

Juneau County
4-H Oral
History Project

Lois Lawton

Interview

7/3/2013

Lawton Interview

Interviewer: Emily Rebhan

Also in room: June Schoff

Rebhan: Today's date is July 3rd, 2013. The time is 1:00 pm. We are at the home of Lois Lawton in Mauston, Wisconsin. My name is Emily Rebhan and I am interviewing Lois Lawton about her years involved in the 4-H program. This interview is being recorded for the Juneau County 4-H Oral History Project.

Thank you very much, Lois, for meeting with me.

Lawton: I feel very privileged that you came and asked me, and you want to know what my involvement in the 4-H in this county is.

Rebhan: Yes.

Lawton: Well, the truth of the matter is, when I was a child I had a very bad experience with 4-H so I quit after the first half year, or the first, you know, nine months of doing 4-H and I thought that I would never have anything to do with 4-H again as long as I lived. And then I came into this community in 1981, and I substitute taught. And the people in this community saw that I really cared about children a lot, so they asked if I would work at the fair in the Green Building where the children exhibited. I said, "Oh, if it's for kids, I'll be there." So I came and I helped. I helped setting up for the Cultural Arts. And it was I think, it was around 1983, or 1984. It wasn't the first year that I was here. And Barb Hug was the person in charge of the 4-H at the time. And I had met her daughter in school as a substitute teacher and she demanded respect. Her daughter just demanded respect. It was the first time I really realized that children knew a whole lot of things that I didn't know. Because she just demanded that, "You don't think we're that dumb, do you?" she says to me. We were trying to do something on the sewing machine, and was told, "We might not sew in the class. But I don't know what to do if something goes wrong with these machines. And she says, "You don't think we're that dumb, do you?" And she proceeded to go ahead and use the sewing machine.

Which I thought, well, if she is successful at it, I'm not going to step in, you know. But if something goes wrong with the machine, I still don't know what to do with it, you know. So that was my first encounter with Barb Hug's daughter. I don't remember what her name was, but, hey, I thought, these children know things. And I started to respect the children for knowing more things than I gave them credit for, or more than I knew even. So that was a very, very educational step into my becoming more versed in working with children as a substitute teacher. So someone said to me, "Will you help?" and I said, "Sure, I'll help." So I went there, and I worked there for about three years before I figured out this was all 4-H.

Rebhan: Oh really?

Lawton: I did not realize it. All of a sudden they put up these pretty little signs and they all had

the 4-H symbol on it, and people are talking about what 4-H club they belong to and stuff, and then I thought, "Oh, this is 4-H. This is really good 4-H!". You know, instead of being angry that I got copped into it, I thought, this is well run. And I made blame sure that no child was ever put down the way that I had been put down by my older brothers and sisters who were in 4-H. They put me down. They kept telling me that I couldn't do anything right. So I made sure that no child was ever put down no matter what they came in with.

I had some issues with a judge or two through the years. But, the children were never put down; we tried to lift them up. And the Danish method of judging was so, it seemed to me it was unfair because the child was not there to explain what they had learned. 4-H is a learning thing. So I am so happy that we went to face to face with Cultural Arts because the child can explain what they learned. And the child can learn from the judge. A judge looking at a piece of work, even if the child writes a note, it is not the same thing as being personal about it. I think that helps the children a lot. There was a time when we took a very great care to make our whole building look nice. We used to skirt the tables. And then we only judged on Thursday and it only stayed till Sunday. So it seemed so futile to do it for just a couple, just a couple of days. I think it would be worth it now if we would skirt the tables and make it look pretty. But our building is so, our tables are so unstable, and the floor, maybe we'll wait till we have a better building to work in. I don't know if that will ever happen.

Rebhan: What did you use to skirt the tables?

Lawton: We bought plastic skirting.

Rebhan: Oh.

Lawton: We used green and gold.

Rebhan. Okay.

Lawton: The 4-H colors.

Rebhan: Yes.

Lawton: We put them around and it really dressed up. I was thinking that even if we dressed up the front tables, with the awards on. It wouldn't be that much money.

Rebhan: No

Lawton: Any kind of homemakers club would donate something towards that. Or a 4-H club could. When we did it the first couple of times, the 4-H organization brought them in. And if we didn't have enough, well, I just went out and bought some.

Rebhan: But that's you, that's what you do, Lois.

Lawton: When something needs to be done. I admired the children for the variety of skills that they had. We used to have a lot of ceramics. We used to have very much leather craft. Now we have a whole lot of scrapbooking and things like that. It depends on who the leadership is, what their skills are.

Rebhan: Sure.

Lawton: The most fun thing is when you do something with a whole group of 4-Hers and they all come in with the same little object.

Rebhan: And they are all a little different, but they are all the same.

Lawton: They are all the same. You look at them and you say, oh, I'm supposed to pick out the best one. And that's why I thought Danish was so hard; because there is no way that you can do that.

So, do you want some anecdotes?

Rebhan: Yes.

