

Juneau County
4-H Oral
History Project

Evelyn Gray

Interview

8/7/2013

Evelyn Gray Interview

Interviewer: Carissa Huebner

Also in room: Emily Rebhan

Huebner: Today's date is August 7, 2013. The time is 9:00am. We are at the Hatch Public Library in Mauston, Wisconsin. My name is Carissa Huebner and I am interviewing Evelyn Gray about her years involved in the 4-H program. Also in the room with us is Emily Rebhan. This interview is a part of the Juneau County Oral History Project.

Thank you so much for meeting with us today. So, when was the first time you were involved in 4-H?

Gray: I was in 4-H back in around, probably '54 till I graduated in '57.

Huebner: And how long were you in it as a child?

Gray: I was in it I think three years. The name of our club was Lindina Pioneers, and that club is no more, but we had a big group.

Huebner: What types of projects were you in, when you were in it?

Gray: I know I was in sewing, because I can remember making a skirt and having it in the Dress Review at the fair. And I always took cooking. And I'm sure I took other projects, but I don't remember.

Huebner: Were your parents involved in 4-H when they were growing up?

Gray: No.

Huebner: So how did you find out about 4-H?

Gray: Well, I guess some of my friends at school told me about 4-H. So I just, there was group of us girls, and we did lots of extra-curricular things. There was three of us. We did a clarinet trio for Music and Drama, and I remember we did, as a club, we did square dancing, that was when they had the Music and Drama. And so that was real fun.

Huebner: Do you have any other memories from childhood, 4-H?

Gray: Yeah. I think it was 1955. I was selected to play in state 4-H band. And we met first in Madison at Club Week, that was always the first or second week of June. And also at that time, the other, two other girls, Jennifer Von Haden from Elroy and Julian Thompson from Elroy were also in the band. So we played concerts and stuff, and then we went to the State Fair. We went down there on a Sunday, our 4-H leader, Herb Mocadlo, I'm sure you don't know him. And then we, he took us down there on Sunday morning, and we'd come back Thursday afternoon. And the year we were down there, they had just built dorms. We were the first year. That's where all the kids stayed when they went down, for, for anything. They stayed in dorms. That was the first year. Well, I think a year or two ago, they torn all them dorms down and built new ones. So, (laughing) you know how the time goes. And anyway, that was a real, I still remember that whole thing. That was really neat. We wore white skirts, blouses, and we bought green 4-H jackets, or my parents did. And I think I've still got the piece of paper, and I think it was \$3.49 jacket. That was, that was big money then. And I think to go to Club Week down here, in Madison, I think it was fifteen dollars for the week. So those are things that...about some of the extra ones, things that we did.

Huebner: Okay, and then, how did you get involved as an adult?

Gray: Well, I guess I was always interested, and when my daughter, my oldest daughter, was twelve, and I said, well, I said, wait until your brother, who is three years younger, is nine, then you can both be in 4-H. And one of our first ones I remember, was Betty Riddlestein, and we'd always known her, and Nancy Ziese, she was our leader. And they started, and I don't know, I just started getting involved in it, and I can remember taking the girls over to Nancy's to learn how to crochet, and that's where I learned crocheting from, was at her meetings. And then we just kept being leaders, and I just kept being leaders, and then I had two other children, and so all four of them were in 4-H. I don't know, I just kept, and Nancy then wasn't there anymore, so I guess I probably took over as the General Leader. Then in the Leader's Association, I was treasurer back for quite a few years. We had lots of fun there. And the Leader's Association did lots of things, I'm sure they do it now, but everything is different. In our club, one of the things that I remember, we went down to Upham Woods when we had a day off from school. I think I had three of them that went, my three younger ones that went. And I went as leader, and down there they showed us how to make an igloo, and all the outside stuff, plus we went skiing, we went cross-country skiing, and I remember I cross-country skied, and I fell down, and I couldn't get up. And it took my son and another boy to pull me up. But that was some of the things that I remember. And then after my kids all got out of school, I chaperoned down there for six or seven years. That's when Juneau County went down, and they went usually by themselves, there were no other counties involved, we had enough to have just our country alone. And sometimes, they always had the younger ones, and the older ones, and sometimes we'd go out Sunday, and I'd stay till Wednesday morning with that group, then I would hurry home and be back by four

o'clock that afternoon until the following Saturday morning. And we stayed right up in the cabins with the kids.

