

4-H Story

By Samantha Jean Schnell
Senior Essay Winner

Hello, my name is Samantha Jean Schnell and this is my 7th year in 4-H. This year my projects were “Rabbit I,” “Horse Program,” “The Normal Animal,” “Leadership II,” and “Public Speaking SD.” I was also involved in many activities throughout the year with not only my 4-H club, Enterprise for Progress, but also as a County Council Officer, and here today on these pages is my year long 4-H story.

In January I was elected Secretary as a Socorro County Council Officer, and elected Vice-President in my 4-H club, Enterprise for Progress. This is the time of year when Socorro County holds its end of the year 4-H banquet. As a presiding Council Officer, I helped form a banquet committee to discuss this year’s theme, who our guest speaker would be, awards, decorations, etc. The committee decided that the guest speaker would be no other than our own 4-H Department Head for Extension Youth Development, Frank Hodnett, and that the theme would be “Change Can Make a Difference.” This year I received my 6th year pin in 4-H and project pins in personal growth, speaking, Secretary, and Treasurer pins, as well as being one of two Junior 4-H’ers to receive a Leadership and Achievement record book pin. I also was inducted into the 2008 County Council as Secretary. This night is always a blast! All the 4-H clubs in my county attend, and we have a BIG potluck and dance afterward. This year I presented the “Friends of 4-H Award” to a local resident named Dick Ritter. Mr. Ritter is always willing to help the 4-H program, whether helping with a livestock project, donating his time, or simply contributing at our Jr. Livestock Sale during the Socorro County Fair.

Later that month I met with the County’s 4-H Agent to discuss my application for a 4-H General Scholarship. Large donations given to the Extension Service Offices this year allowed 4-Her’s a chance to attend a state 4-H event or a position (Diplomat, Ambassador, State Officer) at reduced costs upon approval of application. My agent helped me to decide on a four-part community service project during half days of school during this past spring. For four months I would demonstrate and present workshops that implemented 4-H to a group of elementary-aged children.

In February I received my 4-H General Scholarship certificate and acceptance letter. I applied the scholarship funding toward Horse School that I will now be attending during the summer.

I started my first school workshop at Finley Gym. I was really nervous. I had never presented to a group of children so young and so large! Looking back now, I feel I could have done a better job, but at the time I was still dealing with my self-confidence. This month’s theme was “This is 4-H,” and I talked about what the 4-H colors symbolize, the motto and creed, pledge, and what they might want to name their after school club. Afterward, we made Valentine cards for each other and their parents to help teach kindness and respect toward one another.

As a Council Officer, it was the time of year to participate in the “Food for America” food drive. This is a Farm Bureau grant that was matched by our local Supermarket. Three teams of three 4-H and FFA members had a total of \$500.00 to spend, so each of the teams were allowed a total of \$166.00 to purchase groceries. We were given a list of what to and not to buy, and had to shop for the “best deals” (my team was the closest to the \$\$ amount-we went over by one cent and our FFA teacher gave us a 100% extra credit grade). After the shopping we loaded

all the grocery bags onto a flatbed trailer and rode through town to the food bank. Later that afternoon, we gave an interview about the food drive on the local radio station.

Later in the month of February my county hosted a Southwest District Leadership Retreat. The training was ALL weekend long and we worked on leadership skills and parliamentary procedure. Grant, Catron, Sierra, Hidalgo, and Socorro Counties attended. We all promised to take the fun games that we learned back to our clubs.

In March I continued to be busy with 4-H within the community. I presented my second workshop at Finley Gym. This month's theme was "Springtime with 4-H." I talked to the kids about the Gardening Project, and why growing produce is so important not only for us, but for our animals and other people all over the world. I then offered a dirt baby project where the kids took cut pieces of pantyhose and added grass seeds and dirt. After they twisted and closed off the opening of the pantyhose, we made faces and placed them on top of a cup of water. The kids had to take care of their babies until County Fair where they could then display them under their 4-H club. This workshop was to teach responsibility.

In the middle of the month I made a vanilla cake decorated with green Cloverbuds for our local Tumbleweed Spring Auction Sale to help raise money for Council's fiscal year. Nine 4-H members participated with baking cakes and auctioning them off.