Lawton: Well, one year we had this judge who didn't seem to understand to well what she was doing. We had some gorgeous pieces. But one little, young, well she was a junior in high school, she had written a children's story, illustrated it, printed it out by hand. That was before computers were in. She had bound it herself. It was a beautiful piece of work. And she had the whole outline of how she had done it in the folder. It was so complete of all the work they had done. And the judge looked at it and said, "What's this?" And I said, "This is a book that I child had made." "Well, I don't understand what it is." I was wondering if she couldn't read, or what the problem was. I really didn't know what her problem was that she couldn't see that this was something nice.

Rebhan: This was a handmade book.

Lawton: It was a handmade book. I said, look at the work at is done on the book itself, and the story itself was a real cute little story, I don't remember what it was about now. But the judge gave it a red ribbon.

Rebhan: No.

Lawton: I was very distressed because that should have been a Grand Champion. And the young lady came and she was so angry. I said, don't be angry. I'm angry enough for both of us. You go, and make sure something good comes out of this. And in the middle of the night, I had a wild , wild thought. Hey, we could make a special literary award.

Rebhan: One year only!

Lawton: Yes, one year only. I went to Mrs. Riddlestein, she used to run the fair. And I said, I want to buy the biggest ribbon you have floating around here from I don't care what. I just need a great big ribbon. And she said "For what?" And I told her about the judge. And she said, "Oh that horse's ass! We won't ever have her back again!" She gave me a great big yellow gold ribbon.

Rebhan: Beautiful.

Lawton: And I lettered a little thing that said, "Special Literary Award." We hid the red ribbon in the middle of the pile of stuff that we had standing up there. The little girl called me after a while and told me how pleased she was. Her mother called me later and said, "That was the best thing that you could have done for her. She was so pleased. And that same judge- there was fruit jar, with a Mother's Day card taped onto it, with an artificial flower stuck in it, and that got first place.

Rebhan: You never know.

Lawton: You never know. We hid it. We had a great big doll with a cornhusk kind of a thing. We hid this thing under her dress when we displayed it because we were kind of embarrassed. But we the superintendents of an area have the right to judge the judging.

Rebhan: Okay.

Lawton: And that was the only judge we ever had where I gave a really negative, "I don't want her back." There were some that were better than others, but they were all good. No one did something like that after that, or before that- that was an acquired incident.

Rebhan: So, are you now the Superintendent at the fair for Cultural Arts?

Lawton: Yes, I have been since, I think, the second year I worked there. They wanted to know how we could work this, and I sat down and I thought about it. We had to take in all the exhibits before judging started. And you had to have each category in its own little spot, so you could take the whole category, you had to mark them in as they came in, and then you had to see how many there were, and you had better find them when it came time for judging. And we did that round and round. Finally I got a system going where I had a little card that said what category, and what number it was, A16, or whatever. And I spread them around.

Rebhan: Oh yeah.

Lawton: And we put the exhibits underneath the card. And those that didn't have anything checked in, we just took away, you know, but I made cards for every category, and there weren't as many as there are now. Now we have it by age group, and by media being used, and all that. It's all judged in different categories. But there weren't quite as many as there are now. It was a lot to keep track of.

Rebhan: I'm sure.

Lawton: And then you have all these people coming through because it's Thursday at the fair, and they want to see where their child's work is, and what it's compared to, and they are lifting things up and pulling things out.

Rebhan: And you're like, "don't touch that!"

Lawton: (Laughing) Please! Finally they roped off the doors where nobody could come in. Well, now it's not a problem because the fair really hasn't started on Monday. And I think Mrs. McGowan is doing a fantastic job with the fair. It feels like a real fair.

We had another incident where we had a wonderful judge. She was here several years in a row. And she was handicapped. She used a cane to walk; she was an elderly lady. But she tutored Special Ed children. She had been a teacher. And we had a Special Ed kid that really walked odd. Millie, Millie Kastner. She paints beautiful paintings in our area. She had taken five or six children and they had painted on old saws. This little kid came through, and I said, "Do you want to see your saw being judged?" "Oh yeah, I would!" you know. But I said, "You may not say a word. You just have to stand, listen, and watch." We put the five saws in front of the judge and this little feller says, "That one's mine!" (Laughing)

Rebhan: Oh no!

Lawton: Oh Lord, now what! Well, the judge engaged him beautifully. She knew right away he was special. You could tell by his speech, and a few things. She is very attuned to that, having worked with these children. And she said, "What did you learn when you did this?" "Well," he says, "Millie, she did this half of this tree, and you don't know how many times I took the paint off the other half until it looked like hers. (Laughing) He was just so ecstatic about telling her all about it. I think he learned more doing that than any other kid with painting. So he got Grand Champion on his thing.

Rebhan: Oh, fabulous.

Lawton: And he didn't know. He said, "It's got a big purple ribbon on it. Is that good?" Yes, it's good. So those are some experiences we've had. I had, Mrs. Russo, is a lady who lives two miles down the road from us. And she comes almost every fair to help notate. Pam McGinley is another person who came and helped every year. We have students who come every year to help. We have, I have at least two judges for the Cultural Arts, because there is so many of them- so many entries. Each table with a judge should have at least three or four people working there. So to get the people is my main job, and to make sure that everything goes smoothly. The judge will ask us questions, as Superintendents, and we are supposed to know the answers. So at the beginning, it took a lot of remembering what we were supposed to do. At one point, one of the leaders gave us a little stick with a card on it that said "HELP" on it.

