



Mary Neiheisel EdD, CNS-BC, FNP-BC, FNAP, FAANP has been an institution with the American Association of Nurse Practitioners for many decades. She has been the Editor of FAANP's newsletter, *The Forum* since its inception. She is longest active nursing faculty at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She held the Pfizer/Ardoin Endowed Professor in the College of Nursing and Allied Health Professions at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, until 2000. She continues to teach in the nurse practitioner program and is a practicing nurse practitioner at the Faith House of Acadiana, a shelter for survivors of domestic violence. In addition to her teaching and practice, she has been very active in her community including Acadiana Center for the Arts, Camp Bon Coeur, PASA, Family Violence Intervention Program, the Junior League Advisory Board, the Lafayette Public Library Foundation, the League of Women Voters, Performing Arts Society of Acadiana, Rotary, United Way, March of Dimes, American Heart Association to name a few, but not all. In 2009, she was recognized as a Friend of the National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties. In 2008, she was nominated for Outstanding Nurse Educator for NONPF. She is a Fellow of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (2006), the first in Louisiana to be recognized, The University of Louisiana Lafayette Foundation recognized her as a Distinguished Professor, the first in the College of Nursing and the first and only one in the 20th century.

#### Interview Abstract:

Dr. Neiheisel is a tireless educator and practitioner. In her words, she loves to work and play hard. She is the longest active faculty member of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 57 years and counting. She was instrumental in developing the NP program at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and for obtaining legislative approval for graduate nursing programs. She attributes her longevity and enthusiasm to balance in her life. Although she teaches full time and has an active practice at the Faith House in Acadiana, a shelter for survivors of domestic violence, she is an active participant in community organizations. She is currently active in raising funds to expand the Domestic Violence Shelter to 600 beds. Her list of philanthropic and volunteer activities is endless. Community involvement, especially in fine arts and theater is a high priority for her. She has been active in the National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties and co-sponsored a research grant with Amelie Hollier, a former student of hers. She has also been very active in the American Association of Nurse Practitioners and is a Fellow in AANP. She has been instrumental publishing *The Forum*, a quarterly newsletter for FAANPs, since its inception. Dr. Lee Ford was a valuable resource to Dr. Neiheisel as she developed the

NP programs at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Her passion has been and continues to be teaching and clinical practice for the underserved.

#### Biographical Sketch:

Dr. Mary B. Neiheisel joined the University of Southwestern Louisiana (USL) now the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL) faculty in 1966 where her late husband, Richard taught in the history department. She held the Pfizer/Ardoin Endowed Professor in the College of Nursing and Allied Health Professions at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, until 2000. In 2000 and continuing she holds the Lafayette General Medical Center/BORSF Professorship in Nursing II.

A native of Texas, Dr. Neiheisel began her studies at Baptist Memorial Hospital School of Nursing in San Antonio, Texas in 1957 graduating in 1960. Her B.S. in Nursing is from Incarnate Word College, San Antonio, TX. She received an M.S. in Nursing from the University of Colorado, Boulder in 1965. Her Ed.D. completed in 1981, is from Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. She then completed a Family Nurse Practitioners curriculum in 1995 from Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas. In 2005, she completed additional course work in Adult Nurse Practitioner from Northern Kentucky University.

Her tireless dedication to the community and profession includes Editor of Fellow of American Association of Nurse Practitioners Quarterly Publication, *FAANP Forum*. Dr. Neiheisel has been a valued and energetic force teaching for 57 years at the College of Nursing at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. In addition to teaching, Dr. Neiheisel is a family nurse practitioner at Faith House of Acadiana, a shelter for survivors of domestic violence.

Keywords: education, clinical practice, community involvement, philanthropy, family nurse practitioner

Mary Neiheisel

Interview

AANP oral history project



# **Interview: Mary Neiheisel EdD, CNS-BC, FNP-BC, FNAP, FAANP**

**Date:** 11/18/2022

**Interviewers Name;** Michaelene Jansen

**Place for Interview:** Phone

**Education:**

Baptist Memorial Hospital School of Nursing G.N., Diploma. in Nursing, San Antonio, Texas, 1960

Incarinate Word College B.S. in Nursing, San Antonio, Texas

University of Colorado M.S. in Nursing Education, Boulder, Colorado, 1965

Louisiana State University Ed.D. University of Louisiana, Lafayette, Louisiana, 1981

Midwestern State University, Post Graduate Certificate, Family Nurse Practitioner, Wichita Falls, Texas, 1995

**Other Coursework:**

University of Colorado Health Science Center, Advanced Nursing 1997

Northern Kentucky University Gerontology NP 2005

Northern Kentucky University Adult NP 2006

**Certifications;**

Registered Nurse Licenses in Texas and Louisiana, Advanced Practice Nurse License in Louisiana, Certification as CNS-BC in Adult Health, Certification as APRN-FNP-BC,

**Short Bio:**

Dr. Mary B. Neiheisel joined the University of Southwestern Louisiana (USL) now the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (ULL) faculty in 1966. She held the Pfizer/Ardoin Endowed Professor in the College of Nursing and Allied Health Professions at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, until 2000. In 2000 and continuing she holds the Lafayette General Medical Center/BORSF Professorship in Nursing II.

