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Interview with Katie Ball

Jenny Lawton

Katie Ball

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Researcher's name: Jenny Lawton

Event: Interview with Katie Ball

Place: at her home in Fredericktown

Please note: Katie's mother often interjected more detailed answers to my questions in order to assist Katie -- however, she was sitting far away from the microphone and her words are not well recorded. Although her answers were helpful during the interview, the actual qualitative value of her comments was unsubstantial. This interview is extremely choppy and muffled.

Jenny Lawton: What kinds of stuff are you doing to get ready for the spring?

Katie Ball: It's not that time yet.

JL: How old are you?

KB: 16.

JL: 16! When did you turn 16?

KB: January 16th.

JL: Oh, so it was just your golden birthday! That's great. So how long have you been growing things.

KB: It must have been since I was about 10 or 11. A while.... I was 9.

JL: So tell me a little bit about 4-H because I'm not from around here and I don't know about it.

KB: You have projects and you about 3 or 4 months to do it. And then you go to judging and if you get **A**superior[®] you get to go to the Ohio State Fair.

JL: Have you ever been to the Ohio State Fair?

KB: I was supposed to go for my gardening, but I didn't get to go.

JL: What kinds of stuff do you grow?

KB: Tomatoes, mangoes, onions...

JL: Mangoes! I didn't know you could grow mangoes in Ohio.

KB: Yeah. We tried lettuce one year, carrots, celery -- that was good, celery.

JL: So how do you decide what you're going to grow.

KB: We grow what we use -- because we use a lot of tomatoes. And my dad likes onions. The stuff we eat, we grow.

JL: I know there are a million kinds of tomatoes -- what kinds of tomatoes do you grow?

KB: Just whatever we want -- we usually choose what we want when we go.

JL: What seed store do you grow from? Where do you buy?

KB: [consults with mom] Garden Greenhouse. [lots of consulting]

JL: Whatever, it doesn't matter.

KB: Big boy was one, wasn't it -- beefsteak.

JL: So, what's this big boy, big girl... I don't get this -- is it just the name?

KB: Yeah, it's just the name.

JL: So you use a lot of tomatoes.

KB: Yeah.

JL: What do you use them for?

KB: Um, to make spaghetti sauce, tomato soup, we can them.

JL: So do you have a special family recipe for tomato soup?

KB: Grandma's... my grandma makes tomato sauce.

JL: Tomato everything.

KB: Yeah.

JL: That=s cool. So you started growing when you were nine. Why?

KB: It runs in the family. My grandma does it, my uncles -- and we=re, our family is a big tomato-eater. We just like eating tomatoes.

JL: Well, that makes sense. So when did you start competing through 4-H?

KB: When I was 9.

JL: So right away.

KB: Yeah.

JL: Your first year you got a Superior? Wow.

KB: Yeah.

JL: That=s pretty good. So did you get the gardening bug then?

KB: What?

JL: The gardening bug? Did that get you really excited about it?

KB: Yeah. It=s not really hard, it=s fun.

JL: What about it=s fun?

KB: You can eat the food.

JL: Eating the food? Eating the food is the best part, you=d say? That=s great. So when do you start? When do you plant?

KB: We usually start in April, March or April. [Muffled] I start with the seeds... I had them inside when they=re little and then I bring them outside when they=re big.

JL: So what=s harder? It=s probably harder to go from seeds...

KB: Yeah. It takes longer.

JL: Do your friends garden or is this your thing?

KB: Something I do.

JL: It=s something you do?

KB: Yeah, it takes up time during the summer so it gives me something to do.

JL: That=s cool. Not the eating, but the growing takes lots of time. Do you think you=ll keep growing in the future?

KB: Mm-hm. By my grandpa=s because we don=t have the yard for it, so I have to do it at my grandpa=s now.

JL: Uh-huh.

KB: Yeah.

JL: Where does he live?

KB: Up Garden, 21 South Pleasant.

[Muffled discussion in background with mother and younger sister.]

JL: So does it take a lot of space to grow?

KB: Yeah.

JL: How many hours do you think it takes you every day when you=re growing?

KB: It takes about a good 3 hours a plant.

JL: Really.

KB: Yeah.

JL: So what are all the different things you have to do?

KB: Well you=ve got to roto-till it.

JL: Roto-till it? Tell me about roto-tilling, because I don=t know anything about that.

KB: You take this little roto-tiller and go through the grass and it brings up the good nutrients in

the soil. And it just turns it over and it makes it easier to hoe.

JL: Ok. And so after you roto-till...

KB: We kinda level it out -- and then you just make little aisles.

JL: A lot of people believe that only flower gardens are really pretty -- is there any method to the way you put your tomato plants? To make them look a certain way or to make them grow better?

KB: You rotate them.

JL: So and what about the animals? Do you ever have problems with deer?

