were in the government.

And got us into places that we couldn't have gotten into. And, so, it was just an endless list of lovely experiences.

FOSTER: Did you have a favorite one?

VERSFELT: I did love being at the Smithsonian. I can actually say that standing there behind the rope, instead of looking at it, but literally being a part of it, it was just - and the families that would come through there. And the hive was, it was an enormous hive. It was really magnificently done. And of course, everybody wants to see the queen. So we were always looking for the queen. Of the hive, you know, and all this. Those several days were, were a highlight, just because of all the people that came through. Though I don't know if they would have ever stopped and just really spent the time they did if somebody hadn't been there talking about it, and pointing it out, and showing it to them. Showing what comes out of the hive, and the comb, and how you extract it, and all that stuff. What else? Singing at White Sox Stadium was pretty fun. A guy named Bob Locker, and - I'm trying to think - the owner was Honey Romero or something? [Unclear on recording] two baseball guys. We did all of this promotion together. And that was kind of interesting, to be behind the scenes in an environment like that. But [pauses]. I don't know. I think probably some of the television interviews, were kind of fun, and delightful. So, other than that, like I said, there was just, [pauses] it was just so nice that people were so open and so receptive. And, for the most part, so pleasant. They were pleasant experiences. There wasn't protesting, there wasn't negativity about it. Everybody was just really excited to learn more about something from somebody who, hopefully had some answers for them about it.

FOSTER: Going off of that, did you ever experience anyone kind of not understanding the pageantry aspect of it? The crown and the sash?

VERSFELT: Oh, well, you know. [Sighs] Although back then, a crown and a sash. Well, like earlier, you were kind enough to say, you know, "you all are celebrities to me." Well, back then, walk around with the sash, people didn't go, "ha, ha! You have on a crown and a sash," they actually stopped. There was that moment of, "what did that person do that makes them a little bit different than me?" I can remember, and I think it was the Northeast Kansas Honeybee Association, somehow talked the Kansas Highway Department - Oh, I know why! Debbie Bryant, the young woman who had beaten me, right? In Miss Kansas. They put these enormous [gestures as if reading a sign] "Debbie Bryant, Home of Miss America" on every highway going into Kansas City. Somehow the Bee Association gets the Kansas City Department to make [gestures again] "Beverly Gibbs, Home of the American Honey Queen 196[6]" at every major highway coming in. And eventually - I was a Tri Del [Tri Delta] at KU- one of those enormous signs ended up in our front yard at the sorority. Somebody had cut one down and, I mean, anyway. Point is, back then, those kind of silly things, it did hold weight. Today, when you see somebody with a little crown on and sash walking through somewhere, people just kind of, [sighs] I don't know. Everything's become so commonplace, everything's become, you know, everybody wants fifteen minutes of fame, and everybody wants to look like, whomever. But back then, it was, it was an honor, whether they liked it or not. But they seemed to respect it in a way that, I don't know. I think the sash probably is going a bit far these days. [Laughing] And I don't know. Maybe not.

I do know, though, in the beekeeping world, when you would walk in with that sash and crown - and I bet still today it's that way - there was an appreciation and a [pauses] sincere interest in those young women. And, I would hope that - it seems like so many times, in this day and age, we just look for the flaw. You know, we look for the negative of something. We look for the silliness of something or the - and I don't know whether that's out of just envy in people who [pauses] have no desire to find good in anything else, or whether we've become so callous in our world. And everything is so visually attainable, instantaneously, that there is nothing that's enough that can be appreciated for what it is. But back then, the crown and the sash - and I must admit I did feel silly sometimes, with that crown and sash on. That was just me, though. [Pauses] Because they'd want you to wear it to, you know, McDonald's when you stopped, when you were driving [laughing] somewhere and you'd go, "I don't want to go in there with this on!" [And they'd say] "Oh, no. You've got to go in there with that on". But for the most part, yeah, there was an appreciation of that, that I hope it still exists for that person that's wearing that crown and sash. They aren't sashing anymore. Are they still? Are they still sashing?

FOSTER: I believe so, yeah.

VERSFELT: Oh, boy. Okay, well. [Laughs] Good.

FOSTER: What kind of challenges, if any, did you face in your role as Honey Queen?

