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Interview with Dashau Knight

Jenny Lawton

Dashau Knight

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Researcher's name: Jenny Lawton

Event: Interview with Dashau Knight

Place: at her home in Howard

Jenny Lawton: So, when did you start growing things?

Dashau Knight: Well, down the road, my great-grandma lives. And ever since I was little, my mom, my dad, my grandma and my grandpa, they grow a great big garden down there. So I remember when I was little going down there and gardening.

JL: So what do they grow down there?

DK: They grow tons of corn, tomatoes, green beans, we did, this year, lima beans, radishes, cucumbers, zucchini, a ton of different things.

JL: How big is the garden?

DK: Pretty big.

JL: So would you say gardening runs in your family?

DK: Yeah.

JL: So when do you remember first planting something?

DK: As early as when I started to remember. Because I can remember when I just little going down there and messin= in the dirt and stuff.

JL: So what is your favorite part of gardening? Is it messin= in the dirt? I=d bet that when you were little that was your favorite part...

DK: Yeah. Eating the stuff now.

JL: So do you grow what you like to eat?

DK: Pretty much.

JL: So what do you grow?

DK: We did a little garden up here -- and I like peppers, like bell peppers, we do those. And I like cucumbers, and radishes, I like pretty much all of it.

JL: So it must take a lot of time to do all of this.

DK: You have to weed the garden and all of that stuff. A lot of it you just let it go and if they get too big you just throw them out -- but like cucumbers are easy too because all you have to do is pick them, and they just grow on their own, pretty much. And tomatoes, you have to be careful because the bugs get to them.

JL: Do you use pesticides? What do you use to keep the bugs away?

DK: When the plants are really little, we do the lime, because otherwise the bugs would eat them. But we really don=t put anything more on them. We just kinda watch them and try to do whatever we can because the pesticides would probably effect the fruit and stuff.

JL: Do you grow more for a hobby or specifically for 4-H?

DK: We do it a lot and we can for the winter. That=s a lot of it, mainly, a lot what we do. And it=s really fun.

JL: The canning? I=ve never canned before -- does it affect the taste of it a lot?

DK: Not really.

JL: Do you have a specialty, a specific vegetable that you=re especially good at or proud of?

DK: Not really.

JL: Tell me more about 4-H. I=m from Chicago so I don=t know what 4-H is really.

DK: 4-H is...well this is the book. All you have to do is you write the stuff that you do in here, and you can do different experiments for it, and at the end you - like I had to take a tray that was

so big and I had to lay something over top of it so it matched the vegetables and did the vegetables in sort of a design. Then he would grade you on that. And then he would ask like, y=know, **A**What did you do to your garden?@ and everything like that. And it was really fun, and it was easy to do. And he was really nice, so it was a lot of fun.

JL: I=ve heard that in 4-H, the people who do animals get more recognition than the people who do animals. Yeah, why do you think that is?

DK: Probably because they think it=s harder to do that -- to raise an animal and then show them. A great big cow? Uh, no thank you. And then probably because of that stuff.

JL: But vegetable growing, it=s an art. It can be hard. What do you think are some of the most difficult things about it?

DK: Probably weeding -- that=s not a lot of fun. And... probably that=s just...

JL: A pain in the butt.

DK: Because sometimes you can get the big prickly weeds. And you have to get the gloves on and all of that stuff.

JL: So do you have to weed everyday?

DK: We do it probably about once a week, because they=d come up pretty fast. They=d especially get the little plants. They get those the worst.

JL: From start to finish, what=s the first thing you have to do.

DK: Pick out your plants, and makes sure that they=re good plants. We go to a greenhouse and we pick out tomatoes and stuff -- and make sure they=re healthy. And then we come and plant them and you have to... when the tomato plants get big, you have to put baskets around them so they won=t droop and break. And you have to make sure that you pick them at the right time because if you don=t then they don=t taste good. And you have to make sure that they don=t get all ate up by bugs, things like that.

JL: A lot of it=s dependent on the weather too...

DK: You have to make sure that you plant it at the right time, or else otherwise, they=ll go bad.

JL: How do you learn those kind of things?

DK: Probably most from my mom and dad -- they=ve shown me a lot.

JL: So, their garden has become your garden?

DK: Mm-hm.

JL: That=s neat. So is this something that you think you=re going to keep doing?

DK: Probably.

JL: Do your friends do it?

DK: Um, my one friend, yeah - her mom does a great big garden too. Quite a few of my friends have gardens.

JL: So why do people garden?

DK: Probably because they like the taste of fresh food. And it=s cheaper, then, to can in the winter-time, rather than buying it and it being expensive.

JL: That=s definitely true. Do you think that there is something special about the vegetables your grow personally?

DK: Yeah -- you=re proud of it, and you can say to people, **A**I grew this, I can do it.@ They might not have done it before and not know what it=s like. So that=s pretty cool, to be able to say that.

JL: Have you ever given any of your vegetables as gifts?

