

TREND

Gummed-up works of art

By LISA GUTIERREZ
The Kansas City Star

Mom never told us she did *this* back in the '60s and '70s.

She never told us she spent hours in her bedroom or her girlfriends' rec rooms — folding and linking colorful Fruit Stripe and Juicy Fruit gum wrappers into long, braided, zigzag chains.

How come she never told us how fun it is?

Thirteen-year-old Emmy Bird of Kansas City found out last weekend when she and two of her friends learned the lost art of gum-wrapper chains at Stuff, a trendy gift boutique in Brookside.

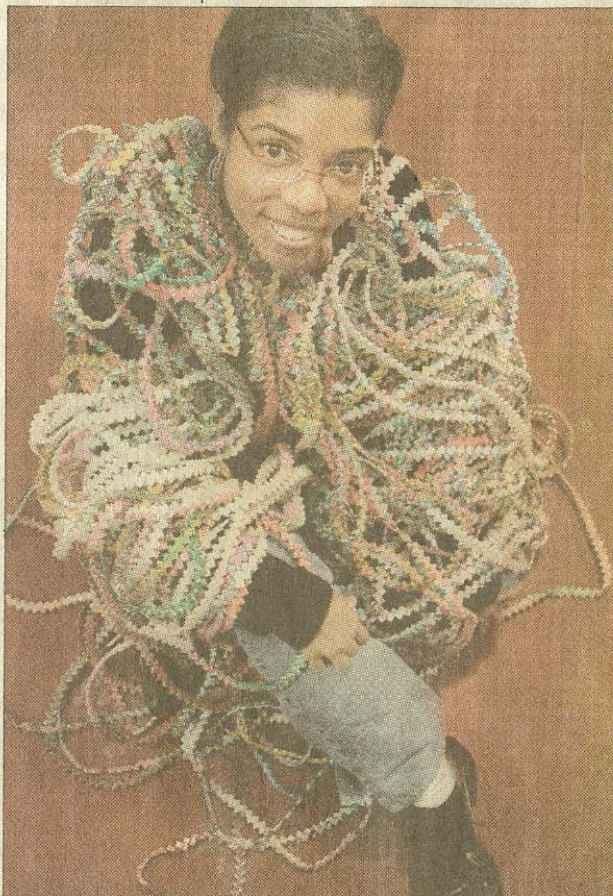
Store employee Sherry Jackson, the maker of a

gum-wrapper chain said to be at least two city blocks long by now, spent the afternoon demonstrating the art to curious visitors. And as women of, ahem, a certain age, walked by the tables where she worked, memories of their childhood years rushed back faster than you could say "David Cassidy Fan Club."

"Oh my gosh, we used to make those in the car on summer vacation," one woman exclaimed as she walked by Emmy and her friends, Mary Warwick and Kelly Gude, meticulously folding colorful rectangles of paper.

Colorful gum wrappers, Jackson said, are hard to find these days, replaced by foil or

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SUSAN PFANNMULLER/Special to The Star

Sherry Jackson started her gum-wrapper chain when she was young. It is now over two city blocks long.

GUM: These chains are long on nostalgia

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plain white wrappers. But that's not a worry for a woman with several jars full of now-vintage wrappers left over from her youth. No, she didn't chew all that gum herself. When friends learned of her hobby they started saving wrappers for her, and they still send them to her from around the world.

To learn more

Visit www.gumwrapper.com, Web site of Gary Duschl of Virginia Beach, Va., the holder of the Guinness Book of World Records for the longest gum-wrapper chain. His stats:
■ 44,378-foot-long chain
■ 1,036,574 wrappers, Wrigley gum only
■ \$51,829 worth of gum
■ Length equals 148 football fields
■ It would take three hours to walk the length of the chain

woman in Kansas City still in possession of her gum-wrapper chain.

Gourley and her girlfriends started their chains when they were in sixth or seventh grade.

"... They all had boyfriends, and they would make them the height of their boyfriend," said Gourley, of Overland Park. "I didn't have a boyfriend, I was too busy in ballet, so I just kept making mine. I just kept adding on and adding on."

She put the chain away in the early 1970s after high school and hadn't looked at it since. But then she got the idea to show it to her YouthFriend, a seventh-grader in Independence. She also showed her friend how to make the chains.

"When we pull it out, everybody wants to see it," Gourley said.

The next week "I came back, and she had been doing it with big pieces of paper and had been making these crowns for her friends," said Gourley, who is also the director of technology and evaluation for the YouthFriends organization. "I thought, 'We've got to do this together.'"

Gourley's chain stretches more than 56 feet, and each week she and her YouthFriend add a few inches more. They're working with 200 wrappers that Gourley, like Jackson, held on to from her youth. "I chewed mostly Wrigley's," she said. "I have tons of Juicy Fruit, Doublemint, Wrigley's Spearmint. Those were my favorite."

She has turned their chain-making moments into school lessons, measuring the chain with a yardstick — how many feet in a yard? — and learning how to write a letter if they decide to submit the chain to the Guinness Book of World Records or offer it to Wrigley for its museum.

And so Gourley passes on an old-school tradition. And already her young friend has a new-school idea: Making a chain out of foil gum wrappers to hang on the Christmas tree.

And Emmy Bird and her friends are just as excited.

"I'm going to ask my mom if I can buy a lot of gum," Emmy said as she worked on her chain at Stuff.

And wouldn't you know, a few minutes later Emmy's mom popped in.

Whoa, another flashback coming.

"I was an expert," Jill Bird said when she saw what her daughter was doing. "I used Bazooka wrappers."

She had never shared this information, let alone her technique, with her daughter — her chain is long gone — but seemed excited to see the girls picking it up so quickly.

"I think it's going to be the next thing," she opined as she watched the girls.

Hotter, even, than David Cassidy?

How to make a chain

- 1) Open up the wrapper. Fold it in half lengthwise, back and forth, several times to make a crease, then tear along the crease. Set aside one piece.
 - 2) Take the first piece and fold it in half lengthwise.
 - 3) Fold it in half again lengthwise.
 - 4) Fold and crease end to end. You should have a V-shape. Then fold each end toward the middle, meeting in the middle crease. Then, fold each end again to the middle to make a smaller V-shape.
 - 5) Repeat instructions on the other half of the wrapper. You'll end up with two V-shaped pieces.
 - 6) Fit the two "prongs" of one piece into one of the slots of the other piece. Voila, the first link. Keep adding links to make a chain. To make it pretty, try to keep the more colorful side of the wrappers on the outside.
- NOTE:** To see an instructional diagram on gum-wrapper chain-making, check out www.gumwrapper.com.

Source: Sherry Jackson of Kansas City, experienced gum-wrapper chain-maker

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SUSAN PFANNMULLER/Special to The Star

Patrick Sturm, 4, of Overland Park worked on a gum wrapper chain with the help of Katie Ford during a free workshop at Stuff in Brookside.