

Enjoy!
This preview of stories from:

Making Love While Farming: A Field Guide to a Life of Passion and Purpose
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This sampler of stories includes:

- *Giving Blood in Baghdad* from Chapter 1: Journey of a Self-Created Life
- *Build a House, Keep that Spouse* from Chapter 3: The Sacred Sacrifice, Living with Less is More
- *Strong Women, Power Tools, & Scary Dudes* from Chapter 4: Cultivating Hope, Educating for Change
- *Is This a Crazy Idea? Giving Birth to the Festival that Stinks* from Chapter 5: Rebuilding Community: Love over Fear

And a recipe!

- We Ate Kale Before it Was Cool

There's Lots More... stay tuned for the book release in March! Your support means a lot.

Sample Story from Chapter One: Journey of a Self-Created Life

Giving Blood in Baghdad

The UN helicopter overhead blew the desert sand and rippled the folds of the monks' yellow robes. We were surprised when it landed, thinking it was only surveying the scene of our diverse and somewhat disheveled group, halfway and fully weathered on a pilgrimage from Auschwitz to Hiroshima. It was early 1995. The arid landscape revealed just us, the helicopter, and rusted remains of cars that were carpet bombed as they sought return to Iraq from Kuwait during the first of a devastating series of Gulf Wars.

The backdrop for the helicopter landing was a peculiar ridge of sand stretching across the landscape. I had noticed it beyond the heat haze as we walked the scorched road south of Basra, Iraq. It was the only thing of height for miles around, clearly not a geologic phenomenon. We were to learn that this was a ridge created with large bulldozers funded by the U.S. government and recently moved by the same. Many meters below us swirled the viscous blackness of Rumaila, one of the largest oil fields in the world. The ridge marked a border between Iraq and Kuwait, and was moved not under the cover of darkness, but under the cover of exploitation and profit. The ridge had been moved to bring more of that oil field into the domain of Kuwait, U.S. oil ally. Unbeknownst to our group, this clandestine and political border move meant that our ceremony at the end of the highway of death was now in Kuwait, and we were without the visas to be there.

I automatically expect someone descending from a military helicopter to be a middle aged white guy. But the man who walked slowly down the four metal steps from copter to sand had ebony skin, and wore an olive jacket heavily decorated with military emblem. He strolled unthreateningly towards us as our circle leader John Schuchardt turned towards him. John is a seasoned peace activist, Plowshares Eight member, former attorney and marine captain who became temporarily but powerfully known worldwide as the man who barged into the Kennebunkport church of George Bush Sr. crying out 'Stop The Killing' fervently and repeatedly as security carried him out. John

had been with our pilgrimage in Auschwitz and returned to join us in Iraq. Our group now watched this distinguished elder from afar, his gestures indicative of animated speech before he politely shook the hand of the UN official before turning back to us to let us know that we were committing a border violation and should move our circle thirty meters North to continue our prayers.

Days earlier on the well worn bus from Amman, Jordan to the border with Iraq, we folded origami cranes as best we could as the bus dodged potholes. Along with building interfaith Peace Pagodas and carrying forth the tradition of prayerful walk as a form of non-violent activism, the Nipponzan Myohji Buddhist order folded and gifted these in memory of Sadako. She was a young girl who was poisoned by radiation during the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, yet folded cranes as a symbol of hope. While a small strand was offered to someone who had provided us with food or a place to sleep at the end of our long days of walking, most of those we folded would be strung into cascades of 1,000 to place in deeply significant places. We had left one at the gates of Auschwitz. We would leave another at the Almira bomb shelter, where, in a Baghdad suburb, hundreds of people, mostly women and children, were killed by U.S. bombs dropped dead center over their refuge. As we folded the colorful squares on the ragged bus to the border, an idea arose among our equally ragged group hailing from Japan and the U.S., Germany, Chile, Costa Rica and Thailand. Some of us decided to give blood. We would give blood in Iraq because it was very likely needed in the hospitals given the unethical U.S imposed sanctions restricting medical supplies, and for the symbolic power of this small sacrifice, an added gesture of solidarity along with our walk and our prayer . . . if we made it across the border.