Rebhan: Was this like a 4-H camp then?

Gray: It was the 4-H camp, yeah, down at Upham Woods.

Rebhan: And it was all Juneau County kids?

Gray: Yes, at that time. I think when we about got done, it started to be, I think Sauk County was with us. It started to be another county. But no, we had enough there, just all Juneau County kids that went to that. And then I always worked at the fair. I've always been a Superintendent out there for many years.

Rebhan: What are you the Superintendent of at the fair?

Gray: It used to be, it was just Home Environment, and that. We had so much stuff, the one area, you could not find room to put everything up. And I had Knitting and Crocheting. And we had a lot. I bet we had twenty pieces of knitting and crocheting. I think last year I had two. In the last few years since then they've added clothing because there has been hardly no clothing. Back then my daughter, when there was Dress Review, if you got picked to go to state Club Week, it was an honor. Because there was so many girls that were there. And I can remember my oldest one, she was a sewer, when Jeff our youngest one who is going to be forty-two, she made him blue flannel pajamas and a matching house coat. I think he was about probably four or five years old. And he modeled it. I still see him modeling it, and that's when it was in the new... the food stand was quite new then. And so, of course he don't like to admit that anymore. As I said, all four of mine were in 4-H. I remember one year we had over a hundred entries. They took flowers, and did houseplants and vegetables too. That area, they used to just have one on top of the other. Also the flowers and houseplants. They used to be there, and I know that you (motioning to Carissa Huebner) do that, and your folks, and there is hardly anything there. Cooking or Foods to. One year my daughter made chocolate chip cookies, and she put a tablespoon of salt in them, instead of a half a teaspoon. She didn't realize that. We don't know if they sampled, I don't think they sampled them, at that time, or that year. So anyway that... I can remember... we had our club for... and then when my kids joined it with the Mauston TNT 4-H, and that is still a club. We used to have floats for the parade. I can remember walking with our float. We had a float probably for TNT, oh, for four or five years. Of course, back then, our kids weren't big enough to be in the high school band, so we had lots of kids to be in the parade.

Huebner: Okay, so you talked about, like, there's a change in the amount of projects, is there another change in 4-H, from when you were a kid till now, and even having your kids in it?

Gray: I don't know. It used to be much slower pace back there, and now everything is so, I want to say, so much more paperwork and everything. Back then our 4-H agent, which was Ray Saxby, when my kids were in for years, I mean, when he decide to do something, or we'd go someplace like Upham Woods for the day, or here's the dates, and he just got the parents or whoever, the kids all in the vehicle, and away we went. There was no paperwork then. Oh my goodness, I can't go because you don't have a permission form, or anything like that, anymore. And I can remember, we used to, the Adult Association, we had dances for the kids. And that's where the Justice Center is now. It was the gym from the old school. And I don't know, it just seems like...well, let's just say everything has changed. In the amount of students, and I have seen what has come back, which was not when my kids were there- horses. There are a lot of horse projects.

And we all had quite a lot of project meetings. I don't know, maybe they have project meetings now. But we had a lot of them. I remember they used to come to our place for project meetings. My husband did the Electricity and he had kids coming for that. I remember when I was in 4-H. We went to project meetings, especially for sewing. And we had foods to, cooking. And we always had, a...can't think of it...before the fair where you went to different ones house to look at all their projects. We went around, and of course at that time, all the kids were in the country, and you went around and everybody just showed you what their projects were. We had it right before the fair, and you always ended up with a picnic or something, at somebody's house. I don't know if they do that now or not. That was one of the things that we did. I did, and also my kids did when I was a 4-H leader. Went around, and they showed you everything. I don't know, it just seems like it's a faster pace nowadays, and well, of course with all the electronics, and all that stuff, and the parents are all so busy that...there are a lot of them that don't take a whole bunch of interest. If you go to a club and you have a sewing leader, they think the sewing leader can teach my kid how to do this, I don't have to.