Rebhan: Help!

Lawton: (Laughing) And we could lift it up and she would come and see what the problem was, if you ran out of staples, or things like that. That was very, very helpful for the people who were new at it, because they always came to me- you've done this for a while, how do you do this? How do you keep your stuff straight? You know, some of them adopted the idea of having little signs that said where we would put things. I thought it would help the spectators a lot to know. One year I went through the trouble of putting all the younger children's exhibits in one spot.

Rebhan: Like all the Cloverbuds?

Lawton: No, the Cloverbuds are by themselves. But like the nine through eleven, and then there's eleven through fourteen or something, and then there's fifteen and up. Those are the age groups. But that is very difficult to do when it's face to face. Because these things keep coming in and you, if they are sorted out that way, it's easy to do that, but it's not that way any longer. But it still is, it's a magnificent thing. And I would no longer be able to do this without the help I have. You know, how many years is this, from '83 till...

Rebhan: Would that be thirty years now?

Lawton: Yes...

Rebhan: Thirty years.

Lawton: That takes, you know I'm getting old, and I don't run so quick anymore. I get achy sitting, and I get achy standing.

Rebhan: What you need is little 4-H kids who will do the running for you. Oh, get me some staples! Okay.

Lawton: We do have that. We have the people. I usually have the judge, I have a secretary, and I have another person who staples the ribbons on, and then we have a runner. Go get this, or do that. Put this away, this is already judged. And the judge will say, "this looks like it could be considered for Grand Champion, or whatever special award." That stuff has to be separated. And while we are still judging, I try to get two kids who are pretty responsible just to hang things, start to hang them up. We have made it easier for ourselves all the way through by putting direct instructions in the book. They used to be able to, you used to get something and you can't hang it. You have no way to hang it. Now we say, you have to have two holes on the top of it, and your card should hang from the left side. Now I don't know if it's the left side when your looking at it, or the left side of the back. But either side, it has to be from the top. And that's the most important thing because you hang the ribbon on that. You hang the ribbon on the bottom, and it's hanging on the next piece. So there were a lot of things like that we did. We used to do it by size to. They couldn't make anything bigger. If it was bigger, they automatically got a second ribbon for it. And, that just wasn't fair, because some of those children worked on projects in school.

Rebhan: And they had to be a certain size.

Lawton: Well, they were given a size to do, and why should we penalize them for that. There was one girl who drew a beautiful nude. And she said, "I know why that got a second place- it's a nude." And I said, "No. It got a second place because it was too large for the book. And she said, "Oh really." And I said, "Oh, we admired it very much. It beautifully done. It was very sensitive and very graceful. It was just wonderful." "Oh," she said, "I thought it was because the judge was prudish." I said, "No." (Laughing) Those kinds of fun things.

Rebhan: Yes.

Lawton: I remember the days once in a while when we had a state supervisor come in and tell us, that was the time when we had tables dressed and everything else. They said this was one of the most beautiful fairs that they went to. Not beautiful fairs, beautiful fair of 4-H that they went to. They really admired our little painted signs that were hanging. And those signs helped me to, because they come with something, and this doesn't belong in my category, you had better go find number 23, or whatever.

Rebhan: So it's the signs that say Cultural Arts.

Lawton: Yes, Cultural Arts- 18J. You know those things. And then their painted white with a little clover leaf on it. And that's the thing when I noticed those, I realized I was working in 4-H.

Rebhan: There's a clover!

Lawton: There's a clover! I got two awards for being a friend of 4-H.

Rebhan: Tell me about that. You told me about one of those.

Lawton: Leona Johnson and I received one. And I don't remember what year it is. I'm sure it's on the award. But she gave a very long description of what she did for 4-H, and how this all, how this all started for her children and kept up through her grandchildren, and when they were all gone, she was still working for 4-H. And she was the first lady when I met her, I met her at our church, and she was like the grandma to our community.

Rebhan: Okay.

Lawton: And I said, that's what I want to do when I grow up. I want to be a grandmother like she is. She was my role model. I treasured her all the time. Well, both of us got set up here. She gives this really long explanation. So they give me this thing, and I say, "Thank you very much, I'm very honored. Your children are a joy to work with, thank you" And they said "We want to know some things about your background." And I said, "Do you really want to know?" And they said, "Yeah." So I told them what a terrible thing 4-H was for me, what a terrible experience it was. I watched the other kids in my family, all the way through. They had rabbits, and gardens, and they had all this stuff. And I, all I did, well they said they could do it better than I can. I can't do anything good. I just couldn't- or so I thought at that time. But I remember, everyone belonged to 4-H in the whole countryside. We would all visit each other's gardens and take out their best

produce out of their garden. Our beans grew very well, and so they took our beans out. But the person who owned the garden got first pick usually. It took something to identify that. My mother was a 4-H leader. And she had a set of twins that she was teaching cooking to. And baking. And she and Dad, and we were all gone by that time, and they would have lunch together on Saturdays and it was made by these two girls. And for the fair, they made a chocolate cake, and they iced it. They cut it in half, and each of them presented a half. One got first place, and the other got second. My mother said "I'll never know how they did that. How the Judges did that."

