

Eighth Annual Louise Daniel Women's History Luncheon & Women's Equality Day Celebration

Guest Speaker: Ineta Chesher

1. It is my privilege to be here with you today. I would like to thank the Louise Daniels Heritage Foundation Board for inviting me to speak.
2. Although I was invited here to tell you about my life as a woman in agriculture, a farmer, it can't be just about me, but has to include the people, the events and experiences that led me to be who I am today. So, we begin...
3. I was born in Littlefield, TX. My family lived near a little place called Spade. The community was primarily made up of farm people. Most of them were related to me. It is said that there were 24 cousins, all mine, in the Spade school at one time!
4. My parents, J.L. Stowers and Mary Rosy Ruth Young Stowers, lived on and farmed a small acreage just North of Spade. When I was born, they already had three daughters, Maldean, and Twins, Darlene and Arlene. It's said that Dad told Mom, "Mary, we had better give her a boy's name, 'cause this is it!" So, my middle name is Jo. My Dad had 16 brothers and sisters.
5. One spring, when I was still young, Dad headed to the field with a four-row planter behind the tractor and a daughter in each planter box. A neighbor stopped him and said, "What are you doing, J.L.? Planting girls?" Dad laughed about it and said he'd decided it was a good idea.

6. Growing up in farm families, my parents certainly had the right work ethic for farming. Hard work and long hours were not a problem for them. They had a strong 'can-do' attitude and a desire to succeed. I believe those traits were inherent in many of the early day farmers and people in general. The American way of life was built on these attitudes and, also, sound godly principles and beliefs.
7. When World War II came, many went to serve their country in battle, often, farmers stayed and farmed the land, growing food and fiber needed to sustain our homeland and support our troops. Those times were hard for almost everyone. My parents were no exception. Sacrifices, in whatever way, were made by all. Those were character building days for all who 'put their shoulder to the till' working.
8. For farmers, having the fuel, seed and other inputs to farm with was 'iffy' at best. Parts for repairs on tractors and equipment were hard to come by. Sometimes non-existent! My Mom and Dad put in a welding shop at Spade, along with their farming. Dad was a 'master welder'. He could fabricate about any parts that were needed by the area farmers. He taught Mom to weld. Together they built dozens of cotton trailers to help farmers get their cotton to the gin as far away as Lubbock!
9. On her own, Mom invented and constructed an automatic hog waterer, all steel, to alleviate having to carry buckets of water to the pigs so often. She won an award for her invention.
10. The war ended. As better times came, my folks bought their own land, improving it, sold it, and moved north. First to Olton, then to Friona. Now, irrigation helped to ensure a better crop.

11. As we girls grew up, we were put to work, helping out in the fields. Cleaning the weeds out of the cotton and milo we grew, then, in the fall, pulling cotton bolls by hand, right alongside the extra hired-hands that were brought in to help harvest the crop. As we worked, we earned a wage, buying items for school in the fall and a few special treats which included my first car!
12. Along with that, our chores around the homestead included feeding the livestock and milking the cows. (Being girls we gave them cute, little names like Juicy Fruit and Bossy!) I was in charge of the chickens! I guess you could say I was the Chicken Boss! The only problem was that not only did I have to feed them and gather the eggs, I had to clean the chicken house every so often and brush the walls with this awful smelling concoction called Creosote. Although it did keep our chickens free of lice, that Creosote was one downside to being 'Chicken Boss'! Did I tell you I had to churn the butter too?
13. My eldest sister 'Dean', was Mother's 'right arm'. She got the important job of cooking. One of her earliest culinary successes was a toasted cornmeal dish we fondly call 'Mush'! (We had it every night!) But...with fresh cream, lots of butter, a little sugar or honey, it tasted pretty good. Like porridge in the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears! Later, Dean became a fabulous cook, but No One ever asked her to make 'Mush' again!
14. Mom was in the field a lot as we grew up, but she never lacked in teaching us the skills a woman needs to run a household. Cooking, cleaning, sewing, gardening and canning. We learned to dress a chicken (and I don't mean in clothes). In short order, cut it up and fry it oh so crispy and good. Colonel Sanders has now relieved us of this chore.

