

Did You Know?



Mary Louise Reynnells wearing her white FFA Chapter Sweetheart jacket in high school.

The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History was looking for Future Farmers of America (FFA) stories and FFA jackets to display in a new exhibit. A colleague of mine at the National Agricultural Library (NAL) sent me an e-mail and asked me to tell my FFA story. So I did. The museum liked my story and my jacket—a white FFA Chapter Sweetheart jacket—and now

both have become a part of a permanent exhibit in the Smithsonian along with four blue FFA jackets chosen, one of which belonged to President Jimmy Carter. It is an honor and a privilege to have been chosen to participate in this new exhibit and serve as an example of what agriculture education can do and the impact all of us in agriculture can have on others.

I was in the San Bernardino, CA, Pacific High School FFA Chapter. In the early years of FFA, girls were not allowed to join, but were allowed to participate in some FFA activities as a "Chapter Sweetheart." They were given an honorary white FFA jacket, and they helped with events as hostesses. It wasn't until 1969 that girls were given full membership after being voted in at the national FFA level.

I became a member of FFA during the first decade that girls were allowed in, joining in 1976. In 1977, I was elected FFA Chapter Treasurer. I was also voted in as Chapter Sweetheart, receiving a white FFA jacket, and designated as a spokesperson for chapter events. In my senior year, I was elected FFA Chapter President. Chapter Sweethearts and the white jackets no longer exist, having been voted out of FFA in the early 1990s.

The leadership opportunities and public speaking skills as a spokesperson for my chapter during my years in FFA laid a foundation for my agricultural career at USDA. I began work at the NAL as a Technical Information Specialist nearly 30 years ago. I work in the Rural Information Center, and in 2009 I assisted in the development of a clearinghouse for beginning farmers and ranchers, Start2Farm.Gov. Through this clearinghouse I have assisted individuals with information on starting a farm or ranch, bringing me back to working with future farmers once again.

The jacket donation ceremony was held at the National Museum of American History on July 25, 2014. Click [here](#) to view photos from the event.

*Written by **Mary Louise Reynnells**, National Agricultural Library.*

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