VERSFELT: What kind of role did I face? [Looks through items on her table] For me personally - and I noted in your paperwork that it is a personal perception, obviously - for me, going from a life of pretty much containment. You know, I was perfecting playing the piano, I was perfecting singing, I was perfecting being in theater, I was perfecting being a good student. And I lived on a hill with my animals. [Laughs] To go from that [pauses] to, sometimes thousands of people. Or even in the settings of forty or fifty people who really wanted to get close and talk to you, to day after day of one thing in it. Because you needed to have some knowledge of these people before you went into them. It wasn't like you just went on and said, "where are we?" You know, you wanted to know who they were, you wanted to give them what they needed from your visit. It was like, you know, zero to 180. And as far as what that was like, it really, it was like living two lives, sometimes. I would go home to a setting that was pretty quiet and laid back, and then go into the world. It was, really, that's how it felt. That was just kind of a step into a whole different wardrobe, if you will, of experience. And had I maybe had broader experience going into it - I tend to think though, that because of some of the folks even being more rural than I was, that we're in that contest, it would have, might be, even been harder. You know, making sure you got to the plane, making sure you had what you needed, making sure you have all your paperwork, your hotel. All of those things, starting at ground zero, was pretty, pretty interesting to do. And again, back then, in 1966, eighteen-year-old women, nineteen-year-old women, weren't thirty-year-old women in their head. They were about you know, fourteen. And so, we were going into the world - I mean, I can remember several situations, where - one of them, I think, was in New York - where I just, I was overwhelmed by the enormity of the place that I was. Because it was just so foreign to what, how I had been raised, and everything I'd ever seen up until then. But you know, that's why travel is probably the best education of anything there is. It's amazing how it just opens your mind when you see other perspectives, and other disciplines, and other lack of

disciplines. So it, I don't think [pauses], there certainly wasn't anything that made me sad or depressed, or made me wish I hadn't done it. That's for sure. But I can honestly say, it was a constant learning curve, to execute that after being raised the way I was.

FOSTER: What is your favorite or proudest memory from your time as Honey Queen?

VERSFELT: [Thinks for a moment] Golly. That is so hard to answer. Because, I mean, I remember several things, proud moments. I remember one kid's camp, for disabled, mentally challenged children, that I was able to spend a day or two at. And so, from the standpoint of giving back or feeling like, you know, you were making a difference, that was kind of a highlight. But when you talk about what's the most memorable, I mean, of course things like, singing at White Sox Stadium was a big deal to me at the time. My voice was very important to me and that arena was very important to me. [Husband asks a question off camera] Hmm? [Husband: "Tell them what you sung."] *Star Spangled Banner*? Yeah, [quietly] that's what I sang, *Star Spangled Banner*. What would we do without a husband? [Kathleen laughs] Let's see. You know, that's hard, because on so many different levels - Being at that international conference was highly meaningful to me, because I can remember connecting with a gentleman from Denmark, who I ended up corresponding with for years after that. Because it was just fascinating to hear how they address beekeeping and have such high regard for it. And it's so important there, they realize the value of the process and what it does for our environment. So, that's a hard one. That is a hard one. [Pauses] Sorry, I didn't have a good answer to that one, did I?

FOSTER: I promise you, any answer is a good answer. [Beverly laughs] Well, you mentioned that conference again. What was that like, the international conference?

VERSFELT: Yeah. It was, and I - let me give you the correct term of it. [Picks up the copy of *American Bee Journal*] Because it really [pauses to find article] - International Apicur - hmm - Apicultural Congress. It was August eleven through seventeen of 1967. And, oh! And the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, was, I guess, the person who wrote this article. It brought together new technology for beekeeping, you know, from all over. I mean, it was a shared kind of world conference. Made me think of the United Nations because everybody came in, and made their presentation. And I think I sang at a dinner, or banquet, or something. And then I was in a booth, and at one point, I was working with several of the other countries. They didn't have Honey Queen situations set up and wanted to know how it was put together. And I think, if I'm not mistaken, that Canada and America went together, which, probably wouldn't do now, right? [Laughing] Canada and America went together to put this on, with the University of Maryland. I should - should I send you this book, Kathleen? Should I send you that book?

FOSTER: I would love it, if you're willing to part with it.

VERSFELT: Well, it just, you know, it really is a plethora of - I mean, there's just so many different - I think there's three articles about me in it, but other than - there's just great information of the time. Where beekeepers, you know, kind of were, in place. And they were just finding ways, I guess, to extract the honey from the hives with a certain kind of spigot. And I

mean, there was just - [Her husband says, "We can scan it and then send it to her."] Oh, we can scan it? Okay.

FOSTER: [Difficult to hear on audio] That would be better, yeah. I wouldn't want to take that from you!