15. My mother knew how to teach us all of these things because as the eldest of five daughters in her family of 13 children, many chores came her way, especially cooking! She has told us that when she was only 9 years old, her mother, Nellie, who was the community mid-wife, would say to her, "Mary, I've got to go to a neighbor's. They have a baby on the way. You are in charge of the cooking." One of Mom's brothers would saddle up Ol' Ribbon, the horse, and away Nellie would go. Mom would cook on a wood burning kitchen stove for her younger sisters, Dad, and brothers. These events occurred over 90 years ago. Are they relevant to remember now?
16. Yes! Because of responsibilities like these, my Mother was strong and capable in everything she had to do later. She taught us to be the same.
17. Growing up, our family worked together and played together. Our home was always open to family and friends. We never had a Pastor who didn't put his feet under our dinner table. Thank God for men and women who answer that call!
18. Both of my parents came from families of strong faith, so we didn't leave God out of our lives. Music was important. Mom saw to it that we learned to play an instrument. One sister and I still play the piano, organ and accordion. I've been the organist at church for over 50 years.
19. As my sisters and I grew up we all married boys we met at church. My sisters married farm boys. My sweetheart was a 'city boy'. He loved fast cars, not new ones, but cars with character that he worked on himself. It was a prelude to oh so many engines he would overhaul later as a farmer.

20. When I married Jimmy Carroll Chesher, my forever husband, he had enlisted in the Navy. He was assigned to serve aboard the USS Kearsarge, an aircraft carrier based out of Long Beach, California. His ship picked up a couple of the early astronauts the United States put into space. The capsules carrying the astronauts returned to earth, dropping into the ocean, and were recovered by ships at sea. A moment to remember!
21. While Jim was stationed in California we had two daughters born, Jacque Denise and Anita Carol. Two life-long blessings!
22. When Jim finished his tour of duty, we returned home to Texas. No job but plenty of family to come home to! That was in 1964.
23. While we were in California, my folks had bought farm land at Stratford, Texas, and along with my sisters, their husbands and kids, they had all moved to the top of the Texas Panhandle.
24. Irrigation there was fairly new. Wells were being drilled and the high plains were flourishing with irrigated wheat and milo. The area ranchers now had grain produced nearby to augment the native grasses their cattle grazed.
25. Today, our area in the Panhandle has huge feedlots bringing beef to the consumer, also dairies have come into the area using locally grown crops. A large cheese factory in Dalhart provides many jobs for the area. All related to farmers and farming!

26. My family was part of some progressive changes around Stratford and when Jim and I got back to Texas, there was a job waiting for us at the farm. So we jumped right in and started farming with the folks!
27. Not long after we returned to Texas, our son, Bobby, was born. He was the third grandson for my parents, to add to the eleven granddaughters they had! 😊 Another blessing to be thankful for!
28. Life got busier and the farming got bigger. More irrigation wells were drilled. Irrigation practices improved, going from row watered crops, to where we are even today, with center pivot sprinkler systems that rotates in a circle and cover large acreages with 'rain', a more efficient method of watering crops, also a great water conservation advantage. One note of interest, our area the North Plains Water District, has the best water conservation record in the state. We must all work to preserve our water!
29. Today, with corn as a major crop produced, and now cotton also, the Texas Panhandle is one of the most productive farming areas in Texas and, also, a good place to live and raise a family!
30. And...while not all of our extended family chose to continue farming, eventually moving away, they all have retained a love for the farm and it's always been a favorite place to come home to. Many came and helped at harvest over the years and we gathered there for special occasions.

31. As for Jim and I, our kids in tow, we bought land of our own and continued to farm the 'family' land. My 'city boy' took to farming 'like a duck takes to water'. He was a natural, the best farmer around, a great mechanic, a good manager.
32. As our three kids got older, I began to help with the farming on a regular basis. We did have hired help, but I enjoyed working outside, could take our kids along and was glad to be of help, farming. We rented more land and the farming pace picked up. At times, we farmed around 3,000 acres of irrigated farm land.
33. When I was a child, we didn't farm such large acreages. We often got 'laid by' with our farm work and traveled some. Jim and I and our family used any 'down time' to go to our favorite vacation spot, Colorado. To ride cycles and unwind, smell the mountain air! We all loved it. Made it easy to come home and go back to work.
34. As for my work, I have done about every job on the farm. Plowed and planted too many acres to count – from sun-up till sun-down sometimes. There were times I plowed all night long to get a field ready to plant by morning. I know how to grease every piece of equipment, diesel up the tractors, combines and trucks. And I know how to drive them all. My Mother enlisted me to help drive trucks hauling grain to the elevator when I was 15. (Back then, farm kids could get a 'hardship license' at 14 years of age.)
35. Those old trucks we drove back then probably carried only 200 bushels of grain. The last trucks Jim and I owned were 18 wheelers and carried over 1000 bushels of grain to the elevator.