DK: Yeah, we did strawberries and we had a ton of them and we gave them to people. Our cucumbers go wild half the time so we have to give them away because we have so many. So, yeah, we do give them to people.

JL: They must appreciate it... oh, fresh strawberries, that would be the best. So do you have any special tricks of the trade that you've learned over your many years of gardening?

DK: Well, when we plant rows, my grandpa has this wheel that he does and he pushes it and it makes the dirt turn up so you have a little row. And he does it and he takes 2 steel rods and he makes a straight string so he knows exactly how far apart they are. So that's a way to do it.

JL: You told me before that 4-H judges you on how something looks? Tell me more about that.

DK: They give you this sheet of paper that says: put it on so big of a tray, like 16"X70", and then you had put like a cloth or something to match the color of the vegetables. And then I took some peppers and put like three of them there and that sort of looked like a rainbow or something -- so it just looks decorative. It's really cool looking and it's fun.

JL: Yeah, they say that flowers are the only plant that's decorative, but flowers can be beautiful too. 4-H judges on how it looks, but personally, as a gardener, do you feel it's more important the way it looks or the way it tastes?

DK: Tastes. I wouldn't care, sometimes they're deformed and all that stuff, but if it still tastes fine.

JL: Do you ever get weird-looking plants?

DK: Sometimes, yeah. Like we have this great big, our tomatoes went great big, and they would droop all over and they would sit on the ground and they'd get great big, and all funky deformed and stuff. But they still tasted good, so it was really fun.

JL: [pointless banter] What do you think is the most fun about gardening?

DK: Probably picking it because I think that's fun to do. And then, eating it.

JL: So when it all comes full-circle. How long does it take most of these plants to...

DK: Probably 4 weeks or longer.

JL: And that happens in the summer -- when do you plant, May?

DK: Yeah. Sometimes a little bit earlier. But you have to be careful -- like carrots have to be planted earlier because they have to grow quite a long time -- because when I did it last year, they took quite a while to... because I kept checking and they were like, this big. And then little by little they got bigger but they turned out great...

JL: Do you feel like it takes a lot of patience?

DK: Yeah.

JL: Between the weeding and the waiting and the watering and stuff so. Do you know what you want to be when you grow up?

DK: Not a gardener.

[laughs]

JL: So gardening is a hobby, not a job. Not like a farm. Why is it different?

DK: Well farming, most of the time you hear people saying like "Oh, I'm a dairy farmer, or cow farmer." And if they do grow crops, they grow tons of corn or something. And that wouldn't be fun. I think it's fun to grow just a small garden where you have a whole bunch of different things, which is much more fun.

JL: To get the variety. What kinds of things do you make with what you grow?

DK: Well we do the roma tomatoes and things like that, and we make spaghetti sauce. And we do salsa and my mom and grandma do these really long hot peppers and they make this pepper

mustard that my dad likes.

JL: I guess you don=t like it, huh?

DK: No, it=s really hot. And they make a whole bunch of different things. All of it=s really good.

JL: [jokes about peppers]

DK: I like hot peppers. I like the bell peppers, and then they grow the longer banana peppers that can get really hot -- I like the mild ones. Because the really hot ones... my dad really likes those but they aren=t my thing.

JL:[jokes about macho guys testing their strength with hot peppers] So what grade are you in?

DK: 6th.

JL: And how old are you?

DK: I=ll be 12 not this week, but the coming week.

[banter]

JL: So does your little brother garden?

DK: He just likes to go and play in the mud.

JL: What other things do you think I should know about gardening?

DK: You really don=t have to water it a lot unless it gets really, really dry because most of the time, the rain will water it for you. You=ve gotta watch up for rabbits. They=ll eat your...

JL: I=ve heard that rabbits and deer will eat everything. How do you keep them away?

DK: Well, my grandma and grandpa, they live by the woods and they have deer really bad. So they take two metal pie pans and they=ll stick rocks inside so when the wind blows, it knocks them back and forth and makes it really loud so the deer and rabbits will stay away.

JL: Does it keep them up at night?

DK: No, because it=s not loud enough, but it=s loud enough for the deer when then come close to it, they=ll hear it.

JL: So how much of gardening depends on what happens outside?

DK: A lot because it depends on how hot it gets, how cold it gets, if it rains or not.

JL: Is that frustrating?

DK: It can be, yeah, because you watch your plants die even if you try watering them again and again and again because it=s so hot outside. And then, the cold, you can=t do anything when it=s cold because... you can=t take a heater outside and warm them up. So that=s just you have to let it -- sometimes you just have to let nature take its course.

JL:[banter] Do you grow for fun or do you grow for competition, would you say?

DK: Fun.

[discussion of some 4-H particulars regarding the different vegetable projects]

JL: I=m from the city, so I never had 4-H. But why do you think 4-H is important in a place like Ohio?

DK: Probably because lots of kids out here don=t have a whole lot to... you don=t go to the mall or things like that -- because we don=t have a mall around here. So it=s something to do during the summer before the Fair comes, which is fun for us.

[banter about living in the city v. ruralality]

[ends interview but gets permission to come back with more questions]