Rebhan: Were you only allowed to enter half a cake?

Lawton: I have no idea what the process was then. But it was so funny because...

Rebhan: It was the same cake.

Lawton: It was the same cake. Maybe they could only give one prize. So you had to look at it, and say, well, the frosting was swirled different on this one, or something. Pickey eunish, you know. So, things like that.

I had another experience with a piece of ceramics. The judge put it way down, gave it a pink ribbon because they said they used an air brush on it. First of all, I did not know what an air brush was. And secondly of all, does that tell you, is that an advantage, or what? This piece was so beautifully done. Found out that the little girl didn't know what an airbrush was either. She had worked the colors down where it was so fine. See, those are the things that I felt bad about, because I couldn't defend the child. Because I didn't know. So that is the kind of thing that happens when you have someone stupid working there. (Laughing)

Rebhan: But now face-to-face judging gives the child an opportunity to describe what they were doing, or how they made it.

Lawton: Or the child would say, I don't know what an airbrush was either. I found out what it was when I was substituting in school and the kids did, they did taxidermy, and art teacher came in with an airbrush and told the kids to color the fish. You know, take a picture, and air brush the fish. I found out what it was, but it was a little late for that little child. I always felt bad when there was controversy over something, because I thought this kid is doing the best they know how to do. See, the judge with the air brushing thing said that this little girl wouldn't be able to use it, some adult did this for her. I couldn't disprove it, because I don't know. Another thing that happened one time in photography where he submitted some pictures, and he was in one of them.

Rebhan: Oh, and he was supposed to take the pictures, okay.

Lawton: He was supposed to be the photographer. I mean, things like that we looked for. Three years in a row there was the same pencil drawing put in. When the third time that happened I said to the judge, this has been in the fair two years already. So just give it a pink ribbon if you have to give it a ribbon at all. And then say, how long are you going to keep putting this picture

in? Like we didn't notice. But it was a very unique picture, it was a picture of a possum hanging by its tail. Not many kids would draw that.

Rebhan: See, those are the pictures that you would remember being a Superintendent.

Lawton: You remember those. That's why it's pretty important to keep the same Superintendent going for several years. There is a limit on the years a judge can serve, in the same, you know. They can do flowers or something, and come back and do Cultural Arts again. But, they think that maybe you get to familiar. And judges can't judge in their own county because they would know too many kids. My problem with that would be, I would probably recognize the kid's face, but the name wouldn't be there.

Rebhan: Or you might recognize the project they had last year. Oh, I remember you.

Lawton: I belonged to a little 4-H club called Pleasant Valley. And it was out where I used to live out in the country. We had about four families that comprised this little thing. And we had more fun with projects and working with children. And one of my specialties was how to mount, how to do the presentation on a project. Because so many children were hanging in paper, like a drawing or something with no backing on it. And then we saying you had to mount your picture, it had to be, what do you call it when you put a frame around it?

Rebhan: Like cardstock?

Lawton: Cardstock, something on it. A matting, it had to be matted some way with something behind it. And if you didn't want holes in your picture you put holes in your matting. And now that holds up really well. And it has to have a way to be hung. Now some of the children are actually putting wires through the holes, and we don't use that because we're to afraid it's going to get torn. We just put the pins through the holes. It is very, very difficult to hang some of the things from the backings we have. We use T pins. That is about the only thing we can make go in. That was another project. And my homemaking group supplies the colored material that is hung behind the cultural arts now. Because I insisted that what we had was so bad. The homemakers do a lot. They sponsor a lot of the ribbons and things like that.

Rebhan: Is this the HCE group?

Lawton: HCE group. And it's run by the same university Wisconsin extension as the 4-H is. So being in both groups helps me see a lot what is going on. At one time our wise council for our, I don't know if it was city or county, was going to drop the agent. I wrote to all the board members. You know, who is going to do all the work that is done by the HCE and the 4-H? Are you going to pay people to do the things that we do as volunteers? And I got told that that has nothing to do with anything. Well yeah. Well we didn't loose them. Mrs. Janice Seebecker stood up at the meeting. And one guy put her down so bad after the meeting, she was just in tears. They have no idea. They are just looking at the budget. They have no idea how many people go to that office to see if my pressure cooker works right, I'm having trouble with this kind of insect in my rose bushes or on my lawn, or in my trees. You know, how much information is given out by that whole university extension. And by the 4-H children, how much they learn. And how

much the women learn. We do all kinds of projects to, as HCE members. We no longer belong to the national, we belong to the international. Because they wanted us to build a big building, for something And money shouldn't go toward a building, you know.

Rebhan: It should go back. It should go back into the community.