36. Today equipment is all bigger and faster. Farmers need to farm more acres and get across them faster. Remember the 4-row planter I mentioned from my childhood. The last planter I used planted 16 rows at a time. Today our young tenant farmers use a 36-row planter and plant 50 acres an hour!
37. Along with the field work in farming, there are always repairs needing to be made. There's a lot of 'fixin' on the farm. I've helped Jim do a lot of that. He could and still can fix anything!
38. And the bookwork! That was my least favorite thing, but records must be kept, bills paid. Jim and I shared that chore but since computers came along, Jim handles most bookkeeping that way.
39. My Dad passed away 27 years before my Mom did. She loved bookwork and kept her own records, marketing her own crops and all the rest right into her 80's. And continued to drive her favorite truck also! Mom passed away at the age of 94.
40. In years past, both my Mom, my Husband and I each have received a few farming awards including 'Farmer of the Year, Sherman County', Soil Conservation awards and others. For that we feel honored because there are a lot of good farmers in Sherman County! But it is nice to be recognized.
41. More and more today you hear about women in Agriculture who are engaged in joint ventures with others or who are sole proprietors of farming enterprises, running the business on their own. My hat is off to them. They've been called Farm-Hers in magazines and there is even a program on RFD TV that features these women and what they do.

42. As for me, I'm glad I never needed and wanted to 'go it alone'. Along with that, my husband is such a pleasure to work with! 😊
43. There is a lot about farming that I haven't had time to mention. One challenge to farmers is the weather. Farmers plan their day with an eye to the sky. And pray. Heat, drought, untimely freezes, too much rain, too little rain. Oh my! Anything can happen. Tornadoes that flip your sprinkler upside down with wheels in the air, crops laid flat. Oh, well. That's what we get for farming outside!
44. And, oh what a conundrum it is trying to market your grain. Because you have NO control over the prices! Oh, well, maybe next year everything will be perfect. 😊
45. And there's a whole nation of farmers that just love this stuff? Thank the Good Lord for that!....You might ask, why? Why do you do this? Let's take a ride!
46. Well, come on. Get in the pickup and we'll ride out to the farm this morning while the dew is still glistening on the corn leaves. See? The ears of corn are plumb pushing out of the shucks! Yup, you'll say, it's gonna be a good year. Now. Smell the fresh plowed soil in the field next to you. Anticipate the wheat crop you are going to plant there. That crop will bring a field of golden grain. Oh, yeah...! Prices are gonna be better next year! Gonna be able to pay that loan off at the bank!

47. Well, I'd better get y'all back to town now. Oh, by the way, I wrote a poem the other day. You want to hear it? I call it Sunrise Over the Cornfield and it goes like this.

48. Sunrise Over the Cornfield

I hope you have the chance to 'see'
[Before you leave] this present plane
Sunrise over a corn field,
Tassels glistening after a rain,
Leaves like well-oiled leather
Dark green & yellow veined
Stalks as thick as a man's arm
Support the golden grain,

The colors of the sunrise, enhance
This awesome view,
Of sunrise over a cornfield,
Oh My, Father,
What good, good, work, you do!

Ineta Chesher

49. And just for the record when John Denver used to sing....."Life on the farm is kinda laid back"....well, it's clear he never spent any time on a real farm!

50. I would like to recognize my 'table of friends', all of whom have some connection to the farm, the land. All Business women or Farm-Hers in their own right!
51. Also, my dear family and other friends here. First, my husband and business partner, Jimmy, also, the 'Ultimate' mother, our daughter Jacque and her beautiful daughters, two of whom helped prepared my Power Point, ~~(her husband, Roy, could not be here)~~, our lovely daughter, Carol, the flight attendant-slash-cowgirl, our handsome Son, Bobby, who makes Fort Worth and the whole Dallas area a better place to live, and my sister, Dean, **AND** other family and friends and all of you beautiful people! Thank you for being here!
52. And thanks again to the Louise Daniels History Luncheon Committee for inviting me. What a great organization you have here, what a lovely event you have created today!

God Bless America, this great country that we have the privilege to live in, and God Bless You! Thank You!