

Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project
Interview with Marjorie Edwards by Nia Flood
Conducted on June 29th, 2024 in Farmville, NC

[00:00:00] **Nia Flood:** Hi,

this is Nia Flood with the Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project. I am in Farmville, North Carolina and the date is June 29, 2024. Will you please introduce yourself and tell me some things about yourself that you feel are important?

[00:00:15] **Marjorie Edwards:** My name is Marjorie Edwards and I was born back in 1944, July the 10th. Got a birthday coming up and I grew up in the country on a farm with six other siblings and my mom and dad.

[00:00:33] **Nia Flood:** Did you live here your entire life? Where do you call home?

[00:00:37] **Marjorie Edwards:** Right now I call Farmville home, but I was, I reared in Green County, so wherever I stay over a year, that's home.

[00:00:47] **Nia Flood:** Do you farm and garden?

[00:00:49] **Marjorie Edwards:** Yes.

[00:00:50] **Nia Flood:** Can you tell me a little about that?

[00:00:52] **Marjorie Edwards:** Well, we at the community garden here in Farmville, North Carolina and uh, we raised vegetables and things like that and everything that I can put in a jar from the garden, I do. I've canned green beans and tomatoes and stuff like that. Put 'em in a, I canned 'em in a jar and I do the, um, not the pressure canner, but I do the, uh, water bath boiling.

[00:01:17] **Nia Flood:** Mm-Hmm. , would you mind, um, elaborating a little bit on the process of canning?

[00:01:24] **Marjorie Edwards:** Oh, of course. First of all, you know, you gotta pick your vegetables, , and then, you know, you prepare them, uh, your vegetables. And with the jars, you wash them very well, and I take mine and put them in boiling water, so when I pack the vegetables, the jar will be hot.

And I put it in the, in the, put the vegetables in the jar, and then I fill it, not full to the brim with water, but just about the top where you can see it. Boiling bath, I just put them back in the canning pot, and let them boil. And, uh, I can't remember exactly how many minutes, but when I take them out, set them out, and when I know I hear the lead pop, I know it's sealed.

So then, you can keep them for years.

[00:02:13] **Nia Flood:** How did you learn how to do this, did your family members teach you?

[00:02:18] **Marjorie Edwards:** My mom. Cause we were in the country, and um, there was six of us, and we had a big garden, and we had to pick vegetables, and my mom would can them, and sometime, you know, back in the day, when I was younger they cure tobacco with wood.

And my dad could take the jars and set them in the barn. And could count them in the tobacco barn.

[00:02:46] **Nia Flood:** Um, would you mind sharing about your experiences gardening growing up?

[00:02:51] **Marjorie Edwards:** No,

I

don't. Because when planting season come, I was always the one following my papa, my daddy around. And he, and then we, we didn't have tractors. We had mules and plows where we, the farm we stayed on, they let us use it.

And my dad would go out and dish the garden up and make the rows. And when time comes to plant, see I'd be behind him. And he taught me how, taught me a lot about gardening. Because my mom wasn't able to do it in the sunlight and stuff like that, but I'm the outdoor person. So I followed him around.

[00:03:28] **Nia Flood:** Do you have a favorite memory gardening with your father?

[00:03:33] **Marjorie Edwards:** Yeah, just basically watching how he would plant this stuff and how he would take, you know, uh, certain time, you know, you have to give it some nutrients and, uh, then watch em come up out the ground.

Because he was in that garden about every other day just to see it. And, and then the garden, you might stay right here, but your garden could be right in your backyard. So, I, and then I learned, he taught us how, my mom taught, we would pick the stuff. Uh, my mom taught us how to do the harvest, I mean, the preserving it.

[00:04:09] **Nia Flood:** Um, how were you taught to preserve? Was it through canning or another way?

[00:04:15] **Marjorie Edwards:** Well, at first it was canning because we didn't have a deep freezer. But once we got a freezer, then it changed over to canning the food in a jar and also packing it in the bags or whatever we had to freeze it. And my mom would always blanch the food first.

[00:04:37] **Nia Flood:** Um, do you have a favorite meal that you remember from growing up?

[00:04:51] **Marjorie Edwards:** Growing up. I'm trying to think. Yes. Oh, the favorite time I did, I remember because we were farmers and my mom had to, you know, like tobacco plants. She would have to go pull plants. And what she did, that's how I learned to cook. And she would help me prepare the food, put it in a pot, tell me what time to turn it on, what time to take it off.

And one day she came home, and I had everything on the table for them ready to eat. So that was an experience for me.