Later that month our Extension Office offered the RHEINM clinic (Ranch Horse Exhibition & Instruction in New Mexico). My new four year old Buckskin, "Bo," and I attended. There were three clinics in the morning. The first one was presented by Dr. Turner who is the horse specialist at NMSU, and he talked about horse food & nutrition. The second presentation was some Ranch folk talking about the "working cow horse" and how your horse should perform. The last presenters were some of my fellow 4-H'ers; they talked about horse maintenance. My Extension and 4-H Agent had made BBQ brisket and side dishes for our lunch (The Extension Agent's horse, another Buckskin named Rico, was such a piggy! He walked right into the concession building to help himself to BBQ.) After lunch, there were three classes to compete in: Ranch Pleasure, Ranch Trail, and Working Ranch Horse. I decided to compete only in Ranch Pleasure due to the fact that Bo and I had only just started riding together. When I bought him back in October 2007, he was about 400 pounds under weight, and I had finally gotten 300 pounds on him. He still had a lot of "spook" in him, so we hadn't even spent that much time loping yet.

In April my 4-H club had their annual community service day. We spent a few hours cleaning up trash along a patch of Highway 60 East in San Antonio, New Mexico. Last year my club adopted this section of highway. After the clean-up, we had our monthly meeting where I gave two demonstrations on how to make oven-less cakes. The first cake was called "dirt cake" made with chocolate pudding, crushed Oreo cookies, green colored coconut, and gummy worms. I had my fellow members assemble the cake in individual cups - they had a BLAST! The second cake was a "pineapple, upside-down cake." This one was made in a microwave by laying whole pineapple slices on the bottom of a Pyrex pan, placing cherries in the middle of the pineapples, and pouring the batter over the top. This presentation was a little harder and I was able to talk about the handling of foods (have to wash hands), how to take care of handling hot glass and the use of microwaves. After the demonstration, when it was time to eat our cakes, I had one of the club members ask if she could just have some pineapple and cherries due to her food allergy (peanuts). Talk about feeling horrible. I hadn't even considered the possibility. My heart felt broken that I had put a 4-H booster in this position! Learned my lesson...

It was time to present my third workshop to the kids at Finley Gym. This month's theme was about the Rabbit I project. I talked about why I show rabbits, the differences between fancy and meat pens, rabbit management and how you get recognized for all your hard work at both the fair and the end of the year banquet. My fellow senior 4-H'er (who was helping me) and I held some of my rabbits while the kids petted them and asked questions. I was really impressed with how smart their questions were.

It was finally May and time to present my last workshop to the kids at Finley Gym. This month's theme was about the Food and Nutrition (Dairy) Project, and I talked about different foods we get from dairy cows, the 13 different dairy farms we have in our county, and how the farms process dairy products and sell them at the grocery stores. I then had the kids make their own butter with heavy cream and little jars that they shook.....and shook.....and shook until butter began to form. This was a really BIG workshop for me and I asked both my Extension Agent and my 4-H Agent to help me.

School was finally out and now it was time to spend more hours with my beautiful Buckskin. This past spring, he and I had been taking lessons two times a week, became members of the New Mexico Buckskin Horse Association, and have been competing in the western classes (shag shows and all). We have begun to progress well together - he has now grown to a full 16.4 hands high-and very much a teenager! I look forward to attending horse school with him, and I plan on competing for the title of princess this summer during the Socorro County Fair and Rodeo.

June has arrived and my life quickly became busy with 4-H again. I competed at County Contest in Public Speaking. I wanted to write a speech about a modern-day problem - concern in agriculture. My speech was titled "Agriculture - An Underappreciated Industry." I took first place. I also competed in meats. I didn't do so well because I didn't have the cookery practice I obviously needed. I had practiced in horticulture though. I did well competing in this.

During this month I decided I wanted to run for a State 4-H Office. I filled out an application to run for State Secretary. I had to answer many questions and write an essay on what I've gained through my 4-H career and why I think my skills would benefit the New Mexico leadership team. I also mentioned why I wanted to run for office and represent my beautiful New Mexico. Now I need to think of a campaign theme.... Hmmm!

The time has finally arrived for me and Bo to attend Suzanne Norton Jones' Horse School in the big city of Albuquerque. I had an absolute BLAST! Bo and I were placed in the middle level of the highest class. We ended up doing so well together, that we were able to lead and instruct my class with different activities. On the last day of class, Bo and I had to compete in a mandatory show where we placed 6th. My instructor was a really neat ranch horsewoman named LeAnn Monroe, and she was from Raton.

