

Farm Notes

CSA Newsletter

Vol. 13 No. 11

October 22, 2012

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PVF Future – Values, Innovation, Zombie Apocalypse: 13th in a 12-Part Series

by Stephen Bradford

An institution with such a storied past as PVF is destined for an equally compelling future. And while a prudent individual might shy from bold claims of what fate hold for us – that doesn't apply to me, so here we go:

First the cast of characters: six cousins. My dear brother Jesse (27) works in a box, pressing buttons for a living. Benjamin (25) has just purchased a decommissioned ambulance which he is converting into a waste-oil burning, mobile home. Alissa (22) is currently swinging in Boston while she supposedly prepares to apply for med school. Cousins Michael and Rebecca (21 and 20) are finishing at Oberlin College, majoring in East Indian Hallucinogenics and Ancient Greek respectively. And your narrator, Stephen (25), recently returned from an epic, 11-month time-travel adventure before shipping off to Guatemala later this month.

Now to the future: On December 21st, 2012, the final day of the Mayan Calendar (spoiler alert) the world did not end. But in the epicenter of the Mayan universe



Clockwise from top left: Benjamin, Alissa, Jesse, Rebecca, Michael, and Stephen, circa 2011.
Photo by Brian Kent

I felt these non-existent changes most acutely and was inspired to cast off all capitalist shackles and embark naked into the Lacondon Jungle to apprentice myself to the Zapitista National Liberation Army. In June of 2013 Michael was blessed with the epiphany that Jesus was a mushroom (a fungus among us) and declared himself to be the First Apostle of the Cult of the Holy Fungus. Later that summer Alissa scored a 42 on her MCATs and met

some super cute boys at a Brown Alumni speed-dating event.

In an unexpected appeal to the progressive wing of his party, Obama tapped Gramma Hiu as the new Deputy Secretary of Agriculture and in December 2013 Hana stood down as the farm manager in order to pursue her dream of opening a Bikram Knitting Studio. To fill the vacuum, Michael moved the Holy Fungus to PVF, now dedicated to the

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PVF History — New Vows, More Community: Eleventh in a 12-Part Series

by Hana Newcomb

In 2002, forty years after the first corn seeds were planted, PVF was still going strong – and improving with age. We had shifted our focus from wholesale sweet corn and tomatoes and now sold everything at the farmers markets and the stand and our growing CSA. We survived the development and building of Blueberry Hill Cohousing and were in happy co-existence with the new neighbors. We had two organic farms in production – one in Loudoun County and one in Fairfax County – with two full crews working in parallel 30 miles apart. We were getting better at growing and better at selling.

Ellen Polishuk had been farming full time with us for ten years by this time, and we decided it was time to find a way to make her an owner, even though she had been working for

the same farmer wages as everyone else (and had no pile of money). At the end of 2002, we established Potomac Vegetable Farms, Inc. with three owners: Hiu, Hana and Ellen. We now were co-owners of about 20 aging tractors, 15 trucks, some fancy compost equipment, a lot of metal implements and many rustic farm structures. We shared the risk and we shared the profits. It was a big commitment for each of us and we felt good about it.

While all this farming was going on, there was of course regular life happening at the same time. The same year that we decided to “marry” Ellen and keep her in the family by making her a co-owner, my mother and her long time sweetheart Michael Lipsky decided to get married. We had a farm wedding on July 7, 2002, with the reception at the Blueberry Hill Common House. In attendance were

all the grandchildren, friends and family from near and far, and many fellow farmers who had worked at PVF in the past.

And while all this was happening at our farm, other farmers in our circle were doing the same thing. PVF by now was a grandparent farm as well as a parent farm (these are not official titles, it’s just a way of explaining relationships) – Chip and Susan Planck had learned to farm here in the early 1970s and had created Wheatland Vegetable Farms. Many of their workers established farms of their own. In 2002, the same year that PVF became a corporation and Hiu and Michael were married, we all danced at the wedding of Eric Plaksin and Rachel Bynum, the founders of Waterpenny Farm.

And down in southern Maryland, on the sandy acreage that Tony and Hiu Newcomb had whimsically purchased in 1960 before they had a clue, Heinz Thomet was establishing Next Step Produce. As the fates would have it, Gabrielle LaJoie came to work there in 2001 and ended up staying – now they have three daughters, Heinz and Gabrielle are both American citizens, and the farm is thriving. From the very beginning, we have given Heinz moral and physical support and he has given us advice and beautiful vegetables.

It was the year for long term commitments, and we have all benefited from these ties that bind us together. For the last ten years, these interlocking circles have depended on each other – as business partners, friends, spouses, and devoted farmers. And there is nothing that rivals a farmer potluck (and performance party).



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cultivation and consumption of the second coming. In the midst of his North American ambulance tour, Benjamin inadvertently became the figurehead of a vibrant international subculture of unemployed, college-educated, existentialist ambulance owners. And in October of 2014, after a series of compelling second place finishes in his fantasy baseball league, Jesse was recruited as the new manager of the minor league Potomac Nationals.