Lawton: It should go back into the community. I think it had something to do with family planning and abortion, and stuff like that. And if we live to our code where children are our most valuable asset, we can't do that. That is not part of it. We say that creed every time we meet, where we say that children are our nation's most valuable asset. Well then, we had better protect them. That's a part of that. It's all a part of making the community better. And I see so much influence by the children. And it is actually for their own good, as well as for the good of the future. Because if we teach our children, it is our obligation as a culture to teach our children. When we fail to do that, our civilization, our country will fall. Because the next generation will have no clue. The immigration problem runs into this a little bit. We have to teach those people what America is. We can't just let them come in, and not teach them. They have to be taught. How to legally go about to change a system, so we don't have rebellion. And that all comes through 4-H, schooling, education, all this stuff, homemakers. We have to teach everybody that as an American you live with a heart. That is the most important part of living. To live with a heart, to see the other people around you. To be compassionate. If we lose that, we will lose everything that this country ever stood for.

So, is there anything else you would want to know, specifically?

Rebhan: Sure!

Lawton: What?

Rebhan: In 4-H we talk about the four H's, the Head, the Hands, the Heart, and the Health. Is there a story that in your mind captures one of those, or was there a child that you saw that just came up through the program where their life was made different?

Lawton: So many of them. One of them was this little boy that I told you about. He was so encouraged by doing something that was approved of, and he wasn't even aware if went to State. His little project went to state. It got Grand Champion, and he kept losing it. He wanted to show his friends, and it wasn't in the place it was before. "Somebody stole my saw." "No, it's over there on the table with what is going to State." "Well is that good? (Laughing)

Rebhan: Yes.

Lawton: Yes. I've seen children develop confidence, especially through demonstrations. I did a lot of speech judging and you could see from year to year children who were so timid at first came out of themselves. There is one little girl in particular, and I don't remember what her name was, but she was very timid and she was scared to give her demonstration, and once she got into it and she found out people were really interested in what she was showing, and not her, it just blossomed. You could see. And the next year it was all this confidence. They are interested

in what I want to show them. And that is the most important thing for a child to learn, is that, we're not looking at you, we are looking at what you are teaching us. And what you are saying is more important, you know how to show us how to do something is more important. I taught many, many little children how to stitch. And some of them became wonderful stitchers, and some of them, I made them finish the project. And I said if you never want to pick up a needle again, it's okay. At least you will know, when you see something, how difficult this is. You will appreciate it better. I did some of this through school, I did some of this through 4-H, I do it every summer through the summer school project. I will be doing it again this month, and probably with four or five little people. And one year I had, they didn't know what to do with this little boy. They just had no clue. It was middle school and it was hobby day. So they put him in my group with all little girls. O Lord, what am I going to do with this kid? I knew him, because I substituted, and he was a pain. And whenever he could be a pain he was one. But he was the first to recognize a pattern, he was the first to be done with his project. I have never seen a kid more proud of something he knew he could do. (Laughing) And he was so proud of it. He went around and showed everybody. I thought he was going to go to hide the fact that he was stitching. No. Not at all. It was okay, you know. So those are some of my, what I feel are great accomplishments in children's lives, and just because the child doesn't get the prize he thought he should have, they often come, they often came. Now they know. They often would come and say, "How come I didn't get first prize?" Well, you have to show them what they were up against. In the Danish, you could give only two red, two blue ribbons. And so, yours was counted less than that. But the face-to-face is magnificent. We give a lot more blue ribbons out, but it is much more fair to the individual child. That's the thing that I feel is good. I think Mrs. McGowan is doing a magnificent job as secretary. The whole process has gotten to be so much easier. It has become so much more comfortable to work in. Nobody is yelling at you for doing something. (Laughing)

Rebhan: Don't yell at me, I'm just a volunteer, right?

Lawton: There was a time when the men had charge of all the keys in all the buildings, and the building wasn't open until nine o'clock. So you got there at 7:30 because you were going to set something up. You know, I was going to get ready for the thundering herd. They wouldn't let you in. Or, you would have to go and find them someplace, and they would open. Well, I'll have time in ten minutes to come and open that door for you. So there you stand with your education, or lack thereof, with all this stuff that you're supposed to be setting up. It was very difficult. And that got taken care of right away. The grounds are nicer, their cleaner, the whole thing has improved a lot. The only thing I see, is that, what I think should be improved, is that we should dress our tables up and we should make it look very, very nice. At least the ones with the prizes on it, or something. We could do that. When we did it, I was happier with it. I, we used to give out all the prizes, and the Grand Champions and everything, and every Grand Champion had a little card with the student's name, what they won, whether it was Grand or Reserve Champion and who donated the ribbon on it. So this is Thursday we judged. I would stay at the fair all day. We would hang up everything, and I be so beat, I would come home and I thought I'd died. Around 2 o'clock in the morning I would letter all these things. And then I'd go back to bed so at nine o'clock I'd go in there and set this all up.

Rebhan: Now, you lettered everything in calligraphy?

Lawton: Yes. I lettered it all in calligraphy. Now they can do that with a computer and you don't have to stay up all night.

Rebhan: But it's not the same as when it's done by hand, is it?