A native of Texas, Dr. Neiheisel began her studies at Baptist Memorial Hospital School of Nursing in San Antonio, Texas in 1957 graduating in 1960. Her B.S. in Nursing is from Incarnate Word College, San Antonio, TX. She received an M.S. in Nursing from the University of Colorado, Boulder in 1965. Her Ed.D. completed in 1981, is from Louisiana State University,

Baton Rouge. She then completed a Family Nurse Practitioners curriculum in 1995 from Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas. In 2005, she completed additional course work in Adult Nurse Practitioner from Northern Kentucky University.

During her career, she has been recognized with many honors both for her professional accomplishments as well as her civic and philanthropic involvements. I Acadiana Center for the Arts, Camp Bon Coeur, PASA, Family Violence Intervention Program, the Junior League Advisory Board, the Lafayette Public Library Foundation, the League of Women Voters, Performing Arts Society of Acadiana, Rotary, United Way, March of Dimes, American Heart Association to name a few, but not all.

She provides services to many boards in the community, including the Acadiana Center for the Arts, Camp Bon Coeur, PASA, Family Violence Intervention Program, the Junior League Advisory Board, the Lafayette Public Library Foundation, the League of Women Voters, Performing Arts Society of Acadiana, Rotary, United Way, March of Dimes, American Heart Association to name a few, but not all. In 2017 she received the Lafayette Civic Cup, the highest honor in her city. In 2022, a former student and her husband named and endowed the Dr. Mary B. Neiheisel Graduate NP Student Award and presented from 2022 in perpetuity. In 2022 she received the first Dr. Mary B. Neiheisel Patron of Hope Award from Faith House of Acadiana. In 2022 she was named Member Emeritus of the Acadiana Center of the Arts (ACA) Board of Directors and was celebrated and honored at a reception and at the Pelican Ball at ACA.

Her tireless dedication to the community and profession includes Editor of Fellow of American Association of Nurse Practitioners Quarterly Publication, *FAANP Forum*. Dr. Neiheisel has been a valued and energetic force teaching for 57 years at the College of Nursing at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. In addition to teaching, Dr. Neiheisel is a family nurse practitioner at Faith House of Acadiana, a shelter for survivors of domestic violence.

### ***Honors:***

In 2022, a former student, Mrs. Tracy Frentz and her husband, Dr. Bryan Frentz established the Dr. Mary B. Neiheisel Graduate NP Student Scholarship which is presented twice a year and has been presented twice and will continue in Perpetuity.

Sponsored the Richard and Mary Neiheisel endowed Dissertation Award for Doctoral students in the College of Liberal Arts-2018-2023;

Sponsored the Richard G. Neiheisel Endowed Professor of History. (Professor named for Fall 2017. 2017- in perpetuity.

Established the Richard and Mary Neiheisel Dissertation Award for doctoral students. This is an endowed fund and is enduring. Presented once a year and for the first time in 2011 and in perpetuity.

Established the Richard Neiheisel/Phi Beta Kappa Graduate Student Award for a graduating Graduate student. This is an endowed fund and is enduring. Presented twice a year since 1990 and in perpetuity.

Sponsored the NONPF Leadership Mentee Program 2018-2020

Established with Dr. Amelie Hollier, the APEA Poster award for NONPF. Presented once a year to four recipients attending and presenting at the annual NONPF meeting.

Zonta Club of Lafayette: Contribute to and raise funds for four different annual educational awards

**When did you become an NP? What was the motivation?**

I was appointed Graduate Nursing Coordinator at the College of Nursing at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in 1989. At that time, we did not have a nurse practitioner track but received numerous inquiries regarding NP programs. I was certified as an Adult Clinical Nurse Specialist but felt that if we were to offer a nurse practitioner track, I needed to be certified. I had met Dr. Lee Ford in Colorado in the mid-sixties and was intrigued with the role. However, I was not able to obtain my nurse practitioner certification at that time as I was focused on nursing education and finances were limited. Midwestern State University offered a post master's summer program for certification as an FNP; so I spent two summers in Wichita Falls, Texas earning the NP certification and became nationally certified.

