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Our Roadside Stand: Another Chapter

by Hana Newcomb

A couple of years ago, the highway department installed a very tall, opaque sound wall between our stand and Leesburg Pike, even though we objected. This changed the way the outside world relates to our stand, that's for sure. No one driving by could see the piles of pumpkins or the Christmas trees or the full tables of red tomatoes in August. We immediately stopped making a big display of anything. We were invisible.

In truth, while other people loved the pumpkins and the trees, some of us were getting tired of that heavy work. What a lot of lifting and moving of things that people don't even eat! Also, we stopped growing pumpkins a few decades ago and our dedicated pumpkin grower from Grottoes, VA had retired recently, tired of the traffic of Northern Virginia.

We turned the stand into a self-service business, confusing the folks who find us on Google. Most of our sales happened on the days when the CSA was open, and we continued to purvey local peaches and apples and sweet corn. We puttered along, focusing on the back instead of the front..

In the olden days before farmers markets and the CSA, the stand was our main source of income – that was before Whole Foods and Walmart and Trader Joes. Roadside stands were a brand of their own, with sweet corn we picked every morning, and tomatoes that had a real season. On the weekends, it took three of us to keep the bins and tables full, and in October we had a person parking cars.

It was starting to feel sad last year, having this abandoned legacy space at the front of our farm. Last winter I thought it might be fun to try to set up the CSA in the stand. Of course, for the first few Sundays, the CSA members marched right past the stand and went to look in the back. But sometimes it



The stand / CSA on June 10, 2025.

was really cold or snowy, and the stand felt cozy and right with the lights on.

This spring, we decided to set up the weekday CSA display in the stand, since those groups are the right size for that space. Sundays, we need to use the larger space in the back. We still haven't figured out how to display sweet corn and watermelons from other farms, but it will all become clear.

It feels so nice to see the stand busy and full again. The vegetables are beautiful, the customers are happy to shop for their CSA shares, and the stand has purpose. It's a funky little space and it is basically unchanged since 1971 when they poured the concrete pad (the building inspector said that pad could hold up a skyscraper) and it makes me happy to see it back in action.

What are some hazards you have encountered while working on the farm?

Meredith Graves, she/her

If you were to look in my house closets or kitchen drawers, you'd see nicely arranged Tupperware, evenly folded towels, and neatly arranged bins full of various medicines and salves. But on a daily basis I seem to leave a trail of myself everywhere I go: a sweatshirt here, my phone there... I'm always looking for something and wishing I had prepared for my farm shift better.

But THIS season I vowed to be prepared and have my bag organized the night before ... AND to make sure all items were accounted for upon my daily departure from the farm (you'd be amazed at what you can find left behind on the golf carts). Water bottle - check; sunscreen - check; knife - check; hand hoe - check; phone - check; cortisone itch cream - check; poison ivy soap - check. I was most proud of bringing my itch cream since I haven't yet discovered what it is that gives me the itches: is it the hay we put down to suppress the weeds? Is it the tall grass we pull out of the leeks so that they can grow up? Is it our bug friends that help our farm so much? Who knows? But it's nice to put that cold cream on and not be the crazy itching lady.

I was in the field on my own, peacefully weeding onions, when I looked up to see a crow on my golf cart pecking around. Haha! So cute, I thought. Until I saw said crow IN MY BAG. Before I could even stand up, I saw the crow with my cortisone itch cream in its mouth. In front of my eyes, it flew away with it... up and over the fence, past the houses on the other side of the road. Alas! My one day of perfect packing ruined by a crow! Talk about a work hazard!

Maybe I could have filed for workers comp, but the

amusement it gave far exceeded the hazard. I told this story at our weekly potluck and someone described crow intelligence, so I looked it up! You should, too! They are amazing. The crows got me thinking about the pigs and how intelligent they are. Someone the other day remarked what dirty animals they are. But pigs are actually very clean! They only wallow in the mud to cool themselves off because they have no sweat glands. And that's the great thing about work hazards on the farm - they give you something to talk about in the field or to bring up at potluck, which inevitably leads to learning something cool. And then things like leaving stuff behind or not being perfectly packed seem like small beans compared to all the wonder going on around us.



Rachel McCrach McCormick, she/her

A couple years ago now I was up in the School Patch doing something fairly ordinary for a hot July or August day....picking cherry tomatoes. I was not expecting much except some solitary moments hidden within the rows of luscious sweet Juliets, Sungolds and maybe some Zebra striped ones too. As I was standing at the edge of a row to exchange one full bucket for an empty one,

I was visited by a hummingbird. More precisely, my torso which was wearing a dark pink shirt, was visited by a hummingbird. I was mistaken for a giant flower.

She flitted close and then away and back again several times. So close I could hear her wings beating, sounding almost like a big bumblebee. I suppose I was a disappointment, what with not being as sweet as she had thought. I bet she did find something eventually though.