Lawton: No, no it is not. But they don't label it as such anymore either. We just had a little card that says Grand Champion on it, put that little card, kind of glue it on. I kept the cards that said Grand Champion on it so then I could use them the following year, and set them up with clear contact paper and stuff, so we did a lot of different things. I could no longer keep up with a program like that. I would have retired had we not gone into face-to-face judging, because I could not have taken the fair for a whole day like that. Because I can't breathe anymore by the end of the day. Because your outside and it's hot, and that is not the best breathing for me anymore. But there is nothing that I would have rather done with my time than work with the children of this county. And that is the reason why I think I am lots of times called grandma. There is just nothing that I can see that would have been more profitable to our community than to work with the young folks. And I am so glad that so many people had so many children that I could work with! Because I didn't have any of my own.

Rebhan: They just kept coming!

Lawton: Yeah, they just kept coming.

Rebhan: Wow. It's a great story. I remember the first year that I exhibited at the Juneau County fair and I don't remember what happened but my mom dropped my brother and I off and she was doing something else, I think there was something like a family emergency that she had to take care of. But here, so my older brother and I, and I think we were like ten and eight years old, so young and we didn't know where to put the projects, and we didn't know what we were doing, but this lady comes out of nowhere at us and says, "My name is Grandma Lois, and I will help you!" But we had no idea where to put the tags, and you showed us how to put them on the left and side, on the top, and you labeled them all, for us, and you gave us a hug when we were done. And my mom was like, who was that lady? And I said, "That's grandma, mom!" I think that it has made a difference, and it has meant a lot to an awful lot of people.

Lawton: Well, there is a certain amount of tolerance. For a while we weren't doing face-to-face judging the people would come to the table to ask us something, and they would have all their tags in their hand, and they had a hundred things to do, and they didn't know which tag went with which thing, and when you are taking the exhibits it's very difficult to deal with them. So I said, let's put a table up right inside the door with a stapler, a hole punch, thread, I mean string, scotch tape, whatever they could possibly need. And leave it out there so they have a place to do that. Because some of these farm people said, well, they should do that at home. Well, if you have to come six miles or eight miles as a farm person, and you've got chores and all the rest, to go pick up those things and take them home and put them on, that to me wasn't really reasonable. So we gave them a place to do that. And they said, nobody told us. And then we went to the leaders and said, would you please tell your children that they have to know which, drawings, or whatever, the tags go on, and they have to put them on ahead of time. If they don't

they have to sit at the table in the Green Building and do it, they can't bring it to the table because we are too busy trying to check in everybody else. You know. Somebody come with a bushel basket full of stuff, you know like the Victoria VanDoren girl, sure, she worked on her 4-H stuff all year.

Rebhan: All year.

Lawton: She probably had fifty or sixty pieces, well then you've got this, and she brought everything from school, and she was very creative. But there was piles of stuff. And then you had to have that marked. She comes in and she's got her stuff marked because she knows. But then you have to go into the book with somebody else that doesn't know what to do with it. So we worked with the leaders so they should teach them and it helped an awful lot.

Rebhan: Have you seen the 4-H program change over the years since you have been involved with it?

Lawton: Yes I have. There is, the things of the projects have changed. I have seen the horsemanship grow immensely which is very, very wonderful. I have seen the Cultural Arts, the knitting and crocheting and sewing has gone way down. The sewing especially, because it takes so much time and talent to do that, and it is hard to judge, because they are pickier- one seam that isn't straight, or something like that. It gets picky. And it's hard. And I don't think we have the teachers anymore that would teach.

Rebhan: The Home Ec. teachers.

Lawton: Yeah. We don't do sewing anymore at school. There is no such thing anymore. I think the canning has gone down, because nobody cans anymore. The baking is pretty good. But the whole accessorizing home stuff is all way down. The electronics have gone up with the times. I've seen some gorgeous, gorgeous Lego pieces. You know, collections were popular. Sometimes we had six or eight collections. We only had a few in the past, which makes me happier because I am always afraid that someone is going to pick up one of the pieces in the collection. Security is not the best. If somebody has something out there, I don't remember any pieces getting stolen, but I'm always afraid, or something will get broken. We try to put the ceramics in the most sturdy places. We have one locked case, I think in the electronics department and when we have something really delicate we take it over there. We've seen the recycling, big things like that cow, or whatever these welding things come together. Those are fun.

Rebhan: The little pieces that everyone else has thrown away come together and build a cow and they paint it!

Lawton: (Laughing) Well, we had a cow so big they had to use a trailer to bring it in.

Rebhan: Yes!