I can remember our club having Halloween Parties at our house. And we had a Christmas Party. Potluck Dinner. I haven't really been involved with 4-H, to know what's going on. Probably it's been, like going to the meetings and stuff, probably oh, about the last eight years or so. The only thing that I am really involved in now is the fair. Every year they call me to help with that.

Huebner: So what do you think you gained by being in 4-H, or your kids, what you saw them gain, by being involved?

Gray: I guess it's ...just the fun and the activities that they did, and the stuff they learned. Like, Audrey, the first year she was in, she learned to crochet. I didn't know myself, so I went along because I had to take her, and we learned together. And of course my boys all took electrical projects because their dad helped them with that. I don't know, just everybody...everybody did.

And my girls were all Junior Leaders, and we always did the Speaking contest. Not the Speaking, they did that too, but the Demonstration contest. That was great if you got to go to State Fair for that, which, two or three of mine went to State Fair for that. And they... every year, every year they had something. One year Jeff the youngest one, he did it on exercises. And he was not very, very old. And it was the lady from Baraboo that was the judge for the agents down there. He had everybody in the audience doing the exercises with him. And that was neat. The first year Audrey did it, she was Garden Gurdy. She came in, and she had a hat, straw hat, with all kinds of vegetables on it. I don't remember what she made that year. But the next year, she had a monkey, a stuffed animal, with her. She made banana bread that year.

Rebhan: It was a stuffed monkey, right?

Gray: Yeah. But that was her...to get people involved, or in, to get...

Rebhan: Attention?

Gray: Attention. But yeah, the Garden Gurdy...I don't remember now what she made. She must have made a salad or something.

Rebhan: I think the extension office actually has a picture of her. Because we have a picture of a young girl, and she's making banana bread, and there is a stuffed monkey there.

Gray: I'm sure it's probably her, because that would be...that would be when she was about twelve or so. And now she's fifty-two, (Laughing) so, you take that, from that, from that, and it's been that many years ago. And one year they made a pencil, a frustration pencil. And one year, Jeff, yeah Jeff, he plays drums, so he did his drum set the year he went to state with the drums. He would teach them how to play for his demonstration.

One year we went out and got petunias at midnight, because it had rained. That was the year it had rained and rained and rained. We went out and got the petunias at midnight. So we took them to the fair with the dirt and mud right on them (laughing). That year everything at the fair was...it rained for weeks straight. One year Audrey, she was doing her artwork the night before (laughing) to get to the fair the next day. I'm sure, probably, I'm sure nowadays they wait till the last minute. I found that out being out there as Superintendent. There are a lot of, half the entries don't come in, that the kids are signed up for. So, anyway.

Huebner: So, besides like the public speaking, that you have already talked about, what do you think that they, that 4-H has done to help kids prepare for later on in life?

Gray: Well, I guess, just getting along with other ones, and just trying to do your best, because everybody is interested in winning a blue ribbon, and stuff. And so, if they go through life and do their best, they can...it's just getting along with people in an organization, just like any organization, and what you put in it...I mean, whatever you put in it, the more you put in the better you are, and more active in school, and then stuff like that.

Huebner: Okay, so you said that your husband helped with the electricity project, what kinds of projects did you help lead, or teach the kids?

Gray: Oh what did we have? I didn't help with the sewing. I...I helped with the gardening, the garden, I remember they used to come to the house to do that. And I helped with Foods, I know. And then just being the General Leader. But we had sometimes as much as forty, fifty kids. We had town kids, and we had country kids. So I mean, it was a mixture of kids that were in. I look back, and I can see them out at the fair, I can see some of the kids I had as 4-H members, their kids are entering stuff now. So some of them kept right on going down. Now none of my kids, there was too much that they were, other things, well, my girl in Minneapolis, she looked into 4-H up there in the cities, and of course, it's not like she was in here. I don't know why, but my other three, they were just, there was other things to be involved in. Of course a big thing was sports, back when they were growing up too, that they were in at school. All your music, and that kind of, that kind of stuff. So they just, they just never got involved in 4-H, so we stopped right there when they were done. But I can see some of them at fair, and I can see some of the parents, the grandparents bringing the kids with their stuff for the fair too that had kids when I was there. I mean, it's kind of neat to see that. That some keep going. That's why the organization can keep going, I think.

