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Tell us what it was like to start working on this farm for your first year.

Katherine Collins: 2014

2014 was my first season working for Potomac Vegetable Farms. I was fresh out of a farmer training program in California and eager to get back to the DC area where I had grown up. Stacey and Casey were managing the PVF West farm site at that time and I nervously interviewed to work for them around Thanksgiving before I started in March of the next calendar year.

Now that I have returned to work at PVF after a few years managing a farm on my own (with lots of help desk support from Hana!) in Alexandria, VA, it's funny to note all that has changed and

all that has stayed the same after all of these years.

In many ways things are so very different at PVF: we have a deluxe wash/pack barn complete with FOUR cooler options and there is not a bathtub in sight (where we used to wash most of the greens), the greenhouse has been thoughtfully relocated to the hub of the farm, the crew is primarily made up of commuter workers as opposed to folks living in farm housing, there are new structures like the beautiful pole barn built by Stephen, and the people at the core of the operation have aged and gone through major life transitions! Notably, Carrie had her daughter, Zoey, in 2015

who was so little then that we would put her in a black produce crate to nap. Now, Zoey, a kind and diligent 9 1/2-year-old, looks after her two younger sibs with shocking maturity.

But things on the farm feel the same in some ways too: the weather continues to be unpredictable, we have delicious lunch and dinner potlucks, Hana is still holding down a chess game of logistics as she coordinates the work flows of two farm sites, and we grow a wide variety of delicious vegetables for you to enjoy.



Potluck in what is now the Vienna CSA pickup location, 2017.



Baby Zoey with Carrie, 2015.

Michael Lipsky: 1994

I met Hiu in April, 1994. I was 54 years old.

I was living and working in New York. Through the summer and for eight years after that, when (at long last) we married and I moved to Virginia, I visited on long weekends or on work trips to D.C.

The farm was then part of an agricultural oasis. Like now, PVF buildings and patches were accessed through a turnoff from Route 7. The farm adjoined the 43 acres of peaches, cherries, apples and farm buildings of the Moutoux Orchard (soon sold to become the Maymont development). Beyond the Moutoux property, the farm district continued with the 8 acres of house, barn and fields once owned by the parents of Tony Newcomb, Hiu's first husband. Tony had died 10 years earlier.

Hiu's daughter, Anna, and her family, were living in Tony's parents' old house. I remember the goats penned in the backyard. Daffodils still bloomed by the path to the house. The enormous barn was filled with treasures, including an old boat. A five-acre remnant of this property continues to be an essential part of the PVF complex, the field now referred to simply as "Parents."

The look of the farm, before the deer fence and hoop houses were installed, was different in other ways. A small pond, abundant with cattails and attractive to redwing



Michael Lipsky checking the mail, 2017.

blackbirds, nestled between the lanes going up the hill from the farm stand. A truck loading platform sculpted out of the Rte. 7 hillside was still in evidence, as was the concrete silage pit in front of the brown barn.

In those first years I did many things for the first and sometimes only time. Up before dawn, with others I drove the 45 minutes to the Loudoun farm to pick corn. The work was cold and wet with all the dew. It may have been the last year PVF grew corn there.

I transplanted tomatoes, sometimes scooping the plants from flats in sync with the transplanter's gearing that delivered water with a click and a squeak, sometimes driving the tractor, going as slowly as possible, instructed to maintain a straight line.

On Sundays in early summer with Hiu and sometimes with Hana I picked lettuce at dawn. We then washed it and added the crates of

lettuce to the truck headed to the Takoma Park farmers market.

I picked raspberries (long gone) on the Rte 7 hillside, and squash from the hillside now occupied by the Blueberry Hill playfield.

On one occasion, six or seven of us got in the bed of a stake truck to make the four-mile trip to pick beans at Odrick's Corner. Soccer fields now stand where beans once grew at the intersection of Spring Hill and Lewinsville roads. The beans were healthy and unblemished, hidden under weeds grown up in the weeks since the field had last been visited.

It was the drive to the field that was most memorable. Jenan, one of the crew, entertained us by leaning out from the truck to put her face into the wind, then shaping her mouth so that the rushing air made the sound of a flute, an eerie, remarkable sound for the circumstances of its origin. On the way back we insisted she do it again.

Chip Planck: 1972

I was thirty-three, coming from a desk-bound academic job, with the only physical activity pickup basketball every week or two. Further mis-preparing me, a few months before arrival, I'd had surgery to remove a ruptured disk. To heal, I was to avoid heavy lifting for some ill-defined period. I recall feeling forlorn when left to sort canning tomatoes behind the stand while the main crew went out for the signature daily corn pick.

In snowy Buffalo I had worn insulated, ankle-high

boots. These proved way too heavy for farm work, but we lacked the knowledge, and the time, and the 25\$, to substitute for them. I clod-hopped around.

Pre-OSHA workarounds: Protecting a cut finger with a taped-on plastic cup so you could keep on picking. Doing without rain gear, work gloves, and visored cap. Priming the Blue pickup's carburetor with gas stored in a glass [!] jar stashed behind the driver's seat.

The diversity of the work compensated for its endlessness. Jacks of All Trades to do it, finally a frost to end it.

