



# Farm Journal

The Life & Exploits of Mike Tabor

Volume I: Farming During a Pandemic

Michael Tabor

## FARM JOURNAL INTRODUCTION 4/18/21

During the winter months I have had time to write this journal. When the farm season begins in earnest, in mid-April and again in June, six solid days a week, my time for reflection and writing comes to an end until the next winter. These winter writings are an attempt to tell my life's story in a way worth reading and to bring enjoyment and enlightenment to the readers including my children. I'm about one-third of the way through.

My original premise—that came during a serious heart operation when I encountered God (in female form) and was commanded to write my life's saga for my children and beyond, about what I did with my life that would make them proud—still stands. It's as true now as it was during my six-week recovery when, as I became conscious, Esther told me I'd be fine and fully functioning in a few months.

I'm involved in a writer's process each day. I rise at 4:00 am. As I waken, my mind allows me gentle access to hidden memories I've blocked or put aside for future awakening—the formerly “closed portals”—then I begin writing. Although I've written and been published all my adult life, I have no professional training in the field. My past writing has been for a political purpose, meant to stir the consciousness of readers to take some appropriate action. So, this chronicle of my life's experience, plus the ironies, contradictions and silliness of life's travails, is my offering to you.

I write by hand—if I had a quill and inkwell, I'd use them. I've never advanced to the digital universe—there's something organic, to me, of access to memories, that's enhanced in this process. Then I give my writing to Esther, my life partner these last 35 years, who types them into her computer.

Esther is a force of change herself, a writer and activist, who has within her DNA at least a century of genius and intellect far greater than mine. Her brother, Rabbi Daniel Siegel, is a scholar, activist and distiller of wisdom. Her deceased uncle, Leo Steinberg, was a universally recognized art historian, and a MacArthur “genius grant” recipient, with multiple books to his credit. Her father, David, who had wanted to be a rabbi, went into teaching to support his family after his father died, and later had a distinguished career as executive director to various synagogues in New York and New Jersey.

Her grandfather, Yitzchak Nachman Steinberg (I.N. Steinberg), was an observant Jewish lawyer in Moscow and leader of the Left-Social Revolutionary Party (Left Social Revolutionaries--LSRs), who became Minister of Justice in Lenin's first coalition cabinet. (Lenin's strategy was to absorb the opposing parties but I.N. resigned in protest after the Brest-Litovsk treaty with the Germans was signed. His colorful life is the subject of many books and articles). Esther's

beloved mother, Ada, a brilliant political analyst, was her father's muse in their efforts to find homelands for displaced European Jews through the Freeland League. Ada's father was the leader of the Freeland League, an organization that publicly looked for homelands in places that were sparsely, or not at all, inhabited. Zionists hated him because he publicly recognized that Palestine was already well populated and he did not want to participate in displacing communities. Ada published a magazine, worked in the United Nations, and had a promising political career before her life was cut short at 39 from cancer.

Esther's career included decades of working for home ownership for tenants, cooperative housing development and energy efficiency for low-income homeowners through the Ford



Foundation. After her housing work ended, Esther was slowly drawn into the farm market and CSA world.

Esther is my editor and transcriber. We quibble about purpose, style, personal needs and presentation. Then the typed draft goes to a long-time friend, Dana Beyer, who patiently edits for syntax. Dana, a genius in her own right—a lay cantor, former *yeshiva bocher* (Jewish day school student), retired ophthalmic surgeon, activist and political candidate, who takes a substantial national and local leadership role in transgender issues. And lastly, De Herman, my next door neighbor, friend, collaborator and spiritual guide who, with assistance from her husband Jan

Herman, generously lent her expertise to make the story presentable. De is an ordained chaplain, avid bicyclist, and mother to a remarkable son, Ben Rosenthal.

Jamie Raskin, whom I've known since I had an office in Arthur and Irene Waskow's home in the early '70's on Wyoming Ave, NW, DC, lived a few houses down from the Waskows. I had taken a year off to work on ending the war with Vietnam. With Arthur's generous help, I organized a trip to Paris to negotiate a peace treaty I co-authored between the Jewish people of America and the people of Vietnam.



Jamie's father, Marcus Raskin, co-founded Washington's progressive think tank, the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), and his mother, Barbara, was a prominent feminist author and wrote novels featuring fictionalized versions of DC politicians. I saw the Raskins as giants in their fields and stood in awe of them.

Long after Jamie grew up and became a nationally known professor of constitutional law, I played a part in convincing him to run for the Maryland State Senate. Jamie has become what our founders probably hoped for in a "public servant."

Jamie has generously agreed to write the introduction to this journal once he finishes compiling the collected works of his beloved son, Tommy, who, at 25, died on New Year's Eve, 2020.

## FARM JOURNAL 3/29/21

Dawn is slowly breaking on my farm. It's March 17, 2021, 7:00 am and I've had a nice night's sleep—sifting through the memories, reasons, accomplishments, failures on this life journey I've taken these last 78 years.

My health, as far as I know, is good. My energy, mind, body function smoothly. Tension, worries, concerns; well, they're always around. I just need to know I'm moving in a positive direction and everything will work out well, or, as well as it can.

I'm writing now, about that journey and what I've done to hopefully leave the world a better place, from the time I entered it in 1942.

And I ask myself, have I lived in a way that others—family, friends, wife, children, can say after I'm gone, "He lived a good life and the world's a better place thanks to him?" Lofty goal! A little more than the predictable "he was kind, generous, compassionate..." and all the other sweet things said about a person during a eulogy. I aspire for more substance.

I'd like to believe my life has had a pattern—a path which I followed consistently. One that flows back to my ancestry and sense of heritage. Belonging to a tribal people known for their beliefs and a strange ability to wander and mostly survive, I'd like to think I'm carrying on that line of humankind.

