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Planting, Growing, Harvesting Our Future

Former NJAA director Jill (Sommers) Harker shares comments presented at the advisor's meeting during the 2006 National Junior Angus Show in Indianapolis, Ind.

by *Jill Harker*

This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done, and Everybody was asked to do it. Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it.

Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody, when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

These four people — Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody — live in our community, and they will continue to live in our community until Everybody realizes that they are Somebody. Everybody is a Somebody, because they

have gifts and talents that can be developed and that they can give back to better our community.

Through many years of involvement with 4-H, the Indiana Junior Angus Association (IJAA) and the National Junior Angus

Association (NJAA), I have worked with some everybodies, somebodies, anybodies and nobodies. Fortunately, I also have had the opportunity to work with a lot of adult volunteers who didn't fit any of those molds. Instead, those volunteers showed me what qualities are important in being a successful adult volunteer.

Being a youth advisor is much like being a gardener. It takes a lot of patience, hard work and dedication, but the result of your efforts can be a bountiful harvest. Let me take you on a walk through my garden. My garden represents hundreds of leaders, advisors, sponsors, mentors and volunteers.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 222

The flowers

As you enter my garden, you first see my bright, dancing daffodils. I have a great deal of appreciation for my daffodils. Daffodils signify rebirth. When you get an eyeful of the bright, cheery daffodils, you realize that there are even better things to come. They provide vast amounts of color while continuing to work together through any situation. Their yellow color says, “the sun is always shining when I’m with you.” Daffodils come back year after year, uncomplainingly. In time, they eventually cast off baby bulbs that break away and produce flowers come spring.

My grandparents, Dorris and Mildred Harrold, were 4-H leaders for 19 years and are the daffodils in my garden. For 19 years their role as leaders meant coordinating a food stand at the county fair. They planned trips each year for 4-Hers receiving completion awards. They came back, year after year, without complaint. Through their actions, they shared the importance of volunteering with their family, and we have proudly carried on the tradition.

Next to my daffodils are my petunias. I have had petunias in my garden for many years. They are one of my favorites because come rain, shine, drought or hail, petunias refuse to die. They are dependable, versatile and diverse.

My mother, Sharon Sommers, is my petunia. For 23 years, my mother has been a 4-H leader. While being a 4-H leader, she also held more than 15 volunteer positions. This was also about the time that Indiana hosted a national junior show. Despite the challenges that come with the job, she has continued to serve with a dedicated heart.

She’s attempted to get others involved so she could pass on the torch, but she didn’t quit her job when her children were finished with 4-H. She continues to be dependable, versatile and diverse in everything she does.

Following my petunias are beautiful roses. You see the elegant petals at the head of the flower and the vicious thorns that cover the stems. Roses have a beautiful appearance and are filled with a sweet, aromatic fragrance. A rose often reminds me of my IJAA advisor of six years, Pam Snapp Lindamood.

Pam’s perspective on life was rosy. She brought beauty, life and a cheery attitude to anything she was involved in. Pam’s attitude

was like a sweet-smelling rose among the thorny perspectives on life that others often have. She made me want to brighten someone else’s day. Pam taught me how to go get the junior sitting in the corner and have them help me make a poster or set up a booth.

Through Pam’s actions and words, I learned that every person is a rose; it’s just that some haven’t received enough praise or encouragement to open their petals and let their beauty out. And when Pam’s world came crashing down around her in April 2000 with the loss of her husband, Don, we all rallied around Pam. We took to Pam the rosy attitudes she instilled in us and provided her with the strength and beauty she needed to face each day.



PHOTO BY SHAUNA ROSE HEMEL

Jill Harker

The vegetables

My garden has two rows of green beans. I have always admired my green beans because they are so giving. Green beans remind me of my NJAA advisor, James Fisher. James gives of his time, his talents, his love and his heart. In his own special way, he helps juniors realize their potential. For many years, he’s taught the folks in the green jackets to realize that they could

reap huge rewards from carefully cultivating the junior members that they meet. James supplies junior Board members and junior Angus members with the energy to do their very best.

I think of my green beans as a mass production line. You receive more than just one bean from a plant, and you don’t pick green beans just once because they’re not all ready at the same time. Instead, you have to sometimes patiently wait as they develop on their own with your help. This is similar to how a junior member develops.