VERSFELT: Well, I mean, how many times is somebody gonna say, "Hey, you got an hour to talk about being the American Honey Queen?" I doubt very many. Okay. But, yeah. I think, actually, I think it gave great credibility to beekeepers in the United States. I wish and I hope that there is more of that going on. Of course, with the world the way it is, that's kind of probably, not right now happening. But at some point, where collectively, beekeeping associations go together to figure out what - well, like this murder hornet thing that's going on right now. I mean, what a sadistically sad thing that is, that they decapitate the honeybee? That's a thought. I mean, [laughs]. Let's figure out how to get rid of that, right? So I'm sure that there are pressing issues that need to be addressed globally, instead of just, you know, with your local beekeeping association. So yeah, it was excellent. I, in my jewelry box, I found a newspaper article [shows newspaper clipping to camera] from 1967, [reading] "to attend the Agricultural Congress." Let's see if it says anything worthwhile. [Reading from the article] "On the campus of the University of Maryland at College Park" is where it was held. "This marks the first time the Congress has met in the United States. Beekeepers from the Midwest who are hobbyists, apiarists, will exchange ideas with American and European manufacturers, importers, packaging specialists, all interested in honey production and sale." [Pauses] Anyway. Yeah, it was probably one of the largest gatherings that I participated in. So it was definitely a good thing.

FOSTER: That is so cool.

VERSFELT: [Laughing] That I have an article from 1967, in my jewelry box, mind you! I had not looked at that sucker for quite a while, I went, "well that's the agricultural congress."

FOSTER: So we talked about it a little bit, but what impact did serving as the Honey Queen have on your life?

VERSFELT: Yeah, it changed my life. [...] I will say that, that it gave me the confidence - I actually did go back to the Miss America Pageant one more time, and became Miss Lawrence KU, and was, I think second runner up to Miss Kansas that year. Never did make it to Bob Hope in Vietnam, which still is one of the [laughing] losses of my life. But, had I not, I mean - honestly, it would be an interesting thing to look at Beverley Gibbs before Honey Queen, and then Beverley Gibbs after. Because what it gave me was a confidence and a level of knowledge. I went on to host Miss Kansas pageants after that for a while, because of the skills that I had learned while I was on the road. I went on, I had a talk show in Kansas City. I was a meteorologist in Kansas City. I'm still doing work down here today on air. Because of what I found being American honey Queen. I found my voice. [Pauses] I just found that piece of me I probably wouldn't have found being a nice girl growing up in Kansas City, Kansas. And, so it changed my life.

FOSTER: Have you remained active in beekeeping since your time as Honey Queen?

VERSFELT: Well, beekeeping? No, no beekeeping. [...] I honestly wasn't a beekeeper. And that experience didn't throw me into wanting to be a beekeeper, probably unfortunately. But it threw me into being who I am.

FOSTER: Looking back, what did being the American Honey Queen mean to you?

VERSFELT: [Exhales and pauses] It meant finding the best in me. And attempting to find the best in any group that I would have contact with. Because there was always a story [pauses] to learn here. There was always a person that really reached out, and wanted to know more. They just wanted - there were so many young women that reached out, that wanted to know how to become the American Honey Queen. [Pauses] It was [pauses again], it developed my desire to help people and it [pauses and sighs] - it enabled me to find a way to perfect the pieces of me that were in there, that probably wouldn't have had the security and the confidence to do otherwise. So it was a double thing, you know, I reached a greater knowledge of all the needs of humanity that allowed me to want to be more humane. And it also though, helped me perfect the pieces of me, that made my life different and changed. They were, and are, wonderful, kind for the most part, people. The manufacturers kind of are a different ilk. But of course, that's their objective is to make, you know, whatever they make. Sue Bee and all of those manufacturing companies, that was interesting, to deal with them. But, for the most part, they were a kind and gentle group of people, who probably still perpetuate and want the earth to thrive and continue. And in this environment, it's probably pretty hard to accomplish that and get that done. So, it was a world, a life changing thing for me.

FOSTER: Why has the Honey Queen program been important for beekeeping and agriculture?