[00:05:26] **Nia Flood:** What did you cook?

[00:05:27] **Marjorie Edwards:** Cabbage. Boiled potatoes and probably pork neck bones. I can't remember exactly. And we, we didn't fry hushpuppies. We baked our bread in a pan. And I had everything ready.

[00:05:46] **Nia Flood:** How has what you were taught in your childhood about cooking and gardening change and influence your current

practices?

[00:05:49] **Marjorie Edwards:** Well, you know, after I got married, we moved out and had kids and we had our own garden. So that helped me a lot. Because I, I would can a lot, you know, special vegetables, um, green beans, butter beans, uh, corn, most, uh, when it comes to corn, most of the time we would

pack it in bags and freeze it, but the other stuff we would put it in a jar and can it.

[00:06:20] **Nia Flood:** Do you have any seed stories that have been a part of your family's tradition? So like saving seeds, planting seeds?

[00:06:26] **Marjorie Edwards:** Oh yeah, yeah. We always did that. Uh, the peas and things like that. See, once they grow, and we would pick them and let them dry out, and let them dry. And I remember my father would go out there and, uh, I don't know how he did it, but get all the husks and stuff out of it.

Because he would put them in a bag and kind of beat them up. You know, break the hull up. And we'll take those same seeds that we picked and use it for the next year.

[00:06:59] **Nia Flood:** Do you still save seeds?

[00:07:01] **Marjorie Edwards:** Oh, yea, that's the only thing I save are okra seeds. I do save those.

[00:07:05] **Nia Flood:** You still save okra seeds?

[00:07:06] **Marjorie Edwards:** Yea, I still, I have some now and I planted some.

[00:07:07] **Nia Flood:** What's your favorite dish to make with okra?

[00:07:16] **Marjorie Edwards:** Boil 'em and put some salt on them and eat 'em. That's all, cause I, I, you know, okra is so, you know, how they are.

I, I, I used to, long, long time ago, mix 'em with some greens, but when you picking that stuff up and then them okras go to string and that, that wasn't so good. So I just boil them, and, uh, put me some salt on them, and eat them up.

[00:07:40] **Nia Flood:** What else do you currently grow?

[00:07:44] **Marjorie Edwards:** Well, we have okra. We had cucumbers. We did have, we have had collard greens, mustard greens, but we don't have them this year, but we have since we've been in the garden and lima beans. But those things, we take 'em and, can, I can some of those. I still have some in a jar.

Cause once you put them in that jar and that lids have popped, it's good for years.

But with collard greens, I cook them. Just like I'm gonna eat them and then I put them in, um, bags and airtight them as much as I can and freeze them for the winter.

[00:08:23] **Nia Flood:** How do you cook your collards?

[00:08:25] **Marjorie Edwards:** Well you know you can put pork in. But most of the time I use smoked turkey. And I just, and um, put my turkey meat in. And with my collard greens, I always put a bell pepper in the, in the pot.

I don't chop it up in the greens. And um, I put a little, uh, cause you know we old people, we save the oil when we fry bacon and stuff like that. So I use bacon fat, a little bit of that, and put it in the pot. And salt, and sometimes I might put crushed peppers, sometimes, but not often, because people don't like it.

And then when I get them done, I take them out, squeeze the water out of them with a colander, chop them up, and put them in. After they cool, I put them in a bag and freeze them, because I don't put hot food in plastic bags. And then we got greens all winter.

[00:09:27] **Nia Flood:** So, do you and your family use plants as medicine or do you have any memories of your parents using herbal remedies when you got sick or when you were growing up?

[00:09:58] **Marjorie Edwards:** Girl we, back in the day, um, it was always herbal medicine, something they put together. Oh that nasty tasting castor oil. They would make us take that stuff. But, uh, most of the time she would always make us use home remedies. I'm trying to think of something that she would use, rub us in, uh, she would rub us in that, uh, turpentine, sometimes, you know, especially if you have an aching joint or something like that, and alcohol and stuff like that.

Cause we didn't go to the doctor very often.

[00:10:20] **Nia Flood:** Do you remember what these medicines smelled like or felt like?

[00:10:24] **Marjorie Edwards:** Well you know that oil gonna make you greasy. And I didn't like that, that grease she put on us. I didn't like it, but what choice

you have. You don't have a choice when we were growing up. If they said it, that settled it.

So, I mean, whatever she did to keep us healthy.

[00:10:44] **Nia Flood:** Any other stories of your childhood that you'd like to share with us?