We sat in the large cinder block room at the Karameh border crossing, waiting. As had been the case often over the last few months, we waited for hours, not quite sure what we were waiting for. At these times, our group members would nap, write, patch blisters on swollen feet; repack knapsacks or fold cranes. No one was napping that day. We were all on high curious, if not high alert. At this border crossing, we would learn if Ramsey Clark, U.S. Attorney General under President Johnson, who had condemned the Bush administration for crimes against humanity had managed from a distance to negotiate our passage over the border and 500 km onward to Baghdad.

Some time later, a few men ushered forty of us out and into a caravan of dilapidated vehicles. Ricky and I made sure to stay together. It was about as hot at we'd been on the journey so far, in all ways. We rode for hours, crammed into old station wagons on dusty roads that eventually became fragmented asphalt. In fragmented English our Iraqi escorts pointed out buildings, power grids, and roads broken and burned by bombs. And, as we approached Baghdad, they showed off the exquisite architecture--some ancient, some modern and gleaming—punctuated by billboards of a smiling Saddam Hussein holding out a butterfly to a small child.

We were housed at the Baghdad Hotel. On each floor, there was a guard, 24/7. Mustapha Samson stood poised near our room. From Somalia, he had been working in Kuwait to make money for his family back home and was now unable to return to either place. He and Ricky made fast friends.

Our group was never without guides from the Iraqi government office of Peace, Solidarity and Friendship, an office I've yet to see come out of our own White House. We told them we would like to give blood while in Baghdad. On the appointed day, the Red Cross set up a very professional clinic in a large room in the hotel. I still say it was the best blood I've ever given. The only thing lacking- lacking in the entire country along with any fresh food - was the usual glass of post donation orange juice to ease the blood sugar drop.

Ricky had headed back to our room while I walked the five flights of stairs down to the lobby, where I was quickly approached by one of the guards. "Is your husband alright?"

“He is fine, thank you” I replied, assuming his inquiry was yet another transliteration from the plethora of diverse, lovely greetings we encountered throughout our travels. Phrases like ‘May God Travel with You,’ ‘May your dreams be Good,’ fill the heart much more than ‘Have a nice day.’ But as it turned out, after giving blood and without that little sugar re-boost, Ricky had promptly collapsed against the door to our room, where his new Somali friend Mustapha had quickly righted his slumped form and helped him inside to rest. News had traveled as fast as it had taken me to walk down the stairs. By the time I walked (a bit more quickly) up to our room, he was restored. But the country would not be, nor could we imagine then that another decade and a half of bloodshed and devastation would follow.

The first seeds were sown and building piers poured at Seeds of Solidarity a year after our return from the 8-month pilgrimage. Ricky and I are often asked what we give up to live ‘off the grid.’ Our early adult years prior to our marriage were spent on a quest to gather skills to grow food and live with renewable energy. Witnessing the impact of war in Iraq solidified our resolve to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and do our small part to not feed wars over oil, oil that is most always tainted with bloodshed. We began to build on a small clearing 600 feet from a dirt road that had been logged and left about 25 years prior. There was no power available. Ricky’s building skills, two cordless power tools charged in our old truck lighter, and great neighbors helped us raise the walls of our off-the-grid home. Having little money for machinery or labor to help transform marginal, stripped forest into farmland ultimately led us to no-till techniques that made rich soil, fostered life within, and helped mitigate the impacts of climate change that devastate farmers worldwide.

Visitors ask if it is a sacrifice to live off of the grid, pointing to the modest arrays of solar panels that now provide all of our electricity for home and farm. True, living off the grid requires attention and consciousness, awareness of use in relation to what the day and season offers. Yet sacrifice and sacred share a holy root, and the line is often permeable if such choices bring you closer to yourself, others, and nature. Living off the grid is not without escapades and challenges. And farming is filled with escapades and challenges. But we sacrifice very little compared to our brothers and sisters around the world living in war, as refugees, or in poverty in our own community. The sun is the source of all life in our daily lives. Each light clicked on to start the day, the reason the breakfast yogurt is cool, a family video watched curled on the couch, and pumping of water from deep well to irrigate the fields and greenhouses filled with crops that we raise for food and livelihood becomes a gift.

Sample Story from Chapter Three: The Sacred Sacrifice: Living with Less is More

Build a House, Keep that Spouse

“Maybe you should drink a cup of coffee.”