Isabel Hulkower: 2011

My first season at PVF was 2011- the summer before my senior year of high school. This was actually 6 years before I learned about drinking water so my memories of that time have a hazy film of humidity over them.

Day to day all I remember doing is picking Juliets, eating freezie pops, doing stand shifts, and feeling lightheaded. I also worked at the Reston farmers market but since I grew up there I found it completely mortifying to run into former teachers and my friends parents. During this era the Vienna and Wheatland farms were operating much more independently- so much so that I had no idea the Loudoun farm existed. Sometimes at the market



Isabel at the Reston Farmer's Market, surprised by a visit from her mother, 2011.

I would stare at our displays in disbelief- earnestly wondering how we were growing so much

food on such a small footprint.

I don't think I cooked or ate a single vegetable but I did harbor an enormous life giving crush on another employee who was vegan and in a punk band. I came back the next summer and asked Hana about him and she had literally no idea who I was talking about.

Anyway I must have been having fun because this is my 11th season- through immense change in my life the farm has felt steady. The other night I stopped unexpectedly by the stand in Vienna, the first time I've been there in stillness and quiet in years. Something about the smell and the specific viscosity of the summer air transported me right back to being newly 17. Turns out time travel is one of the many unexpected benefits of being a long term PVF worker.

Ciara Prencipe: 2013

I heard about PVF because my neighbor, who I went to high school with, was working there. I applied in maybe June but Hana said they were fully hired until September, so I could come for an interview in August. When I came for my interview, somehow I didn't get the location right - I ended up at where the Falls Church farmer's market is located, but of course nothing was happening there because it was midweek. With knots in my stomach for messing up my interview before I even got there, I called Hana

and she directed me to the farm. When I arrived, I had a whirlwind interview where there was lots of activity going on around us - I think it must have been a CSA day. I don't actually remember much from that day, but I do remember seeing a pregnant lady looking very serious with sunglasses and ear protection on a riding mower and Hana saying "That's Becky on the mower."

My first day at PVF was September 4th, 2013. I walked into the meeting area and Hana looked at her phone and announced "Becky had her baby!" A little girl, named Rowan. So Rowan and I kind of share a birthday - for me it's my working with PVF birthday and for Rowan it's, more importantly, her actual birthday.



Grandma Hiu with baby Rowan, 2014.



Ciara and Carrie and Hana transplanting, 2017.

Rachel McCormick: 1982

I started working at PVF in 1982 at aged 19 yrs young. Ronald Reagan was president. Tony and Hiu (Mariette) Newcomb, founders of PVF, were in charge and their 4 young adult children were very much around and, depending on our tasks, they were our crew leaders as well. I remember Hiu leading morning meetings and Anna keeping track and making lists. Hana was already well into her tenure of also being a main leading manager. The next generation of farm kids (the ones who are now in their 20's and 30's) started to come along shortly after this in 1985. I remember Stephen and Jesse playing as toddlers on the dirt floor of the greenhouse, stirring up dirt and making it difficult to breathe, Hana carrying Benjamin around in a backpack while working in the greenhouse, Alissa as a small child getting a rash from eating strawberries. There were some fun times playing pretend games with the kids during breaks from field work. One game stands out to me as the funnest of all time....it involved certain turtle super heroes named Michelangelo, Donatello, Leonardo, and Raphael; they were the most bad ass teenage ninjas and nothing could have been cooler than those turtles. I was Shredder; Supervillain. They loved it and so did I.

Back then the farm did not have Middleton houses to the northwest. That land was a farm (belonging to a different family) and I remember cornfields there and we used to take short cuts through this field to get to the stand. On the other side adjacent to Beulah Rd there was Moutoux Orchard, replaced now by more houses, that orchard, thankfully, did not die, it resides now in Purcellville. The Blueberry Hill Community, which sits in the back of the farm, was not around in the eighties, we grew veggies there on the sloping hill; those patches were called Groves One and Two. When I started PVF had no large barn, just a series of sheds and pens. That magnificent barn, built in the later eighties, is now several decades old.

Having worked here on and off for over 4 decades I've seen and



Our very first golf cart, 2008.

experienced many things. Too many, really, for this article.

Early morning corn picks stand out to me as something I wish new workers could experience. I wonder if we old timers could even do this anymore? Could we lift those tall bushel baskets stuffed full with 60 ears of corn up onto our shoulders and out to the end of the rows? I loved those times. Time seemed different back then. Today our crews shuttle to and fro

from the fields in golf carts. It is still hard work but different and more efficient. We grow more variety. Once upon a time a crew could spend many hours in one huge field harvesting just tomatoes, for example. I think it is those tomato picks and all those months of preparing for them which stands out in my mind...the early Spring greenhouse work of getting the seedlings ready, the raking and baling of the hay to mulch the plants once in the field, the transplanting, the hoeing, the mulching, the harvesting and the sorting and the selling! I'm glad I had those experiences over 40 yrs ago, but as a semi-retired old timer working part-time back at PVF I'm grateful just to be here and for the changes too...the jaunty golf carts, the cell phones for easier communication and Photos (no cell phones way back then), the shorter stints in the fields and for the workers who are still here after all of these years and for the new ones too.



From left: Benjamin, Stephen, Jesse, doing important farm work, 1990.