[00:10:47] **Marjorie Edwards:** Nothing, but we just was six, eight people in a three room house. And the boys and girls had to share rooms, but not the beds. And, um, we had our, our kitchen, we had a breezeway, was separate from the bedrooms and the living room, see, and most of the time with, with us with the three bedroom house and those kids, we had to share beds.

So the boys had a bed and the girls had a bed, and sometimes it was four girls in one bed. But, we made it.

[00:11:25] **Nia Flood:** I bet gardening was really important for sustaining your family.

[00:11:30] **Marjorie Edwards:** Yea, it was very important, because that's how we would eat. Now, we had, uh, my daddy raised hogs, and, uh, he would have the hog killed. And see, you eat every pure part, you eat every part of the hog, but the, but the hair.

The feet, the liver, the, the, he even had the heart, the, the hands, the, whatever. Whatever was on that hog, but I could not stand that head. Cause he had his eyes on me. But my mom would bake that thing and take the meat out and chop it and make barbecue.

[00:12:06] **Nia Flood:** Do you remember anything about helping to prepare the hog?

[00:12:08] **Marjorie Edwards:** Oh yeah. Yeah, we, uh, we had to, you know, my dad would teach, I followed my daddy a lot. And he would teach me how to do certain things. I was watching how he'd salt the meat. How he'd take it out when they had the hog killings and stuff like that. The only thing I didn't work with was those chitlins.

Because, you know, you need somebody with experience doing that. But, that's what we did. We raised vegetables in the spring and packed them and canned them. And they had the hog killing in the fall. And how they salt it down so

we'd have food for the winter. Yeah, we do. We talk about Arnold first, he was our pig. And he grew up to be a hog.

And he would get out, come and sit on the porch, walk around, go back to his pen. Did we kill Arnold? I, I think he just died cause he was a pet more like anything. Yeah, now he was ours. He would get out. We'd be going to church and he'd come out. He'd be on the porch. While, when he was four.

[00:13:21] **Nia Flood:** What about, um, Lucky, the cow?

[00:13:24] **Marjorie Edwards:** Oh. I'm trying to think what happened to Lucky.

[00:13:28] **Unknown:** Can I talk about Lucky?

[00:13:34] **Marjorie Edwards:** Yeah, please do, because I can't remember. I remember having Lucky, but that's not when I was growing up. I was married then and had my kids. And, um, but all this other stuff was when, you know, when I, before I got married, we were home.

Cause with six kids and two parents, we had to raise our stuff. So, but after I got married, we still had a garden. And I still do, did the same thing. And with the community garden, I'm still canning. Like my, if I have enough tomatoes, I can them. My green beans, I can them.

So.

[00:14:12] **Nia Flood:** So earlier you mentioned that your family would butcher hog. I was wondering, what dishes did you make out of this hog?

[00:14:23] **Marjorie Edwards:** Oh, you could, with the hog, they made bacon, sausage.

We even ate his feet, too. Um, the ham, the shoulders. We just ate it. My dad would pack it in salt to cure it out so it wouldn't spoil. But the, we, the chitlins, we were, you know, they cleaned them and soaked them. So we just go and cook them the same day.

[00:14:51] **Nia Flood:** So who prepared the chitlins and do you know how that process looked?

[00:14:57] **Marjorie Edwards:** I know the process, but I didn't do it because at that time I was always looking around. I would hang around to see, but the ladies would always prepare that, you know. It's amazing how they would dig the hole and put the, and clean the inside of the feces out of the chitlins and them. But I would, I had helped turn them.

You had to turn them so you could wash them and then soak them. And then sometime you had to scrape them cause you take the intestines also to stuff your sausage. That was amazing.

[00:15:30] **Nia Flood:** Wow. Do you remember how, do you remember what else was done to prepare the various parts of the whole?

[00:15:41] **Marjorie Edwards:** No, I mean basically nothing but, you know, they would kill them.

And first thing they do is, it was so cruel. They'd cut them right in the throat so they could bleed. Because if they didn't, then the blood would settle in the meat. And then they had this big thing of water. And with some chains on each side, and the meat was pulled from one side to the other and then they scrape them down and, you know, after they did all of that, they, you know, hang them up, get all the chitlins and clean them out, cut them up and pack them up, and then until they're, you know, so we can eat it.

It'll be the fat on the hog and we cut it in small pieces. Well, you take the skin, that's where you got some of the fat from, you scrape it from the skin. And um, then they chop it up in little pieces and put it in a pot and uh, fry them. Put a little oil and a little bit of water until you know, cause that, that fat make its own grease.