One week later while our horses were still primed from horse school, I attended the New Mexico Southwest District Horse Show in T or C. Bo and I competed in horsemanship and placed 4th, in western pleasure we placed 3rd, and in western trail we placed 4th. I am happy to say I qualified to compete at the State Fair in the fall.

In July I attended State Conference where I not only competed in meat judging, horse bowl and prepared speech, but I also campaigned and ran for State 4-H Secretary. For the meat judging team, we (me, Melanie, Shannon, and Richard) placed 4th in the state. In Horse Bowl, my teammates and I (me, Leslie, Jack and Catlin) placed 3rd in the State. I placed 4th in the state as an individual in the Horse Bowl. For the prepared speech, I once again presented "Agriculture - An Underappreciated Industry." I didn't place in the top 10, but I felt I did an awesome job. In

between all these competitions, I was busy campaigning. My slogan was “Soaring High to Your Destiny With 4-H,” which was also the basis of my campaign speech. I attached some of my cards to metallic green and white Marti Gras bead necklaces and to white miniature Frisbees. I also handed out 4-H airplanes and goody bags that had 4-H balloons in them. Unfortunately, I didn’t win all the votes needed to obtain the office, but I plan on applying for Diplomat or Ambassador in the fall.

Later in the month of July, I helped form a committee with one of my club’s project leader to make a 4-H project with my whole club - Enterprise for Progress. We made plant terrariums to display in the County Fair. During this time, I had a girlfriend visiting from Michigan. She was really amazed not only with the 4-H program, but with the level of communication I could apply and the responsibility that my project leader entrusted in me. She talked with my mom and I about the program when we came home that day, and is now considering finding a way to establish an after school program in her hometown (her mom is a 5th grade teacher).

I filled out an application to run for the title of Socorro County Fair and Rodeo Princess. As part of the competition, I have to attend five of the eight mandatory meetings with my horse. This is a two-part competition. The first part is based on personality, so I will need to write and memorize a speech (subject of my choice) that is no longer than three minutes, model, and have personal interviews with the panel of judges. The second part of the competition is in horsemanship. I will have to complete one set pattern and one free time pattern that can be no longer than 2 ½ minutes.

August had finally arrived, and with it a very busy schedule with 4-H. I started off this month being able to “beat the heat” of the summer by attending a county 4-H get away in Elephant Butte. We had a BLAST at the lake. Our Extension and 4-H Agent hauled an outboard motor boat and one of the senior members hauled her jet ski. We had canopies for shade, a boat and lake to cool off with and a big BBQ! I tell you, 4-H is the life!

Later in the month, I and other 4-H members in the county participated in a community gathering that the City of Socorro hosts called “Hot August Nights.” 4-H had a tent where we had art and craft projects like flip-flop decorating, crown designing, and model airplanes. We also had games to play such as the bean bag toss, bowling, and ducks with numbers in the water. Everybody was a winner no matter what age the kids were. There was a food booth, live music from local bands, and crafts for sale. Our booth was free to participants.

During this same time of the month, I and other 4-H’ers helped out with the Wild Turkey Federation Socorro Chapter’s Banquet. This chapter has an auction during their banquet, and 4-H members hold and carry the auctioned items around for chapter members to view.

Now comes the really busy part of my story... My competition for the title of princess and the County Fair.

My Buckskin, Bo, and I had been working all spring and summer for this day. The morning of the competition was HOT! The three judges were sitting under umbrellas as soon as the event started, which made me feel already defeated. (The truth is Bo had just turned five years old, and even though we had practiced a couple of times a week at the fair ground arena, he still had a lot of spook in him, and showed it every time he passed the bucket shoots. Now he will also do this when he passes the judges!) The order for the competition was the queen contestants would go first (there were two participants), then the princesses (five participants including myself), and finally the sweethearts (eight participants). The first set of points was based on a set pattern called the “Queen Pattern.” This pattern is not timed, and the outgoing