VERSFELT: Oh, I think, anytime that you can get a representative in front of your [pauses] organization, your beekeeping associations, anybody that the news and social media can focus on, that can tell the story, then the story is going to get out there more. Actually, I think it would be really wonderful - I mean, I'm not adept at social media, but I seem to be on it, and aware of it, and utilize it more maybe than a lot of folks my age, and I don't see anything about that. I don't see - I think that a representative [dog barks] allows focus so that the message can be heard, whereas a wide group can only talk internally to themselves. And, I mean, they should have the [Dog barks loudly] American Honey Queen of 2020 - [Speaking to her husband] Hey honey, thank you. [Laughs] Buster feels that way too, don't you Buster? I think they should have that person [pauses]. I mean, it just seems like they could do much, much more with that right now to get that message out. You know, all I'm hearing about right now is monster hornets, monster hornets. And honeybees, every once in a while, somebody will mention the fact that you know, what? Eighty-two percent of our food or whatever is perpetuated by honey bees and pollination, and all that. That's about the only message I continually get through social media in one way or another. And I honestly believe that they could do some really creative things with this person. I mean, look at all the venues they could be on, and turn it into something viral. Turn it into something where people are really, really talking about it. You know, our environment is in dire need of this kind of information. So, [sighs] I mean, I think the program is as essential right now as it was then, it just needs to be contemporized. So that, people will take it, at least seriously and with some interest. So, I hope they're doing that.

FOSTER: What is the most important thing for people to know about the Honey Queens and the American Honey Queen Program?

VERSFELT: This is a sincerely, honestly run operation. And I say that, at least from my perspective, obviously. But I have been in several contests of various kinds. And I don't think that I was ever with a more sincere or well meaning, or honest process. They sincerely wanted, you know, a good representative for the people. And, that's how they actualized it. And so, I think that, I know there are a lot of Queens out there these days, I know that. And I get that. And I think most of them are just totally for kind of a mercenary criteria, "we need to stick somebody in front of a camera and talk about the new product, or the new direction the company's going." But I think that the Honey Queens and the Honey Queen organization, just sincerely wants a good representative to speak for them to the public, and make them better known. So, I think it's, at least at this point, well, from my knowledge, it's a good organization.

FOSTER: So, my very last question.

VERSFELT: Okey doker. [Both laugh]

FOSTER: Is there anything else you'd like to share with me or that I forgot to ask you?

VERSFELT: Wow, I think you covered a lot. I know it's pretty weird holding up pictures to the screen. But, I think I did this - Actually. I brought Mom. I know you'll think this is sick, but that's the way it is. [Picks up a small, hive shaped container] I've got a little bit of Mom in here. This was what they gave me, for being American Honey Queen. [Presents the container to camera] Isn't that beautiful? Mm-hmm.

FOSTER: That really is.

VERSFELT: Yeah, it really, it was one of the big - I think they gave me a mink stole. And they gave me this, and they gave me a scholarship, and several other things. But I went through all of this, and I know it seems a bit silly to have all of these different things. I'm sure everyone didn't have show-and-tell. But it was kind of an acknowledgment of all the effort Mother went through, to do this. And she - believe me, if you had asked me and this [gestures to items on table that her mother had kept] hadn't happened, what Honey Queen was like, I don't think we would have had the same conversation. So, for her, Ruth Gibbs. [Pauses] This was a delightful experience.

FOSTER: Thank you so much for taking the time to sit down with me, and talk about this.

VERSFELT: Oh, Kathleen, I know that you will do this. How many people are you going to try and get for this thesis, together?

FOSTER: So far, I've talked to six people. I think that might be all I can do for - just the because I graduate next May. So, I think this might be all I can do for now. But I'd love to keep going.

VERSFELT: Well, it's [Husband speaks quietly off camera] - Yeah, I think I do receive a copy of what it is, isn't that right? That was in the paperwork, that I get a copy of it? [Kathleen affirms that is correct] If you need any more background on me, you can go to Beverlyversfelt.com, that's my company. So that'll show you and tell you what I'm doing now. And if you go to YouTube, if you go to Beverly Breckenridge Versfelt, you'll see kind of what I'm doing now. And if that gives any perspective to what this whole thing generated me to become, it's pretty apparent what that brought me to. And really, a lot of the reasons that those things occurred, the things that I did, were directly and primarily instigated because of this piece of time I spent as American Honey Queen. So, anyway. I will send you - Do I have your ad - well, I can scan it to you. I'll send you some of those, especially about the University of Maryland, considering you're from Maryland.

FOSTER: That would be awesome!

VERSFELT: Alright. Thank you, Kathleen, so very much, I appreciate your time.

FOSTER: Thank you so much. I'll be in touch with the transcript and the copy of your video.

VERSFELT: Sounds good. Be safe.

FOSTER: You too.

VERSFELT: Bye.

FOSTER: Bye.

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