And then when they, when they were done, they take the cracklings out, but they saved the grease. And they put the, they had lard stands. And so we used the lard to carry us on through the winter. So back in those days, see, we didn't buy western oil. We didn't know nothing about western oil. We knew hog fat. And, uh, and that's how we seasoned our food, with that, with that.

[00:17:16] **Nia Flood:** So, could you describe the process of rendering the lard?

[00:17:21] **Marjorie Edwards:** Yeah. Okay. You know, you take the most of it just around the belly of the hog and they would take the skin off the fat and then we would take the fat and they would cut it up in little pieces like squares, little

squares, and put them in the pot with some oil and dry the rest of the fat out of the, I mean the lard, the grease out of that.

And take them out of the pot and then we eat them. But then the lard, they put it on a stand and we use it for the winter.

[00:17:54] **Nia Flood:** So what was your favorite meal from, that you made from the lard?

[00:17:58] **Marjorie Edwards:** Um, when they barbecue it. The ham was good too. My mom used to fry that ham. You know, cause it's all cured out and make homemade biscuits from the lard. And we bake them and of course we always back in the day, we always had molasses. And, cause my dad would buy it with the big jugs. And, uh, sometimes that would be our breakfast.

And then we could eat the cracklings when they dry out. We'd get sweet potatoes and eat that. We'd make a meal out of that.

[00:18:32] **Nia Flood:** Sweet potatoes and cracklings?

[00:18:34] **Marjorie Edwards:** Yes.

[00:18:35] **Nia Flood:** Was that like the whole meal?

[00:18:38] **Marjorie Edwards:** Not necessarily, no. That would be more like the snack time stuff.

[00:18:45] **Nia Flood:** So what did a normal meal look like for you growing up?

[00:18:48] **Marjorie Edwards:** Okay, collard greens, some kind of pork, whether it was neck bones or barbecue or whatever.

Um, we didn't, we didn't fry bread during, back in the day. We always baked it in the, in the oven with cornmeal. And when I was growing up, that was about. And maybe some kind of peas, black eyed peas or butter beans or stuff like that. Because we didn't have collards every time, but we ate a lot of beans.

It was just, well, we would buy the meal in a bag. You don't get it like you do now, because now they get it with sugar. We just have a, and we, my mom and my dad would buy the ten pound bags. And we would just, uh, use, uh, my mom

would put a little salt in it, because it didn't have any. And, uh, just add water. You just add water.

Now, like now, when I cook bread, I add an egg to mine. But I don't use that kind of milk. And, uh, she would bake it. We didn't, we did very little fried food. The only fried food we ate was sometimes pork chop and chicken. But we didn't eat a lot of fried, like fried bread. We always baked the bread.

[00:20:08] **Nia Flood:** And that was how you made your cornbread?

[00:20:10] **Marjorie Edwards:** Yep. Yes.

[00:20:12] **Nia Flood:** So you mentioned earlier that you also had chickens, so

[00:20:17] **Marjorie Edwards:** yeah.

[00:20:17] **Nia Flood:** How did you go about preparing the chicken?

[00:20:21] **Marjorie Edwards:** Well, we raised the chicken, you know, from little Bitties, and my dad said he always knew when to, you know, kill them. He said when they [inaudible]. But my dad would go out. It was cruel. I thought it was ring the chicken neck and then they'll cut it off so he could bleed.

So you wouldn't, the blood wouldn't settle in the meat. And they had these pots with hot water. And we put them in there and we picked the feathers off. And that was real easy because it came out easy. And then we'll, you know, uh, cut the pieces off the leg and then made all the pieces of the chicken. Then we open them up.

Well, no, we opened them up before we did that to take all the intestines and all the other stuff in it that's not, that wasn't eatable, the ones that you couldn't eat, and cut them up or sometimes just put them in the freezer whole.

[00:21:17] **Nia Flood:** So, could you, um, describe more about the crops in your garden? So, if they had any specific names, what they looked like, what they tasted like?

[00:21:28] **Marjorie Edwards:** Well, they did but I can't remember the name of the corn that we had. But you know, we, my, he knew when it was ready to pick and we would have to go out and break it with our hands and take the shucks and the silk off. And sometimes we would cut some off the cob and my mom would freeze it on the cob so we could eat it.

[00:21:51] **Nia Flood:** What about other vegetables that were in your garden?