“I quit drinking coffee,” I replied to Ricky while nursing our week-old baby, perched on the edge of the bed that took up a large portion of the room that was actually not just a room, but our entire home.

Many months earlier, I had applied for a yearlong fellowship through the Corporation for National Service. It seemed ideal. If I received it, I could design and execute a research project while working full time from home and receive a \$25,000 stipend for the year. I’d only have to make three trips to Washington D.C. and, well, figure out how to actually work full time from a one

room home with a newborn and simultaneously help build our house. Um, and run all the new programs of our organization. Right, and launch the first ever North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival.

The call that I'd made it to the finalist round came in the morning after I gave birth. Ricky told me this as I awoke in the Franklin Medical birthing center; a healthy little pink human snuggled at my side. I was not exactly fully rested after a 60 hour labor in 100 plus degree heat following a noble effort at a homebirth. The fellowship agency wanted to schedule a phone interview with six honchos at the DC office sometime in the coming week. Thank God it was not in person. I had not told them that I was pregnant.

I knew that they were not legally supposed to frown on my application given that I was pregnant but I'd never done this before—attempted to be a professional with a brain full of smart ideas and a mother with a brain full of hormones at the same time. So I simply hadn't told them. And I sure wasn't planning on it during my interview either.

So when the morning of the phone interview arrived, Ricky offered his perfectly reasonable coffee suggestion. I guess I hadn't been acting very smart, with my vagina still torn apart, Dolly Parton-esque boobs making me scream at the slightest touch, hormones making me cry at the slightest glimmer of worldly beauty, and no option yet in sight for recovering from being awake for three days while the little baby I was now totally in love sent waves of killer contractions to open the gate for his arrival. We didn't have any coffee. So I heated up a kettle with the water we hand-pumped from our well and made a very strong cup of black tea. And did the interview. And got the fellowship.

A month later, as the date approached for the first trip to D.C. to meet with the other eleven practitioners chosen from across the country, I still hadn't told the project director that I now had a newborn. I practiced: "I am so looking forward to meeting you and the other fellows! Oh! And my husband will be coming to D.C. along with our newborn—at our own expense of course. Just out of curiosity, will we be meeting at the same hotel as where we are staying?"

This was not simple curiosity. This was an urgent need to know how much milk I was going to have to pump before dawn if I was going to have to travel across the city without the hubby and the babe. It was a great relief to hear the male project director reply with enthusiasm and support. The first family flight was an adventure in packing with approximately six items of luggage for a 14 lb small person. It was good that I'd practiced pumping, as a minor hurricane hit D.C. while we were there, separating milk mom from husband and baby for a full day. Somehow we made it.

Back home, we returned to balancing house building, parenting a newborn, and living on a modest check from the fellowship that was our sole source of income for a year. We strived to stay loving through it all.

Our routine went something like this: Each morning I'd get out of the bed- we'd moved the futon mattress down from the tiny loft in the one room cottage that we built pre-pregnancy, begun the day after we signed on the land, which happened to be the middle of winter. So excited to break ground, we'd spent weeks carrying every stick of lumber 700 feet down a path from the main road to a clearing in the forest. It was, and still is a super sweet little place, but with no running water and only enough electricity to power a couple of lights and recharge a computer battery. After nursing the baby, taking a sponge bath and having a bite to eat, I'd close the door to a closet sized space that housed my computer, and worked. All morning.

Meanwhile, Ricky would do his push-up ritual next to the [if he was lucky] napping baby Levi. As he got older, this baby would sometimes imitate his father doing push-ups, pre-cursor to his six-pack abs. Then they would read or play, do a diaper change or two, take a walk—truthfully I don't know exactly what they did except I knew I could not pay any attention for if I did, I would not be

able to cram a full day of work into four concentrated hours. Then the fellowship and Ricky's ability to pass the baby back to me at lunchtime would be kaput. Did I mention there were one very large and one medium dog, plus a cat in the cottage too?