Lawton: It had its own stall! So some things like that are going on. There's more paper things, like scrapbooking. The ones I admire the most are the children who have started a scrapbook about something, maybe their music, and they started it maybe when they were seven or when they first could enter, and it keeps growing and growing and growing. Or I had one little fellow, he just loved plants. He loved flowers, wildflowers. He could name you every wildflower by the time he was in seventh grade. All the wild ones, where they grew, and what the soil was like, and I don't know what all. He is now a research scientist by the way. Anyway, he made a book, first of all, the first one had fifteen wildflowers in it, and they were all named, and the next year he took fifteen more. Oh, what did he do. He did something with them. Oh, he told where they grew, he gave more information. But he did the same thing; he dried them and gave more information about them. And the last book had a picture that he took of that flower. And the judge said, "Oh anybody can cut flowers out of a magazine". He never checked to see that that was a photograph. And this boy was so crushed. And that same year somebody in the electronics department gave somebody first prize for a poster that was all computer done. And that rule was changed. You can not put something in done from the computer unless it's a computer project. But you can't just take information, paste it on a board, and say, this is what I know. Because you know, you just looked it up, printed it, and pasted it. It went from the computer to the page without ever going through the head. But this little boy when he was on his second project that he worked on with the information about the flowers, we were sitting and eating, his mother was a teacher. And he says to me, I wish you was my grandma. And I said, what a nice thing to say. I said, I thank you so kindly, you know, you are so cool. And that just hung in me for months. Finally I wrote him a letter and I said, I don't know what being a grandma is. I've never been a grandma. If it means celebrating your special days with you, that I can do. If it means being interested in what you do, I can do that. If it means baking cookies, forget it. He wrote back and said, I can bake my own cookies. (Laughing). And so he is the first one who started calling me grandma. And from there it accelerated. He is now a research scientist. That is one thing that 4-H did for him, it gave him an avenue to put all his curiosity about plants. He did a whole big session on amphibians for research, and he's also teaching at Ames College in Iowa.

Rebhan: Wow.

Lawton: Yeah. So it just goes. You see these things happen, and other things develop like the little fellow that couldn't read or write very well, and he brought in a collection of arrowheads. And I said to him, you know, if you want a blue ribbon on this, you have to put a tag on it telling me where you found these. And he said, well, I don't read and write good. You know, he said, I can't read well. And I said, well, tell me, and I'll write it down. Will that be okay? He told the most glorious story of how he and his grandmother, he would spend time with his grandmother looking for these arrowheads down by the creek, and the whole public would have missed that.

Rebhan: Yes.

Lawton: If he wouldn't have told me the story so I could write it down. And he said, I love the arrowheads, but I like spending the time with my grandmother better. That was more important to him than the arrowheads were. But what a beautiful thing. Another one of the kids that I work with at our school in Special Ed, I worked with him for writing his card for his bird house. And

he said, you better write in there that the paint is still tacky because I just finished painting it this morning. (Laughing)

Rebhan: Do not touch.

Lawton: That whole thing. Of course that takes down on them when its wet like that, you know. But at least he had a note. Otherwise it would have been a white or a red ribbon. And of course, I had so many good laughs. You know, I enjoyed every time. Well the other time I got the award I helped judge the Fairest of the Fair that was not to many years ago. And Abby Holig, she was one of my kids and I knew her very well, and I thought this really isn't fair. But she was so much, she was already a senior in high school, and the other girl was just a sophomore or something, and Abby had the finesse, the poise, you know that you want in somebody like that. I didn't know the other girl personally, but there was just a vast difference you didn't have a hard time judging. And now she's married and has a baby. (Laughing) So you keep track with all the kids that...

Rebhan: That you worked with.

Lawton: That you work with, yes. And I enjoyed the adults who had the, I enjoyed working with them because they had the same sense of value of how important our children are. That, it's like being with the homemakers to, you have people who share your sense of value and you feel so much at home with them. And you are not going to get judged for what you say or what you do because they believe...

Rebhan: They feel the same way.

Lawton: Yeah. Yeah. And I think we have so much good in this community. With all the bad stuff that gets published, I wish, you know. We have a lot of good things in our paper to, but there is so much stuff that is bad that gets publicized so much that...they have a new playground now, a new baseball arena connected with a ranch. That is going over like gangbusters right now. And I am so proud to belong to a community that has that facility, the same way I wish we would get new fair buildings and stuff because that would be such a boon to our community.

Rebhan: Oh yeah.

Lawton: Yeah. The Holig cow barn should be coming in. Abby's dad died very suddenly, that was hard on the family but I hope we can do something with that.

Rebhan: So you have watched kids grow up, I mean literally grow up in this program.

Lawton: Get married and have children of their own and they are still in the 4-H program. There is a family that you didn't give much hope for, and 4-H pulled them through, a good marriage pulled them through. There's one little girl who lived across the street from us out in the country. I wouldn't have given you two cents for her future. She is a wonderful mother of four children. They've all been through the 4-H. She's a teacher's aide at the school. She worked with a physically handicapped boy all the way through middle school years. He had no hands that he

could use, and she was his personal aid all the way through, helping him learn how to eat and feed himself as best as he could. And what he couldn't eat she'd feed him and help him in the bathroom. That can be so embarrassing for a kid. She did it with such finesse, just a beautiful young lady, so proud of her. She came to my house a lot, because she lived across the street. And she said, you taught me there was another way to live. The house that I lived in, and the family I lived in, there was another way to do this. So those kinds of things come across. You know I love a kid no matter who they are, where they came from, what color they are, purple with pink polka dots, or if they wear checkers with plaids, I don't care. That never bothers me at all is the value of the individual child and the dignity that that child should feel that is his, or hers, that comes along.

Rebhan: So no question in your mind when a child is involved with 4-H they are going to be changed.