Next to my green beans are two rows of sweet corn. Sweet corn is a role model in my garden. It sets no limits and constantly reaches for the sky. Growing toward the sun, it encourages the other plants to develop to their full potential and to reach for the sky.

Sweet corn reminds me of my very first advisor, Karen Lowry. She served as my county Extension educator for seven of the 10 years I was in 4-H. Karen constantly encouraged me to stand tall and to stand up for what I believed. She showed her kids that a person’s true worth and value are measured by what they are like on the inside, for a person’s real beauty is beneath the husks, just

like an ear of sweet corn.

Whenever I was unsure of my abilities or had any reason for doubt, I’d go see Karen. Karen’s answer to my question was, “Sure you can.” Karen saw my inner beauty but knew that I didn’t know it existed. She helped me build my self-esteem and confidence so that I eventually saw my own inner beauty.

Succeeding my towering sweet corn is a row of cabbage. I consider cabbage my most exciting plant. Cabbage continues growing under any condition until it bursts with overwhelming amounts of enthusiasm. Cabbages can tolerate a little harsh treatment and stress without being damaged.

According to the Indiana Junior Beef Cattle Association board members, I am the cabbage in my garden.

Beside my enthusiastic cabbages are my radishes. Radishes are my unselfish plant. They keep their work hidden underground. Their hard-working, caring, selfless attitudes go unnoticed until you pull them out of the ground to reap the benefits. Doug and Glenda Schroeder, this year’s Advisors of the Year, are good examples. For 13 years, their hard work, dedication and selfless attitudes have been the mainstay of a strong Iowa Junior Angus Association.

Finally, I have a few watermelon vines that spread their way throughout my garden. I consider watermelons a recruiting plant. They reach out to everyone, spreading and expanding their good news and cheerful attitude. Tom Burke is very similar to a watermelon plant. He is always recruiting new members for the Angus breed and constantly spreading the good news about Angus cattle.

The weeds

Of course, a garden wouldn’t be complete without a few of our disliked plants — the weeds. Weeds grow uncontrollably and squelch enthusiasm. They discourage growth and reduce productivity. There are seven weeds that seem to plague my garden.

- ▶ The absent-minded weed. This weed becomes distracted, hurries through appointments and phone calls and “daydreams” through meetings.
- ▶ The great answer, wrong question weed is always assuming the issue. This weed is always jumping to conclusions or stereotyping others, thus squelching enthusiasm.
- ▶ What about the judge-and-jury weed? This weed is always advising youngsters that they either “absolutely” can or cannot do

something and discouraging others from achieving their goals. This weed limits juniors' ability to express themselves and experience success.

- ▶ The low-calorie weed. They often don't feel comfortable or knowledgeable in a discussion, so they avoid issues and discussions. They keep their inner beauty hidden.
- ▶ What about the amazing human file cabinet weed? Sometimes being an experienced advisor has its drawbacks. They assume that since they know the information, it must be correct, and they do not recognize that things can change. Why make the effort to update their information when it's there in the third drawer?
- ▶ The fairy godmother weed just shakes her magic wand and *poof* the work is done for the junior member. They make the phone calls, send the e-mails and go to the Internet, searching for facts. This weed limits the junior member's self-initiative and self-responsibility.
- ▶ Of course, there's the all-knowing oracle

weed. These weeds are really a pain. They know the answer to *everything* and assume that the advisee knows *nothing*. This weed limits a junior member's ability to recognize his or her own potential.

The rain

The final thing my garden needs to grow is rain. If things dry out, there is no cooperation. If things remain dry, everyone's directing and no one is guiding. The responsibility and credit for achievement is no longer shared. All youth groups need plenty of rain. They need donations and financial support, as well as praise and recognition from other adults that may not choose to be volunteers. They need to hear "job well-done."

Walt Whitman once said, "I contain a multitude." I contain a multitude. Just think about those words. Our garden of life contains a multitude. It is our responsibility as advisors, mentors, sponsors and volunteers to take that multitude, plant it, water it, cultivate it, nurture it, grow it and reap a

bountiful harvest. I honor all of you for your commitments to be daffodils, petunias, roses, green beans, sweet corn, cabbage, radishes and watermelons in our garden of life.

I'd like to leave you with one thought.

*You sow a thought, you reap an act.
You sow an act, you reap a habit.
You sow a habit, you reap a character.
You sow a character, you reap a destiny.*