After a little lunch, the hand-off would happen. I'd shut off the trusty, clunky old computer and put down the phone from which I did interviews. It was a 'princess style' with a flimsy cord woven through the trees outside to a temporary phone interface. I would close the door to the closet turned office and receive a most beautiful squirming baby into my arms. Then Ricky would suit up into his insulated overalls, strap on his tool belt, and head up to the concrete slab and piles of lumber that would become our main house. He'd bang nails for as many hours as he could until dark. I nursed, made dinner, snuck in a few more calls related to my fellowship, did a little stretching while the baby napped, bundled the baby and went to bring Ricky tea or words of support, and tried not to go crazy.

Some days we got to work on building the house together, especially once the fellowship ended (successfully, with a published curriculum called Schools Serving for Social Change). My 'off the farm' work continued with teaching and consulting for needed money, while we worked to grow the non-profit organization and build farmable soil on barren land while continuing to build the house. Once he was a biped, Levi went off to a family childcare a few mornings a week, and also started helping with (or was at least very entertained by) the building. His expertise was being covered in sheetrock mud. The summer that Levi turned two, and after a long, trying winter with no shortage of cabin fever but still ample amounts of love for each other and our family, we moved into the main house and brought our first farm apprentices on to take our place in the beloved cottage. While it took several more years to bring it towards finished, the first night spent in our own bedroom brought a sense of freedom and great gratitude. With Levi now in his own room, spaciousness returned the opportunity for some long-overdue privacy and intimacy.

When people come to visit now and see all we've built--a cottage, home, studio and guest loft, farm outbuildings, five greenhouses and a farmstand, we try to paint a picture for them of how it began. It is not so much to marvel at the accomplishments as to express that creating the infrastructure took fifteen years of some crazy times. We mention the old truck, whose lighter provided energy for the two cordless power tools Ricky used to cut wood for and frame first the cottage and then an 1,800 square foot house. In case they were wondering, there was no trust fund. What we had were winter days of little light, no running water, and countless walks down our long icy driveway with a bundled baby strapped on back, groceries precariously balanced in a chipped plastic sled. There was a romance to it. There was stress. There was devotion. There was anticipation. There was nothing else we knew we should or wanted to be doing.

Years later, we've learned to schedule weekly meetings together to discuss all the pieces of our lives: parenting, the farm, programs and vision for our organization, scheduled presentations and teaching, social happenings, and this book while being written. I don't remember having planned meetings in the early days. It was in many ways a more complicated time. It was in many ways a simpler time—intense but with fewer pieces before we had a full fledged farm and active non-profit organization to hold together. We developed ways of being efficient and supporting each other in our unique roles towards a common goal, a practice that we have since had many years to build on. We took a lot of walks filled with ideas (as we still do!), and got to know our neighbors. We got to know each other, our relationship, our child and ourselves more deeply. It was really hard and very beautiful. I can't imagine it any other way.

Sample Story from Chapter Four: Cultivating Hope, Educating for Change

Strong Women, Power Tools, and Scary Dudes

The day was over, almost. We still needed to pick up and deliver a truckload of compost and soil to bring to the other end of town so we'd be ready to create a garden for Cherilee and her family the next morning. As most people were sitting down to dinner, we were hoisting 25 heavy barrels of a compost/loam mix into the back of our truck. Riding slowly up North Main as the sun prepared to set, we had some sweet time on the bench seat of the old Ford 350 to check in about our day. "Where are we going again?" asked Ricky. This became a standard question preceding our weekly Thursday evening soil delivery during the years that we created a raised bed garden each Friday from April to June for families in need of fresh food. It was a program we named 'Grow Food Everywhere for Health and Justice.'

"You'll see soon enough," I said, having visited Cherilee at the decrepit cabin in the far reaches of our town a couple weeks before. It was a scene that if shown a photo of, one would assume was in Appalachia, not Massachusetts. In a state where images of colleges, cape beaches, the Berkshires and Boston dominate, you don't expect places like we were about to go, unless you live in the North Quabbin and know that they can be found here.

Pulling in the edge of the dirt driveway, the television blasted out beyond the torn screen of the front door. "I'll just stay in the truck," said Ricky as he looked out at the tar-papered cabin tacked onto a trailer bordered with bags of trash and a rusted truck, his caution stronger than his substantial biceps. "Thanks a lot, keep the truck running, would you?" I said as I pushed aside the pile of farm invoices and toolbox ever on the truck seat. I climbed out and headed towards the house.