Lawton: Oh, Oh. And there is going to be, the self-confidence, for one thing. The ability to do things, or to think things through. If something doesn't work, well, maybe something else will. If the leaders are creative, Mrs. Ruth Treml, if you ever want to do something with 4-H, Mrs. Ruth Treml would be the person to. Her children all went through it. And I think her grandchildren will be going through it, and you know. She's another person who, taught me a lot about it. At first I thought, when we got in the little club we were in, I thought it was a very limited thing until you looked at Blackhawk. You know, they had everything from cows and horses to origami, to whatever, you know, and it was just such a broad thing. And whenever anyone came into our group and said they wanted to work with horses, don't stay here. We don't have horses. Go to Blackhawk. You know, even though we wanted to have more members, for the good of the child you say, go there. They have a wonderful horse program. They just did everything there. Sheep and goats, and all kinds of things. And Mrs. McGowan's son, his first pigs he put in got Grand Champion. He cried when they had to take them away, they had to slaughter them, and judge the meat. He was just so shook up. His mother kept telling him all the while, remember, that's going to be meat. Well, a nine year old...

Rebhan: No.

Lawton: And the next year he named one Pork Chop, and the other one Ham. (Laughing)

Rebhan: At least he got it then!

Lawton: He got it then, he wasn't going to go through that again. And I got to judge the barns. Once in a while I got to judge the barns for creativity and cleanliness and what they did with them. I did that for several years. I can't do it anymore because I can't stay walking that long. And, what else did I do for the fair? She doesn't know (Motioning to June Schoff in back room). June's children went through 4-H. It helps the children gain in confidence. It gives them a community too. It's like belonging to a team. A child will do much better in a team. He will learn how to deal with people. And the same way here, they have compassion for each other. They help each other. That builds community. And that is so important that the children have an eye out for the next one. I saw the children just gain and gain and gain with that. There was one boy who, he came in with his stitching and he was developmentally delayed. And somebody said, he

didn't do that, I bet his mother did that. And I said, do you see how many places that thread was pulled out? It was a mess, I mean the aida cloth was a mess where he had pulled it out. For him to do that, his aunt sat with him and told him where to put the needle in and where to take it out. She had to do that. And it wasn't his mother. His mother was working full time and didn't have time. But you see the effort in a child to do something. The next time he wanted a piece done he asked me to stitch it for him. He didn't want to go through that whole process again. So, what else did you want to ask me here?

Rebhan: I have I guess one more question for you. So if there is a memory that you have that just kind of sums up what 4-H is, or a group of memories that you have that sums up what 4-H was or how you were a part of it, or how, how you changed.

Lawton: Oh, I changed completely. From my first experience in 4-H.

Rebhan: So it's not just the kids.

Lawton: No. Oh, if I don't learn something, I mean, I'm a dead person. I mean the whole thing is staying open to what a child can do, and to respect that. No matter how poorly it is done as a product, but the effort that the child put into it. I grew a whole lot in respect for the children for one thing. I grew a whole lot in respect for the organization. And though I didn't always agree with the methods in some of the leaders, they all did make the things work. I couldn't have done that. And maybe that's why I thought that it was too much work or it was too involved or something, because of my shortcomings, not because of the club's shortcomings. And I just can't think of a better organization for a kid to be in. Now, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts are wonderful to, but I don't think that they have the vast wideness of advantages or opportunities that the 4-H gives. You know, you go through any part of living, I don't care if you are a gardener or if you are a horse person or if you like to sit at home with a piece of thread and a piece of linen, it is, it is respected and taught. Whatever the child wants to do, there is a place for it in this organization. And that can't be beat by anything.

Rebhan: No.

Lawton: And I cannot...I am not wise enough in my vision to appreciate it all. You know, I can't appreciate everything that everyone does. It's too much. It's too varied. And it's to, it's done to with so much expertise by the leaders and by the crafts people and the speech that it does teach, by the demonstrations and the...how to set a table for a picnic, or how to set a...anything you do, cooking, baking, canning, freezing, whatever, preserving foods. The only thing they don't have is how to wash clothes. (Laughing)

Rebhan: No. We could add that!

Lawton: I know that the first year I was in 4-H they had me darn a sock. (Laughing)

Rebhan: Yes.

Lawton: And I darned it very well. But it was not a real thing because it was not worn. It was new sock they cut a hole in. That isn't what happens when you have to darn a sock.

Rebhan: That's not real life.

Lawton: It's not real life. And I didn't do a really neat job of it, and my sisters and brothers told me it was horrible and it never got into the fair. (Laughing) But I do believe that this is about the widest. The Boys and Girls Club is good. After-School programs are good. But there is nothing that will give the opportunities that the 4-H will.

Schoff: Yeah. You have to have good leadership.

Lawton: Yeah. It's the good leadership. And I think in our community we do have, at least my experience has been that they do have where they will widen a child's view of things. You know, if you look at the little set-ups that they have about what the 4-H club is interested in, the booths that they have, you see the wideness of stuff. So, but I can give you other people that you want to call on if you want some good names.

Rebhan: We can certainly do that, but I wanted to thank you so much for your time.

Lawton: Oh you're welcome. It was a privilege.

Rebhan: It was a wonderful interview. Thank you very much.

Lawton: You are welcome.