**What experiences did you bring into the role?**

I have been in education for a long time, initially in a diploma program. After obtaining my master's degree in nursing education, I taught medical surgical nursing courses at Texas Woman's University. When I started teaching at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, it was a small undergraduate program with few faculty. My husband Richard was teaching in the History department when I started teaching at USL. In addition to teaching, I took on part time administrative duties. I became the graduate coordinator in 1989. Amelie Hollier was in our first NP class. She greatly inspired me. I consulted with the National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties (NONPF) frequently. Dr. Lee Ford also came and provided invaluable information and resources. She graciously stayed overnight to participate in a breakfast with state legislators. Although 60 legislators were invited, only nine attended but they were instrumental in providing future legislative support for NPs in Louisiana.

**Did you experience any challenges? How were they resolved?**

Nurse practitioners had great opposition in the early days from a variety of negative groups and this was a challenge to us all. As a state university funds were and are limited. There was little money for graduate nursing education. Money for graduate nursing education was provided for a consortium in the state rather than individual universities. Nurse practitioner tracks met great

resistance. Money, provider and faculty shortage also contributed to the slow progression of graduate nursing programs. There was only one other nurse practitioner at our university and we operated on a shoe string. Student enthusiasm and enrollment increased with time. We were soon able to enroll students in our NP track. There were many physicians who valued NPs and employed them. NPs now have prescriptive authority, are accepted, and are exceptional. They are well respected health care providers in our community. They are now employed in a wide variety of settings, some setting up their own practices.

**Are there any experiences that you would like to talk about?**

I have always felt that I needed to continue clinical practice. Initially I worked part time in summers in medical surgical units. I now practice as an NP in a Survivors of Domestic Violence Shelter and have a passion for providing care for that population. I have been active in fund raising and hope within the next few years to help fund and open a new shelter. Louisiana is currently 600 beds short for survivors of domestic violence.

I also have been very active in the community including the American Heart Association, coordinating walks as well the American Cancer Society. I have learned so much from many people working in the non-profit community. It has been so rewarding helping others. I have also been active on the Board of Directors and committees for the Acadiana Center for the Arts. I have been awarded the second Member Emeritus award for the commitment to the Center.

**What was most challenging in your career/ most important?**

Completing the first level-the RN was the most challenging. Graduating from a very small high school with a limited science curriculum did not contribute greatly to the college level. I spent more hours in study hall than most of my classmates and soon developed a steady pace. Completing this level and passing state boards was, of course, the first and very important step to all future success. It was important to me to not disappoint my parents, but most importantly not disappoint myself. I try to stay positive and look for positive solutions to any situation.

**Is there anything you would want to change?**

I wish we could have started the graduate nursing program earlier in our University. However, the community assistance, money and acceptance was not there. I feel there is so much more to accomplish. I have been lucky to have good health and feel that I have even more to contribute to the profession.

If finances had not been an issue when I finished the MSN degree, I might have pursued post graduate NP certificate. As it was I had \$200.00 left when I graduated and had very little money and needed to work and earn that first pay check.

**What do you see as pivotal moments in the past years?**

Dr. Lee Ford impressed me greatly. Although she was in pediatrics and I was in the adult program, I was intrigued with the NP role. She was very instrumental in helping us develop our NP program at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She was so full of ideas and was

instrumental in persuading the state legislators to understand and support nurse practitioners. Our graduates were outstanding and able to demonstrate the various dimensions of the NP role.

I would be remised if I didn't mention my mother and my husband and all their support. Although they have been gone for 30 years, they always encouraged me to try new aeas. She was so proud of me for obtaining my doctorate. My husband , Richard was also supportive and encouraged me to continue my education. He truly believed in nursing education.

I believe that much of my success is due to balance in life. I work hard but also like to relax and have a good time. I love the theater and have season tickets for Broadway performances in Lafayette and New Orleans. I have been very supportive of promoting the fine arts in Lafayette. Being involved and immersed in community activities are both very rewarding. As I said, it keeps me balanced. I truly believe in living the good life.

I have been engrossed with publishing FAANP's *The Forum* for many years. It is also so rewarding. I must thank Mary Jo Goolsby for her vision of *The Forum*.

**What advice would you give to new nurse practitioners?**

1. Don't give up. Recognize the importance of NPs in prevention of disease and health maintenance and promote both of these at the highest levels.
2. Stay up to date.
3. Participate in local, regional and national activities.
4. Know trends in health care and what NPs can do.
5. Don't be afraid to give yourself credit when credit is due

**What do you see as the role of Nurse Practitioners in the next 25 years?**

NPs will function in key roles in their communities, state and national efforts. NPs will increase their participation in legislation and ensure that NPs are included in all aspects of health care. There will be more research in documenting the value of the NP role. NPs will be a monumental core of health care providers.