I had called and tried to reach Cherilee to confirm our arrival a bunch of times earlier that week. I never got through. Like many in our community, she bought phone time by the minutes she could afford. But, we had set a date to put in her garden that Friday, and our motto is 'we always show up.' So we took our chances, in ways that were appearing to increase as darkness fell. "Hello?" I called as I approached the door. Nobody came out. I knocked, still nothing. I looked back at the truckload of soil. I was not leaving with that load still on it. I took a deep breath and walked around to the side of the trailer where I could see the TV glowing through a small window. Above the sill and below the bottom of the vinyl shade was framed a hairy belly bulging out of a tee shirt, the rest of the hulk apparently on the couch. "Hello it's Deb with the stuff for the garden" I bellowed quickly, escape on my mind more than gardening. "Huh? Oh, wait a minute" I heard, as the couch creaked with relief.

Relief was not my first emotion when a very large man opened the door a crack while tugging his shirt over his substantial gut. "She's not here," he said, in a not too unkindly voice. "We just wanted to unload the garden soil for tomorrow, sorry to bother you" I offered, gesturing towards the presence of the truck containing Ricky. "No problem, over there is good," pointing, to my great relief, towards a spot right near our truck. Then he returned to his couch.

The next morning, I arrived with my young, right-hand intern Catherine. Thankfully, Cherilee was there. So was Randy, as we learned was the name of the man I had encountered, and in surprisingly gentle spirits. Cherilee got on her phone, apparently reinstated with enough minutes to summon a nearby pick-up truck with a bunch of young cousins in the back, who jumped out to help move the barrels and wood for the garden to the designated spot in the back. Cherilee's four-year old Dakota was the most enthusiastic, insistent on carrying the large drill case. She had only one

forearm and hand, the other missing from birth. Cherilee had openly told me that she was an addict, now sober. Her pregnancy had helped her get clean--but maybe a little too late. We laid out the wood where they wanted the garden. Grasping it with her one hand, Dakota leaned into the mighty 18-volt drill and put in several four-inch hefty screws one after the other, stopping only to begrudgingly give her brother and cousin a turn.

I think they enjoyed the garden that summer. Cherilee had told me that her father was dying, and her putting in a garden was in part for his love of plants. She told me that she too loved vegetables, in fact ate them right out of the can. So this would be... different, and bittersweet. But, like many of the other twenty raised bed gardens we created for families with great need, things change rapidly due to the often-uncertain lives of people living in poverty. Jobs are lost, landlords evict, homes are foreclosed, relationships split, children are removed, and drugs take people down. The least of these problems is that the garden is left behind to grow only weeds. Sometimes we'd pass a home where there was once a garden, seemingly no longer there, then be pleasantly surprised to run into the recipient who'd had friends help load all the soil and wood into a borrowed truck to move it with them to their next rental. Creating gardens for low-income families had been a vision for a while, and we were finally able to get a grant to pay for materials, staff time, educational workshops, and garden manuals for twenty families over a two- year period. Experience taught us some things that blossomed a related and stronger program.

During the years that we put in gardens with and for economically struggling families, we partnered with several local social service agencies to help get the word out to potential families. While strengthening our ties to area agencies as well as through conversations with the families in our 'Grow Food Everywhere for Health and Justice' garden program, we learned more about the local subculture of women who run home-based childcare, and serve as a center of stability and constancy within the tumultuous lives of many of the families they serve.

What can you do when you are a rurally isolated woman who starts having kids young, doesn't have opportunities for college, and wants to stay home and care for their own children rather than seek one of the limited and limiting night shift jobs at one of the few remaining factories in town? The road to becoming a family childcare provider might start by getting a few bucks from a friend to watch their kid while you are watching your own. Then you take some courses, get licensed, and increase the numbers of kids you can care for at one time. You get an assistant, and join the local childcare provider's group that meets monthly to share ideas and activities. Through that, maybe you get connected to the system that enables you to accept vouchers from families who qualify based on financial need, or fill out the paperwork to receive reimbursement for providing meals that include wholesome foods. You continue to take night and weekend courses. Now you are a woman that has her own business—sometimes the mainstay of the family finances, that has gained an education in early childhood care, who has peers in the community. You serve families for who you are a trusted caregiver for their kids, not to mention a source of parenting and life counsel. And, unlike at K-12 schools where the day schedule is often tightly dictated and with frequent administrative and curriculum fluxes, you have the self-determination to incorporate the garden into your childcare program in ways that are creative and consistent.

