

My 4-H Flower

Sara Winn

Utah 4-H

It was over 400 years ago that the Bishop of Geneva, Francis de Sales, first uttered the origin of the quote, “bloom where you are planted.” Centuries later, I heard this quote for myself, although it wasn’t from a Genevan bishop, but from family members as they described my late great grandmother and our shared passion for gardening. I have always been fascinated how, with the right care, some water, and just a little bit of sunshine, an unassuming seed can grow into a magnificent plant. As I near the end of my 4-H journey, I can’t help but notice how, just like that little seed, 4-H has helped me grow into something truly special. Good afternoon, I’m Sara Winn from the state of Utah, and today I would like to share with you the most important lesson I’ve learned through 4-H: how to grow. By giving me the courage to sprout, the dedication to grow, and the perseverance to bloom, 4-H has turned me from a timid clover bud into a true leader.

Everyone knows that the first step to growing a flower is planting the seed. My 4-H seed was planted as I watched my older brother raise animals through the county 4-H program. As soon as I was old enough, I followed suit. Every Thursday night, I rode horses with other 4-H members, and I spent summers raising show steers for the county’s livestock show. As someone who was insanely shy growing up, 4-H helped me break out of my shell and find friends with similar interests. My seed had been planted, and my courage, along with my love for 4-H, was beginning to sprout.

After a plant sprouts, it enters a stage of rapid growth. So too did my involvement in 4-H as I began participating in many different clubs. Amongst my involvement in these clubs, I found one

that was different from all the rest: 4-H teen leadership council. A plant will thrive in an environment that is safe and warm, and for me, that place was teen council.

Along with providing a support system, teen council gave me the push I needed to begin growing. It was here that I learned an essential truth about personal growth: very little can be accomplished within the boundaries of your comfort zone. In sixth grade, I had my first public speaking experience at my 4-H county contests. I discovered that my memory and literary skills lent themselves well to public speaking, although the process was still very intimidating. I gave it my all, and walked away with a blue ribbon. The judges encouraged me to come back when I was old enough to compete at the 4-H State Contests. It wouldn't be until years later that I took this advice to heart.

As any good gardener knows, a plant requires diligent care to continue growing. Neglect can lead a plant to wilt, and even die. There was a time in my life when my 4-H flower began to wilt. As I entered high school, I became overwhelmed by the social and academic pressures of the environment. As I was entrusted with more and more responsibility, I found myself with less time to dedicate to 4-H. I stopped coming to teen council activities, and my 4-H involvement slowly faded.

Luckily, there were people in my life who weren't going to let that happen. During my sophomore year, I was invited to join the senior 4-H teen council by a close friend of mine. I remembered how loved and accepted I had felt during my days on junior teen council, and decided to return to attending activities. At that point, not only did my 4-H flower stop wilting, it began growing bigger and brighter than ever. I had learned another truth about personal growth: stay dedicated to the things you are passionate about.

As the year progressed, I dedicated myself to my commitments in 4-H. I began attending activities, service projects, and camps again. I even became a group leader for several programs. In the summer of 2019, I competed in the Juab County 4-H Horse Public Speaking Contest. I received a blue ribbon, and was encouraged to take my speech to state. This time, I did. Not only did I compete at State, but I took first place and advanced to nationals. In January of 2020, I headed here to Colorado to present my speech at the Western National Round-Up. I was terrified. When I walked into the room, my hands were shaking and my stomach was in a knot. I wasn't sure if I could do it. But not only did I successfully deliver my speech, I took first place. In that moment, I learned that through perseverance, you can do things you didn't think were possible.

At the same time I was preparing for my speech, I was also preparing for another 4-H adventure. An adventure that would not only help my 4-H flower grow, but blossom as I reached my greatest achievement of all: becoming a Utah 4-H State Ambassador. It began when the same friend that convinced me to rejoin teen council encouraged me to apply for a State Ambassador position. I hesitated at first, I wasn't sure if I was capable of filling such a position. But I remembered the lessons that 4-H had taught me, and so, I pressed on. And wow, am I glad I did. Being a State Ambassador has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my entire life. Through the ambassador program the petals of my flower opened to reveal a stunning array of color and beauty.

This year has been hard for me: it seems each month I am experiencing a last in 4-H. A last retreat, a last competition, a last service project. It seems like my 4-H flower had just finished blooming, and yet one by one the petals fall as I say goodbye to the organization that made me who I am.

But the beauty of a flower is not limited to the time that it blooms. When a flower reaches its end, the petals may fall, but something magical also happens. The flower sends out seeds to sprout new growth. I've seen this change within my own flower of 4-H. As I spent years nurturing it, the seeds of courage, dedication, and perseverance were sown inside of me, leaving me a stronger, kinder human.

This may be a year of lasts for me. I may have to watch as my 4-H journey comes to a close. But this is not the end for me. After my time in 4-H is done, I hope to plant seeds in the hearts of others. Whether it is a love for leadership, a service oriented heart, or simply a love for 4-H, I can leave the values I hold in the hearts of others. And I can't wait to watch them bloom where they are planted. Thank you.