In the summer of 2015 the fields of PVF were overrun with mushrooms, Rebecca had made a name for herself as the first nationally syndicated columnist to be published exclusively in dead languages, and Michael was having another epiphany. He could no longer suppress visions of an onslaught of mushroom zombies, and decided it was time to mobilize the Holy Fungus to warn of the imminent Fungocalypse. After matriculating with a crop of unusually frumpy first-year med school boys, Alissa decided it was time for a change of career and returned to PVF to found a health and wellness camp built on a foundation of nutritious ecoganic vegetables and backbreaking labor. Despite initial success things took a turn for the worse at the wellness camp when Benjamin showed up leading a caravan (of 137 appropriated emergency vehicles) demanding treatment for a severe and incurable ennui. The farm was consumed in the overpowering odor of waste-veggie oil and post-modern angst. It became unbearable and the camp had to close up in the spring of 2016.

In June 2016, responding only to

the name Subcomandante Gurgi, I reemerged to launch an aggressive presidential campaign advocating for the collapse of modern civilization. Despite not having collected the requisite signatures to appear on any ballot, the campaign was buoyed by Rebecca's Pulitzer winning profile "η του Σωκρατους σοφια και τα τοθ Αλκιβιαδου ειδως: ο ρητωρ τετεγμενος της του Διος αστραπας" and Subcomandante Gurgi received an impressive 43 write-in votes nationwide on November 1st, 2016.

Though I may not have technically won the election, much of my bold program for the social collapse was inadvertently implemented anyway. In February 2017, in order to make their crop less desirable to the plagues of insects ravaging the Midwest, Monsanto introduced genes into their corn from the species *Trichophyton mentagrophyte*, the fungus associated with Athlete's Foot. This unlabeled, untested, product quickly flooded the market infecting unsuspecting consumers with an aggressive full-body fungal rash and in advanced cases spreading to the central nervous system, spawning legions of corn-fed mushroom zombies.

And in this time of crisis, the six grandchildren of PVF rallied around the farm, mobilizing its resources for the salvation of humanity. Jesse sent his baseball team out to subdue the hordes of fung-dead by conking them on the head with bats while Benjamin's fleet of ambulances scooped them up and shipped them back to the farm, where Alissa was feverishly experimenting to find an Ecoganic antidote. Michael emerged as the spiritual guru of

the ravaged nation, having been the only faith leader to accurately predict the Fungocalypse and a giddy Subcomandante Gurgi found himself well-poised to facilitate the political and economic restructuring in the post-capitalist apocalyptic landscape. The whole thing was chronicled in the stirring prose of Rebecca's memoir "συγκομιζουσα την ελπιδα εκ των αιματοεντον αγρον τον της Αιδου," winner of the 2021 National Book Award and the Nobel Prize for literature.

Of course if you know anything about time-travel you realize that revealing the future destabilizes the space-time continuum and our fates are once again uncertain. So don't blame me if none of this stuff actually happens.



Stephen Bradford, 25, has spent some of every summer of his life on the farm. He is leaving imminently to a year long post with a Guatemalan human rights group.

What's Happening in Becky's Kitchen?

Winter (Squash) Wonderland

by Becky Crouse Durst

If you're anything like me, you develop a little Cucurbita problem right about as soon as that first frost hits. (That was Saturday morning, October 6 for us.) The butternut squash are in full glory. Then the neck pumpkins start to appear. Who can resist those? But then there's that gorgeous hubbard squash down at the roadside stand. It's the perfect size, you see. Not too overwhelming. And they make the best pumpkin pies! But I've heard amazing culinary tales about the blue pumpkin, so I might as well grab one of those to try. They store well, so it's ok. Besides, a CSA customer just told me about this delicious sounding pumpkin curry recipe, and I'm surely going to whip that up. The next thing I know, I have a pile of winter squash and pumpkins all prettily nestled in a wooden bushel basket. And they are staring me down. They taunt me, I swear, whispering how I'll never get through them all and they're just going to rot.

This year, I'm going to win. Here's my plan:

Storage: I'm going to store some in my basement. They like a moderately warm and dry place—50-60 degrees. Our basement stays pretty cool over the winter, and we have shelves I can place them on in a single layer so they can breathe and don't heat or bruise each other.

Freezing: I'm going to freeze it for use in pies and baking. Cut the squash in half, scoop out the seeds,

and place cut side down on a pan. Put about ½" water in the pan. Roast at 400 degrees in the oven for 40 minutes to one hour, when it is easily pierced with a fork. Scoop the flesh out of the squash and either freeze as is or puree and freeze. Squash can be packed in freezer bags or in freezer containers. Be sure to label the amount!

Dehydrating. Dehydrated pumpkin and squash is great for soups. Bring a pot of water to boil, peel and cut the squash into pieces ¼" thick and one to two inches

long. Blanch for 3 minutes. Spread on dehydrator trays, leaving air space around each piece, and dry at 125 degrees until brittle. Store in airtight containers. To rehydrate, pour boiling water over squash pieces and let steep for 15 minutes. Pour off water and proceed with your recipe.

Canning. Winter squash can be canned, but it must be done with a pressure canner and the addition of lemon juice. In order to can squash,

blanch using the dehydrating instructions above. Place in clean jars and fill jars with blanching liquid. Add two teaspoons per pint or one tablespoon per quart of lemon juice to each jar. Make sure the squash is completely submerged, but leave ½ inch head space. Pressure can at 10 pounds pressure, 55 minutes for pint jars, 90 minutes for quarts.

I may also make some pumpkin butter, but that'll go straight into my belly. And so will the roasted seeds. YUM!