Our 'Grow Food Everywhere' childcare provider program launched each spring with a workshop for the providers filled with activities, good food, and connection. They left that workshop with a date for their garden implementation or refresher, a set of colorful hand tools, and a colander garden to demonstrate growing greens in small spaces to keep them enticed until the May date when we arrived with wood and soil for their raised bed garden.

While cedar is a great, naturally rot-resistant wood to use for raised garden beds if you can afford it, we didn't have that kind of budget. Instead, we purchased locally harvested rough-cut boards,

usually hemlock or pine, from a local mill. The two-inch thick boards make for a sturdy garden frame. We pre-cut the wood for our standard 8' by 4' by 16" deep raised beds. These dimensions allow for a nice array of crops, as well as use of vertical space and things like cucumbers and nasturtiums cascading off of the sides. We don't recommend shallower beds as they are not deep enough for crops like tomatoes, and the soil compacts and needs to be replenished after year one of use. That said, the beds we make do require a lot of soil- about 1.5 cubic yards- our preference being 50/50 ratio of finished compost to loam. To further build community connections, the youth in our SOL (Seed of Leadership) Garden program contributed by readying the garden wood with a non-toxic, whey-based stain to extend the life of the wood, and helping to raise the seedlings we would gift the women.

Similarly to the approach with our Grow Food Everywhere program for low-income families, on the appointed day at the childcare site everyone helps: two year-olds, the providers, and the occasional parent. Within two hours, a garden frame is built, cardboard laid on the bottom, the barrels of rich local compost/loam mix dumped inside the frame (mostly) by teams of toddlers with an adult helping hand. The first of the spring seeds- peas, carrots, beets, radishes, and salad greens are planted.

We created gardens for 20 low-income families first, and then in the years following, an additional 15 women who run childcare programs and shared 'how to' with hundreds of others across the state. Here is how it multiplies: one garden at one family childcare site reaches 10 families at any given time. The childcare providers in our program that said "I tried to garden and it doesn't work for me" are now avid, expanding their garden with more raised beds, containers, and anything they can find. They've put over-wintered spinach on the table for the lunches of kids in their care, let the little ones graze directly from a patch of colorful lettuce. These kids learn they actually do like tomatoes when picked from the vine, not the supermarket. Many parents report that their kids 'love veggies more than junk food' and that they are inspired to start their own gardens in containers for now, and homes when they have one. One provider who said she once couldn't get anything to grow worked with her husband to wrap four more garden beds around their outdoor play area. They feed their own four kids as well as the twelve or so in their childcare, and host a container garden workshop for the families they serve. The women all say they will continue to garden as part of their childcare programs.

We went by Cherilee's place not too long ago. The trailer and house had been taken down. Driving by, I couldn't see if the garden was still there from the road but I remembered that day. The night we thought we might be greeted with a rifle in that backwoods camp while delivering compost for a new garden makes for a good story. But the ones about the women who care for hundreds of children and their families every day, year after year who now put their own garden produce on the lunch table are way better.

Sample Story from Chapter Five: Rebuilding Community: Love over Fear

Is This a Crazy Idea? Giving Birth to the Festival that Stinks

The sun had been up for several hours when I rolled out of bed. This in itself was uncharacteristic for me, let alone that I was completely hung-over. The morning after the very first North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival I could barely utter three questions to Deb: 'Are you mad at me? Did anyone get hurt? How did I get home?' These would become an often-retold marriage moment.

There was good reason for this post-festival crusty-faced morning: I had not had much to drink at all in the previous decade. I had not had much to eat, let alone any sleep in the 48 hours prior. ‘The morning after’ of our very first year of the beloved and enduring ‘Festival that Stinks’ was immortalized.