I didn't mind this interruption. It

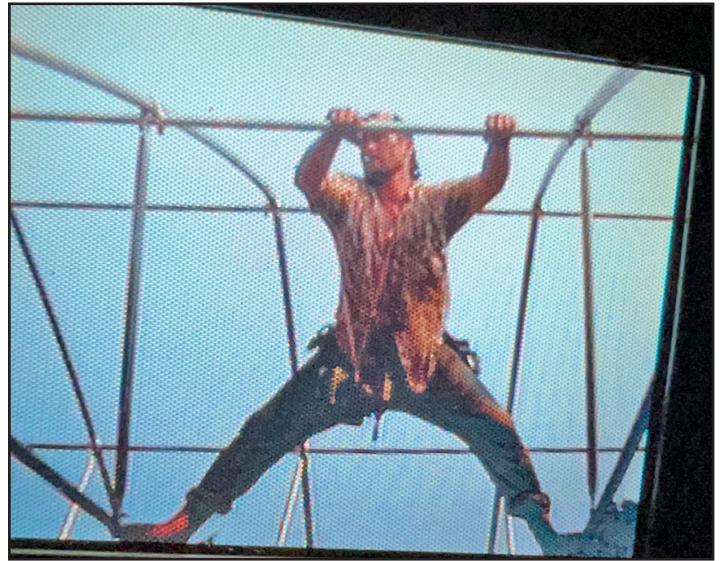
was very nice and quite wonderful. It had never before happened and has not happened since. But I really wish it would. I also wish a crow would come and visit me while I'm there in the patch. There are posts perfectly suited for a landing placed evenly along the rows. We'd have lots to talk about and I will wait. It should not be long now as we are noticing this year's tomato crop already forming on the vines. Come hither, ye crows and ye tomatoes as well.

Storm White, he/him

Stephen is like the chaotic trickster God of sustainable construction, both on account of his seemingly divine ability to never become injured in even the most precarious of situations he puts himself in, and his lack of concern for them.

For example: the other day we were working on building a hoop house, and while I was still attempting to shimmy up along the side on a metal cylinder to the middle support bar, he was already up waltzing between each bar while using an impact driver!

Later, he asked me to use these self-tapping screws to attach these metal channels, which are essential for eventually fastening the plastic cover around the entire structure, to the full length of one of these metal support beams, the very last one, to be exact, on its outward facing edge. To give you a better picture, you can imagine these metal beams essentially as metal cylinders bent like a semicircle above the end frame, where the semicircle terminates on the ground on both ends, and reaches its peak high in the sky. So I spent about half that day precariously pulling my body up the edge of this structure bit by bit—taking time to find a new center of balance which I could push diagonally downward against, putting my leg on the other side of this and my foot hooked around there, wiping the sweat



from my brow, and suppressing intrusive visions of Stephen disappointedly shaking his head over my fallen body—for each screw I had to drive in through these metal pieces, which took about all my limited weight and muscle to achieve.

Just as I finished one of the last screws at the very top, Stephen came over, put in the last few, and showed us how to attach the plastic to the channels with wiggle wire. Then, he traipsed over to the other end of the structure and repeated the same job I had just finished in about 30 minutes, barefoot.

Michael Lipsky, he/him

Some years ago after a very heavy rain, Hiu and I were doing something at “Parents,” the big five acre field at the Vienna farm. Hana was there on some other task. She mentioned that walking in the field would be treacherous. She then drove away on her golf cart.



It didn't seem treacherous to me. I was able to walk on the grass along the edge of the planted rows without any problem. It was wet, sure, but not dangerous. I walked a little way into the rows. The footing was soupy.

I looked over to Mariette. She was a little further into the rows. She couldn't move.

She was wearing calf-high rain boots. She couldn't pull them out of the watery muck. When she tried to extract one foot, the other sank deeper.

I could hardly help her. I was almost stuck, myself. But at least my boots were laced to my feet. With great effort I could lift one foot, then another.

I was able to get to her. She slipped her feet out of her boots. Then we had to rescue her boots. If I reached for the bottom of the boot, immersing my hand half way to my elbow, I could pry them out by relieving the suction that was

otherwise immobilizing them.

With effort we made it back to shore—the grassy verge of sod where we found sound footing again. No harm done, save for some damaged ego.

Lessons learned: 1) after very heavy rains, soil recently spaded to turn weeds into the ground has virtually nothing to hold it together. In a rain it can resemble quicksand. Don't walk in these fields after very heavy rains!

2) Hana knows what she's talking about. Listen up!

By way of introduction, I've been doing various things on the farm since I married Hiu, a co-founder and one of the owners, 23 years ago. I go to markets, give tours, prune blueberries, drive trucks, help out here and there. Once the highest and best use of my time consisted of picking up one of the kids at her music lesson so someone who knew what she was doing could do tractor work.

Oscar Ruth, they/them

When I started at PVF, there was no way to know that one day I'd be writing my fifth bio for the Farm Notes newsletter. Here we are! I go by Oscar Ruth (they/them), and I love seeds, stones, and taking notes. The list of what I love about life is significantly longer, but since there's a word count maximum here, I'll simply share a few others: zine-making, community organizing, reading cookbooks, and walking through the woods.

After four years of enthusiastically coordinating content for this newsletter, I had to hand the reins back to Hana in order to focus on my role in the Future Harvest Beginner Farmer Training Program. My goal is to become a full time herb farmer, growing and sharing medicinal and culinary herbs. Another shift in my role at PVF is that I'm now working incredibly part time, only one day a week in Wheatland. Tuesday is a



dynamic day for my one and only; in March, we were a lean crew tackling as much as possible. Now that we're into June, the crew has grown and so has our capacity for what's possible.

Back in 2021, it seemed like everyone working had either been on the crew since they were born or longer than I could imagine farming or it was also their first season. Regardless, I had this sense: here is a group of people with open minds and open hearts. Feeling accepted is always a gift,

and especially then, as I was in an interesting phase of my (gender) journey. Sending love to past me and their mustache, heh heh. That first season changed me, and I learned so much. There's still so much to learn. It's just that, now, I'm familiar with the rhythms of certain field chores, and there are folks on the crew for their first time, with open hearts and open minds, ready to have fun and get it done. Here's to the season, may we be blessed by countless good things.



Re: front page story, the stand in mid-summer and the vile sound wall being built.