Huebner: So I know that you haven't been to a meeting you said in like eight years, or so, but can you think of any big differences from when you were a kid to now in the meetings? Like I know that the paperwork is a lot more now, but...

Gray: Now they're more structured, and everybody has their position, and I don't know, everybody, I don't know, I just know when I was a leader, everybody was just one big, one big group.

Rebhan: Almost like a big family, then?

Gray: Yes. That's what it was. And as I say back then too, you interviewed Janice, she's one of them that was one of our group back then. It just...yeah...it just seems like everybody knew everybody, and it just...very rarely would I see any strangers or new ones that came. There was just...

Rebhan: Is it okay if I ask questions?

Huebner: Yeah.

Rebhan: Okay, so you mentioned Club Week in Madison. What was that?

Gray: Well they called it 4-H Club Week.

Rebhan: Okay.

Gray: And they selected so many from each country that went. I think from our county, I think there's about twelve that go. And when you go down there, you stay in the dorms, you have programs at night, and then you have different areas that you go to as kids.

Rebhan: Did you get to go to Club Week?

Gray: That's when I went for 4-H band. That was mine down there. We went, well there was other things that we did. But I don't think they have 4-H Club Week, but there was kids from all over Wisconsin. Every country had kids, because I remember I have the picture yet that says the year and Juneau County in the front, and of course you're all standing. And the girls all had dresses on then, and that was in June.

Rebhan: High heels?

Gray: No, I don't think we had high heels on. And there's still a few, Marion Christenson, from up by New Lisbon, she was always a member, and she's around here yet. She went that year when I did. But it was just, I guess, a highlight, and I think you had to be selected to go.

Rebhan: Okay.

Gray: Because I'm sure there were a lot of kids who wanted to. But somebody would take you down, on Sunday, and I think it was Friday. And of course at the end I also think they had a state choir. And so there was kids from other ones...well of course they had the band too. And then there was kids from the whole state that went.

Rebhan: So for the band and choir, did you get to play for everyone that was there?

Gray: Oh yeah, we had concerts. And at the State Fair, we would go and march up and down the streets, well then it wasn't so congested as it is now. I think, probably three or four times a day

we would have our own little, or the band would, would go around and play. The choir then had a spot that they would sing in.

Rebhan: You were with the band.

Gray: Yes. I played clarinet in the band.

Rebhan: It sounds like so much fun.

Gray: It was back then. You didn't have that many things going on. And really, I suppose when I was, to get to go to Madison, that was a big deal. And to stay someplace for that long, you know, and to go down to the State Fair, that was...that was a...I mean that was your summer. That was really exciting.

Rebhan: I bet. I think that you said that the Leaders Association organized like square dances?

Gray: That was our club. When we had Music and Drama, they always had a lot of plays. And lots of times we had, on Sunday afternoon, we had so many we'd go over to Sunday night. And our club just happened, that we decided, that some of the parents knew how to square dance. So we all...they made a skirt, so that all of our skirts matched, I remember the girls, and we practiced at Woodside Ranch. I remember going out there, and not really practicing, but we put it on out there for the people. Then we put it on. Then we also had plays. Every year we had a play.

Rebhan: A club play?

Gray: Yes. That was for Music and Drama. Because I know that Jeffrey ended when he got Best Actor one year in the play.

Rebhan: That was quite an honor.

Gray: And Julie Hug, which was Barb Hug who used to be here, at the extension office, her daughter, they were in school together. And then one year, our club had a little band that played. So we did a lot of that kind of stuff. The kids did.

Rebhan: And then the float, that the club would do...

Gray: Oh yeah.

Rebhan: So which parade was that for?

Gray: The fair parade.

Rebhan: Okay.

Gray: Yeah, the fair parade, they always had, a lot of the clubs had floats. I think we had it one year on our snowmobile trailer, or one of the years. I can remember those kids getting ready. And my oldest one, her girlfriend from Madison, came up. That's when they were teenagers, no, not teenagers, otherwise they would have been in the band. And she helped with it. And they walked by the float, and I remember they had big bats of some kind...I don't know anymore, but I mean, those kids certainly could do anything for a float.