A year prior to that beer-hazed morning, five of us had met over a potluck meal with a concern and an idea. We were bummed out that many of the talented artists and hardworking farmers in our region had to leave town just to find a venue to sell their wares, especially since the five of us at this table were among the hardworking artists and farmers engaged in this seasonal Diaspora. It was 1998 and the ‘buy local’ craze was in infancy. It had not yet hit our town and likely never would in the way more affluent communities would benefit from the buzz. We were culturally and geographically isolated from the nearby five-college region where farmers markets were burgeoning with Saturday morning latte sippers filling canvas bags with organic vegetables and beeswax candles. We needed something unique to lift the spirits of the locals while supporting quality food and art. There was beauty and skill to be found in our region. It deserved celebrating.

Boston-centric media portrayed the demoralizing statistics about the North Quabbin- our new home- as downtrodden and rife with social ills, yet it was apparent even from our short time living there how ripe a region it was, especially in regards to folks who knew how to work with their hands. One late summer day during our first season on the land in Orange, Our neighbor Jim—a native of the region and phenomenal woodworker—stopped in. Chatting while I bagged up a gorgeous crop of our garlic, we found ourselves sharing a similar lament. Where would I sell our beautiful garlic without traveling and taking a wholesale price-cut? Where could Jim show his stunning work that combined fine woodworking with items salvaged from local factories?

This spontaneous conversation led to a creative and fateful potluck gathering of five: Jim and his wife Alyssa, Deb and I, and neighbor and potter Lydia Grey. After dinner and with ideas flowing, we each dug into our pockets to produce a 20-dollar bill, creating a crumpled pile of 100 bucks on the center of the table. We met every month, always over shared food, and schemed and planned an event that would, said our mission statement: *‘unite North Quabbin people whose livelihoods are connected to the land and the arts, and to invite both local residents and those who do not live in the region to experience the richness of an area that is often overlooked.’* We called local artists and farmers and found a dozen who were game to participate as vendors. A few hundred postcards and sheer creative will brought us around to the first annual North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival one year later, a compelling if not unusual combination, fondly known and promoted as ‘The Festival that Stinks.’ We were energized. A multi-season reality show with episodes we never could have imagined had begun.

A few months before the first festival in September of 1999, our team of five gathered at the end of a sweltering summer day on a field on the far end of our land at Seeds of Solidarity, envisioning. “Maybe the art vendors can line this side, and the food truck will park here...We can put together a small stage using some spare 2 x 4s... this center area should be good enough for the raw garlic-eating contest. We can park some cars here, but not many—how about we ask Mike about using that field down the road for overflow?”

The week before the festival a hurricane surged through the East Coast and dropped a lot of rain on our parade. This was to remain a theme, but we didn’t know that then. We called in any available tractor within 5 miles, and a bunch of friends arrived to move gravel. Jim and I built a makeshift stone bridge across a trickle that, with the hurricane, had become a semi raging stream bisecting the soon to be festival field from the entry. We were running out of time before the big day and had no way of knowing what to expect for crowds. So began the sleepless nights culminating in the

drinking night, as I packaged garlic or readied the field for whoever might arrive for this crazy idea of a festival.

Festival morning arrived. It was drizzling. Some say rain is a blessing. If so we've been multiply blessed. By 9am the sun came out and the fog lifted slowly, befitting the dreamlike quality of the experience. A good-natured group of vendors began to arrive, hauling tables and crates on dollies down the muddy path. By 10am, the curious started to show up. With absolutely no idea if 20 or hundreds of people would show, we had arranged to shuttle folks in from a local elementary school lot, transported by a longhaired, tattooed school bus driver named Tom. Years before Google Maps was there to guide, folks followed the wooden garlic signs blazed with directional arrows that Jim and I had nailed to utility poles in the dark of night. We heard back that some passengers considered saying 'let me out' once they hit the country dirt road, but once on the bus they became entranced by the magical mystery tour as driver Tom pointed out landmarks and told stories of the flooding of the Quabbin. By the time they arrived at our field 10 minutes later, they were primed to go with the flow and onto the grassy field they descended, some adding a few bucks to a big plastic donation bottle positioned on a crate near the untended entry. The dirt path led to an open field alive with assorted local artists, farmers and food, along with the coolers of garlic ice cream that was to become an annual staple. Local legend Morris Metcalf drove a horse-drawn hayride around and around the fields. Music was made on the rough-cut lumber and bamboo stage at the edge of the forest. A garlic and egg toss got everyone playing. It was festive and wild, and many hundreds of people showed up to make living history as part of the muddled and muddy mass of humanity that attended the first annual North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival on a September Saturday.