Queen sets the pattern. When it came to my turn, Bo and I entered the arena. No matter what, I was determined to keep my head up high, even if he spooks. Of course, the beginning of the patterns walked us right past the bucket shoots! I tried my best to get him as close as I could to the rail without scaring him. I decided to reach down and stroke his mane to encourage and relax him. (Later the judges told me to avoid the physical interaction and encourage him through my voice and seat position in my saddle, but they were very happy with the way I handled him, and were surprised with just how tall he is when you are up close.) I continued past the shoots with no major spooking. As I was finishing up with this set of patterns and we were approaching the judges and their dreaded umbrellas, it happened! Bo pitched! Determined to keep my head held high no matter what, I spurred him, picked my hands up a little higher, and pushed him forward. He responded beautifully, and went right into the correct loping lead, and we finished the figure eight pattern. The second set of points are based on a set pattern that I choreographed. This pattern is timed – I am allowed 2 ½ minutes. If I exceed the time, I automatically get five points deducted from my score. We finished our pattern in a timely manner, and with no temperamental tantrums from Bo. This concluded the Horseman judging, and now it was on to the Personality judging. That evening, during the Queen's dinner, I modeled, gave my timed speech, and finished up the competition with a personal interview. I really liked the judges this year. They were positive, encouraging, and helpful with their suggestions. Now all the competitors have to wait until next week's Socorro County Fair to have the winners announced before the Friday night rodeo.

Finally the County Fair was starting. I had submitted a cake and lengthy resume for the Cake Ring Sale, which paid off because I won first place and was able to sell my cake at the Junior Livestock Auction. Then it was time to show and compete with my Meat Pin rabbits. Even though I didn't win Grand Champion, I did place Reserve Champion (not bad for my first year in this project as well as my first year stock), but there was not enough individual participants in the class to ensure a second place position at auction. (Guess I know what to do with left over baby bunnies - recruit 4-H'ers into this project!) All the while, I was having to continue in the princess competition with full western dress at ALL times (hat, belt, buttoned shirts, sash, boots and of course, all the bling bling...), and pass out ribbons to participating 4-H'ers during the fair judging.

Friday evening was approaching so I went home to wash Bo and get ready for the night's announcements. I was really nervous while my mom and I were washing him, and that's when my mom noticed Bo's condition. He was coated in hundreds of hives! From the tip of his nose to his hooves and tail. My poor baby! My mom continued to give him cold-water rinses while I went into the house to get ready. Once we were back at the fairgrounds and getting ready to saddle him up, his hives got angry again. (I guess I wasn't the only nervous one.) By the grace of God, one of the sweetheart contestant's parents was our local vet, and they had towed the horse trailer with their work vehicle. They gave him an antihistamine shot, which almost immediately relaxed him. (He ended up being allergic to a bug bite. Another one of the girls' horses had the same reaction the following morning - worst set of hives the vet had ever seen.) I entered the arena with Bo and all the contestants' dads. While the dads were holding our horses, we stepped forward to accept the announcements. My heart was beating so hard I could hear it in the ears! I won the points for Ms. Personality, and I received a beautiful Montana engraved bracelet, then the announcement for the title. I heard my name being announced, but I stood there stunned for a few seconds. I couldn't believe that Bo and I had won! I know we worked really hard, but he was still spooking and that pitch – augh! I received a beautiful engraved Montana belt buckle, leather

crown, and saddle. I had been given the title of Socorro County Fair and Rodeo Princess. The following Day, I had the obligation to be present in all the photos of the FFA and 4-H participants and their livestock during the Jr. Livestock Auction.

I wound down my 4-H year in October celebrating National 4-H Week. As a County Council Officer, I helped hold a workshop day for all 4-H members in Socorro. My workshop was based on communication, the negative results of “cliques,” responsibility, and leadership skills. The games I had the 4-H’ers play were the hula-hoop game that consists of a hula-hoop hanging in a door way. During the first round, I allowed the kids to talk about a way to ALL make it through the hoop or talk. The maze game was a pattern they had to follow from my directions, and if they made a wrong step, they had to go to the back of the line. They were basically learning from each other’s mistakes. We took a break for lunch and I offered cupcakes that I had made. We then finished the day with a project of “iron on” pillowcases that said National 4-H Week.

Whew... once again I have filled many pages with how 4-H has enriched my life. If there is one quote I can leave you with at this point it would have to be the one my mamma is always saying. “Once a 4-H’er, always a 4-H’er.” See you all next year. – Ms. Samantha Jean