[00:21:56] **Marjorie Edwards:** Um, well back in those days with the collard greens and stuff like that, green beans, we'd can them in a jar, you know, because we would pick them. Green beans, butter beans, the field peas, and stuff like that. They were always put in the jar back in the day when I was growing up.

[00:22:15] **Nia Flood:** So, throughout the interview, you mentioned beans a lot, and how important canning is. So, I was wondering if you could describe how you prepared the beans prior to canning them? So, like if they, would they shell them?

[00:22:29] **Marjorie Edwards:** Yeah, some of them, they're like, the green beans, we call snap beans. You take the end and you snap them.

And then the green peas, you have to shell them. Open them up and shell them. Butterbeans were the same way. You had to shell them.

[00:22:44] **Nia Flood:** What did that process look like for you? Did you do it with your siblings, with your mother? Were you sitting on the porch?

[00:22:51] **Marjorie Edwards:** Most of the time, sitting in the house at night. When you're sittin by the fire, but with, now with meals and I, we did a lot of, we, we did green beans where we canned some, and we just worked together in that in the kitchen, snappin them, and I packed them in the jar and put that little teaspoon of salt in it, put them in the pot, and you know when they, um, I put, I did, most of mine was boilin bath, I didn't have a pressure canner, but I knew you could change,

tell by the color when they are ready. And we'll take them out, and if you ever hear the jar pop, it'll pop, then you'll know it's sealed. So then they'll last for years and years like that.

[00:23:36] **Nia Flood:** What color would they turn when they were ready?

[00:23:38] **Marjorie Edwards:** They turn more like a green, similar to that shirt. But it wouldn't be that color, because they wouldn't be real bright green like the ones we picked.

like you see in the store. They changed

a little color.

[00:23:51] **Nia Flood:** Kind of like an olive?

[00:23:53] **Marjorie Edwards:** Yeah, something, I reckon, I don't know. But it wasn't like the green, green, green. Oh, but you'll know. You know, but I did 'cause I worked with this, you know, with my mom and then with also my mother-in-Law. So I just learned how to do it.

[00:24:15] **Nia Flood:** So, um, I also wanted to ask, how did you get introduced or how'd you get involved with the Farmville Community Farm?

[00:24:25] **Marjorie Edwards:** The Farmville community. What you say?

[00:24:28] **Nia Flood:** Garden, I

guess.

[00:24:28] **Marjorie Edwards:** Oh, oh, I'm trying to think what we do here. I just, we went by there. I guess. And we saw it. We saw it out there. And, um, I don't know whether she might have been, I know she wasn't there then.

[00:24:44] **Mia Edwards:** Miss Eulalia.

[00:24:45] **Marjorie Edwards:** Miss Eulalia oh, that's right. That's right. She the one introduced us to it. And we just started, because I like fresh vegetables.

And then I like, I like it better this way because it's non chemical and there ain't a lot of chemicals in this stuff. But when I was growing up, see, they put poison on the thing, you know, like this dusting stuff to keep the bugs and the, and the worms from it.

But this garden, you all, it's all natural. You know, you don't, I like that much better. And we had green beans for that. I still got some tomatoes where I can from the, from my garden.

[00:25:23] **Nia Flood:** Do you spend a lot of time helping in the Farmville Garden?

[00:25:28] **Marjorie Edwards:** Yeah, we take, yeah, we do. We do. I don't know how many beds we have now, do you?

We got four. So we take care of that. I ate okras off of it the other day.

[00:25:44] **Nia Flood:** Is

there anything else you would like to share with us before we wrap up?

[00:25:54] **Marjorie Edwards:** Yeah, well the community garden has been a blessing. Um, especially going to the store and buying vegetables. Now this is the year, I didn't plant collard greens this year. Because, um, I don't know why. But, I will next year. And I will take all, you know, before the frost get to them, I will get mine and cook them.

And pack them in the freezer. You know, go on season like I'm going to eat them, and then I pack them. And during the wintertime, then you've got all your vegetables in the freezer. Butterbeans and stuff like that. And it comes in good. We preserve it.

[00:26:34] **Nia Flood:** Thank you so much for taking time out.

[00:26:36] **Marjorie Edwards:** Yeah, it was fun.

We weren't rich, so we had to improvise with the garden and stuff like that. A lot of beans. I don't like butter beans to this day. Not no big white ones. Cause we did, but it was nice. We made it. We made it. It was nice talking to you guys.

[00:27:02] **Nia Flood:** Thank you for your time.

[00:27:03] **Marjorie Edwards:** Yeah.