By 5 pm that day, the crowds had thinned and it was down to the organizers and friends who had traveled from near and far to lend a hand with clean up. Dan Young, a local as well as co-founder of the People's Pint unloaded a keg. We made a fire and scraped together whatever food was left from Myron's garlic fare. Beers in hand, we all pushed his food truck out of the mud amid relieved laughter. The stories of the day began to flow along with the ale. Deb headed through the woods to the cottage with baby Levi and some visiting friends, while I stayed in the field with my buddy Earle who had come out from Ithaca. We stayed close to the keg with other neighbors and friends late into the night, sending many raucous belly laughs through the forest. Earle eventually walked me home and rubbed my back as I sat on a log in the forest and threw up; getting home with the help of a good friend being the answer to the third of my hangover laden questions the next morning. And as to questions one and two, Deb wasn't mad and nobody got hurt.

That next day, Jim counted up the bills stuffed in the big plastic five-gallon water container for donations. He was lucid enough to throw it on the front seat of his truck before the evening party. Seven hundred bucks-- we were ecstatic. There would be a festival again the following year, and, as time would have it, for many to come. A tradition of living and loving local, neighborhood revelry, and a cultural phenomenon were born.

Sample Recipe from Chapter Eight

From Our Farm Table: Seasonal Recipes (and stories) to Feed and Love People

We Ate Kale Before it was Cool

We never imagined that there would be such great demand for kale that getting seed for the now-popular curled varieties would be a farmer's challenge, let alone appear on the menu of fast-food restaurant chains. When we sold kale at our local farmers markets with our youth program years ago, we had to repeatedly explain to people what it was and how to use it. Kale is indeed a great and nutritious crop for the Northeast climate. It keeps on giving three seasons a year, and is especially yummy and sweet after an autumn frost. A group of women who participate in our program for family childcare providers visited our farm for a season extension workshop and saw the Lacinato Kale -also known as Dinosaur Kale- growing tall. "What's that?" They asked. We generally offer them the more common curly leaf variety for the raised beds we created with them at their sites. They use it to make kale chips with the young children for snacks. "It's a little strong and I wasn't sure you'd like it," I said, but they'd already started nibbling a leaf, and each left with a bunch to try in the children's lunches the next day.

Kale also abounds in the gardens of our SOL (Seeds of Leadership) Garden youth program for local, low-income teenagers. One of our food justice efforts is to make and serve a farm-fresh meal for 80 folks facing hunger who are regulars at the church downtown, coming for the free meal served there twice a week. On our appointed day we serve pasta with lots of our garden veggies and local chicken, pesto garlic bread, a raw kale salad, and homemade cake with freshly picked berries. We give our raw kale dish a palatable name: Lemony Cranberry Kale Salad. While the simplest way to prepare kale is steaming then tossing with olive oil, finely chopped garlic, a little lemon, and salt and pepper, there are many ways to use this excellent and nourishing leafy green in soup, salads, and casseroles. And don't even get us started on green smoothies! The back of our SOL Garden youth program tee shirt even reads: *We Ate Kale Before it was Cool!* These are not home schooled, organic baby-food raised kids but now they can grow, prepare, share, and eat a big bowl of kale as well as prepare it for those in our community facing hunger that love and appreciate fresh food.

Lemony Cranberry Kale Salad (makes a side salad for about 12, a meal-sized salad for 4)

Two bunches or at least 15 big kale leaves

2 lemons

1/2 cup each: shaved Parmesan, pumpkin seeds, dried cranberries

4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

2 tbsp honey or maple syrup

De-stem kale and tear into small pieces, and place into a large mixing bowl. Squeeze the juice of the lemons over the kale, and then massage it until quite tender.

Whisk together the honey and olive oil. Drizzle over kale, and then add cheese, nuts, and dried fruit. Toss everything together with sea salt and freshly cracked black pepper to taste. Top with some reserved shaved Parmesan. Be creative: substitute nuts for the pumpkin seeds, or other dried fruit like chopped dates or apricots for the cranberries.