Rebhan: And then you said that your club would do parties, like holiday parties.

Gray: Yes. We had, I remember it being at our house. We had Sharon Pufahl out there. We had Halloween Parties at her house, and they lived up in the country, up about a block from the cemetery. So they had a hay wagon and they took the kids for a ride through the cemetery and stuff. After dark.

Rebhan: Just a little spooky.

Gray: That was the Halloween Party. And we always had Christmas parties. I think we had them at the Methodist's Church. Before that I can remember having them down town, well, where there's the Justice Center now. And at our Christmas parties, we always gave out our fair checks. Their fair checks, and if anybody else got any other honors, like if they had been there till they graduated from that. And then we usually had some of the kids, if they wanted their to have their band play, like we had one boy play the piano, he was a little one. We usually had them at the Methodist Church, in the later years. And we installed our officers at that time.

Rebhan: Did you do something fun, like did you have candles?

Gray: Yes we did. Yes we did for the officers...yep, we had the candles when the new officers were installed.

Rebhan: Any other traditions for the officers?

Gray: I don't think so. I don't remember any.

Rebhan: The lighting of the candles, and then pass it on.

Gray: Yep. And usually our 4-H agent was there, which was Jeff Saxby, and his son was also in 4-H. He was the same age as one of my sons. So I said, it was just, everybody was just one...

Rebhan: It was a community.

Gray: Yes.

Rebhan: And then you mentioned Junior Leaders. You had kids who were Junior Leaders. Do you remember any of the things that the Junior Leaders would do? I know that they kind of helped out during the fair.

Gray: I can't remember. Way back then, they didn't have Ambassadors to start with. I think that came in later years. I don't know if they had them for the kids, or not. And I know back then we didn't have the younger kids, what do you call them now?

Rebhan: Cloverbuds?

Gray: Cloverbuds, no. We didn't have any of them. And then what comes after Cloverbuds?

Rebhan: Explorers?

Gray: I don't know if we had them or not, either, to start with. I think in later years they might have. But I know that Cloverbuds meetings, you know they have for the little kids now, they didn't have any of that when our kids were there. I think about the time I was done being a leader, that was when they came into existence.

Huebner: So what age could you join then, if there wasn't Cloverbuds?

Gray: Well, when I first started it was nine, because I waited until Garry was nine before Audrey, because she was twelve, at that time, but that's when we first started. And another thing, you went down to Upham Woods, when my second boy Gary went down, they paddled down. They put their boats in here on Sunday afternoon, here, down here, and then they went down there with a group of them, and our 4-H leader who was Ray Saxby, he went with them, he was the adult. I don't know how many canoes they had, but they would stop. They stopped Sunday night, and Monday night, and then they got into camp. And that was the year that, is a few that remember, they were down by Lyndon someplace, camping, and the kids found eighteen hundred dollars.

Rebhan: Wow.

Gray: It was in the sand, and dirt, and mud, and whatever. And of course they...and nothing has ever been said about that money. As far as we still know, it went to the sheriff's department. They think they know who tore down a house and took stuff out there. Maybe that's where it came from. That's what the kids used to...when the kids when to 4-H, or when they went to Upham Woods at that time...they used to do.

Rebhan: They would canoe in.

Gray: Yep, they took the canoes down.

Rebhan: And would they canoe back home then too?

Gray: No, we picked them up. Then they were down to Upham Woods. They canoed from Mauston here to Upham Woods. And then I'll never forget, Gary and a couple more boys, they got there, and we were there to pick them up, they had the same clothes on as they started with on Sunday (laughing). And they took their own food and stuff along. But they had good times. Some of them would be a group and go down to Devil's Lake, start at Upham Woods for that, but they would make a group and spend a whole time down at Devil's Lake, a group doing camping and I suppose looking in the woods, or I suppose looking for stuff like that.

Rebhan: It sounds like so much fun.

Gray: It was back...the kids had a lot of fun back then doing things.

Rebhan: Do you have any more questions, Carissa?

Huebner: No.

Rebhan: I want to thank you so much for meeting with us. This was so much fun.

Gray: Oh, well thank you. I don't know how much I told you.