KB: Well, our cat.

JL: So what do you do to keep him away?

KB: What did we do that one year... mums. [Muffled discussion] We put flowers around the whole garden.

JL: And so that work? Did they eat the marigolds instead?

[Muffled discussion]

JL: So what other things do you think I should know about gardening? Do you think it tastes better if you grow it yourself?

KB: Yeah. I think it does.

JL: Why do you think so?

KB: Because it doesn't... it's more fresh than if you get it at the store because it doesn't have to go through packaging and stuff like that. And it's cheaper.

JL: It's cheaper?

KB: Yeah.

JL: So do you think that if you could grow all your food, would you do it? It'd probably take some time...

KB: Yeah. Some of it -- I don't know if I'd grow all of it. But some of it, I would.

JL: You have canned tomatoes, tomato sauce, chili, ketchup, what other kinds of things can you make with tomatoes?

KB: We eat them on sandwiches. We make tomato paste. Hot pepper sauce. Pepper steaks.

[Muffled discussion from mother]

JL: So do you ever get sick of tomatoes?

KB: No.

JL: No?

KB: I love tomatoes.

JL: I guess if you can figure out that many different ways to cook them, then...

KB: Yeah.

[explains collection of recipes, KB suggests the inclusion of her recipe for Fried Green Tomatoes]

KB: The green tomatoes are acid tomatoes, so we grow pink ones.

JL: So different tomatoes for different people too.

KB: Yup, I like all of them.

[discussion of how good Fried Green Tomatoes are; talk about pet dogs; muffled conversation]

JL: Well, those were all the questions that I have on my list but if you think there is anything else I should know... I was actually talking to the man who owns...

[Muffled comments from mother]

KB: Oh yeah, we tried watermelon one year too.

JL: But the bugs ate them?

KB: I think we got one. The plants are really sensitive.

[Muffled comments]

JL: How do you learn how to garden? Just by trial and error?

KB: Experience -- you learn as you go.

[Muffled comments about watering a plant too much]

KB: I did that my first year.

Katie=s mother: Then you had to start all over!

KB: I think about the easiest thing to grow is onions.

JL: Ok, tell me all the vegetables in your garden.

KB: Cucumbers, onions, peppers, green peppers, red peppers, we tried watermelon, lettuce, carrots, green beans, we tried cabbage...

[Muffled conversation]

JL: That=s a lot. So do you bring all those plants to 4-H or to the Fair?

KB: We go to the Mt. Vernon Fair first. That=s usually where our first judging is. To take the project, you have to choose so many vegetables, so many items. You just taken in, like, 3 or 4 of each. And summers you grow extra stuff like... yeah.

JL: So what makes a good tomato or a good cucumber?

KB: It=s nice and red and juicy. Miracle-Grow.

[Muffled comments]

JL: If you were going to judge a tomato, do you think it should look good or taste good?

KB: They don=t taste them, so probably the looks.

JL: I know, but for your tomatoes.

KB: Taste. Taste.

JL: So it all comes down to eating it, huh.

KB: Yeah.

JL: It must feel very satisfying after you=ve worked on it for so long.

KB: The best is to get it planted and you water it every other day.

JL: So how much is dependent on the weather?

KB: A lot. Yeah, because if it rains too much, it will drown. But if there=s not enough rain and you don=t water it, or if the sun=s too hot, it=ll shrivel up.

JL: So have you ever had experiences like that?

KB: I=ve drowned them before, but that wasn=t from the rain as much. We had one thing that we put out in the sun that didn=t... wasn=t that the watermelon that we put in the shade because if it=s exposed to the sun too hard... There are so many different things that have to have different amounts, different kinds of sunlight. It=s hard -- figuring out which plant needs to go where because of sunlight. You=re not supposed to water them... the sun=s supposed to be coming down when you water them so it=ll evaporate the water.

JL: So timing is really important too.

KB: Yeah.

[Muffled conversation of watering techniques]

JL: So it sounds like you learn just as much from your mistakes as you do from your successes.

KB: Yeah. It=s interesting to see what works.

JL: You said that gardening runs in your family. So who, tell me who was before you and before you...

KB: Well my grandpa and grandma on both sides do it, gardening. And it just keeps going -- their parents, and their parents= parents.

[Muffled conversation about big families gardening.]

JL: So now, since you=re not growing for a lot of people (unless you=re growing a lot of tomatoes for all the tomato stuff you=re going to make!) why do you do it?

KB: Because it=s fun and it=s interesting to see what to do and what not to do. What happens if you do this wrong or just the results of... we eat a lot of vegetables and there are a lot of different things you can make out of them, so it=s not like they go to waste. It=s really fun, I guess.

JL: That=s great, you=ve been really, really helpful.

[verifies spelling of name]

[end of interview]