True, there have been opportunities to rest, become complacent, and retire from the flow. But I've consciously chosen to stay steady and not rest.

The peacefulness of the farm enables these reflections as spring brings us alive for another year of growing fruits, vegetables, honey and Christmas trees and interaction with my farm neighbors. Come June, the urban communities around our farm markets will bring another dimension to my life.

Memories of childhood surface during the quiet nights and early mornings on the farm.

Looking back, my parents led a modest, balanced and moderate life. Despite the availability of financing for a split-level home through the GI Bill for World War II veterans like my father, he would not take on a mortgage and insisted we live in a low-income housing project in Brooklyn, New York.

So, my brother, Joel, and I were raised in the '40's and '50's with working class Italian, Jewish, Black and Puerto Rican families near the Brooklyn Navy Yard. We were surrounded by Italian bakeries and small family-owned businesses. It was a half-hour walk to Brooklyn's government offices and thriving movie houses, 5 & 10 cent stores, meat and fish markets and a sizable kosher

poultry yard where we went on Friday to pick out a chicken to slaughter according to kosher laws and “plucked” by Holocaust-surviving Polish women.

The housing project was dangerous, especially at night. You planned *not* to go out. In the 1940’s and ’50’s, gangs owned the streets and the cops stayed away. Still, I have some fond memories of going sledding at Fort Greene Park, biking through the ethnic neighborhoods, and jumping on the back of the trolley cars running under the “elevated” subway along Myrtle Ave. We used to watch snails try to crawl out of wicker baskets at the Italian Fish market, and for fun, we’d kick the baskets to send the snails back to the bottom of the baskets. (Hey, we were 7-year-old mischievous boys!)



We snuck into Alan Freed’s Rock and Roll concerts at the downtown RKO movie theater. Getting on the IRT subway as early as age six, I went to help at my grandmother’s newsstand in Manhattan, in front of the Horn and Hardart’s Automat on Madison and 23<sup>rd</sup> Street.



(I was surprised to find out my friend, Dana Beyer, also grew up in my Queens neighborhood, and her father took her to the same automat as a child.) I recalled the milk and cookie breaks at PS 67 where I ordered one cent packages of seeds from the Brooklyn Botanical Garden and had my first experience planting them at the library garden next to the school. The Brooklyn Dodgers always losing to the New York Yankees! Plus, the Milton Berle TV program, “Rootie Kazootie,” “Howdy Doody” and “The Shadow” (“Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? - only the Shadow knows”).



And the Boy Scouts! That was my entry into the world of the outdoors in the 1950's. Here I am with my mother at the Alpine Scout Camp in New Jersey. There were other camps on Staten island, and the ultimate “10 Mile River Scout Camp” in Narrowsburg, New York. There were five camps named for Indian tribes in the Brooklyn division. The tribal camps starting with “K,” KETOKE and KUNATAH, were the ones that served kosher meals!

When I was twelve, we were the last white family in our 12-story building, so my parents decided it was time to move to Pomonok, a more moderate-income project across from Queens College in Kew

Gardens Hills. At thirteen, I had my bar mitzvah at my Bubbe Mary's shul on the Lower East Side, where I'd go with my mother on the High Holidays. I confess, I'd take breaks during the long services in Hebrew on the High Holy Days, and walk to Union Square to listen to Communists, Bundists and Anarchists on their “soap boxes,” giving their *shpiels* on justice, capitalism and the coming revolution.

After my bar mitzvah came my first job—having a delivery route for the *Long Island Press* every afternoon. I'd take my bike and bag, pick up about 50 papers and do the route through the project every day, and collect the money on the weekends (my introduction to capitalism).

Around that time, I met my first girlfriend, Karen. I would fling a free paper at her door every day. We both went to Parsons Junior High School. I also met Paul Simon, a fellow classmate with whom I shared an appreciation for WOR radio story-teller, Jean Shepherd's, program, also filled with old-time music. Paul later formed a duo with Art Garfunkel, and



they released their first recording as Tom & Jerry—“Hey School Girl!” Life was good. My closest male friends were Larry Mintzer and Stanley Weingast, with whom I still keep in touch. We loved riding our bikes (mine was a 3-speed Rudge “English Racer”). Our first long distance ride, I think in the summer of 1958, was more than a hundred miles to Montauk Point—the tip



of Long Island. We took a ferry to Block Island where we circled the island and returned to Montauk. I remember we contacted the ferry company and they offered us a free round-trip ticket, but then charged us to return to Montauk Point.

Stanley remembers we rode back to Queens in a “parlor car” on the Long Island Railroad, and paid 10 cents for a coffee served by a uniformed black waiter. I also remember my first taste of antisemitism on the way to Montauk, when we took a bridge over to the Hamptons. We asked several homeowners near the beach if we could have water from their hoses. We didn’t understand why we kept getting rejected, so after the third house, I lingered a bit and heard the owner say to his wife, “Just a bunch of damn kike kids who wanted water!” I didn’t know what “kike” meant.



My first relationship ended after my grandmother found us necking in a garage and called 13-year-old Karen a whore, cursing at her in Yiddish. We never saw each other after that. I remember Karen as a very sweet, decent person, and we’d often go to the popular hamburger and French fries place where they served food from a model Lionel railroad delivery system that circled the store, stopping at each table.

Saturday mornings, *shabbat*, were painful memories for me because the other boys went to services at the Young Israel of Kew Garden Hills with their fathers and I was there without him because he was out “shooting” photos with his photography students.



My next girlfriend, Anita, lived at the Electchester (electrical workers housing co-op), a few blocks from where I lived. While she was also sweet, it was her mother I enjoyed visiting. I think she was a former union organizer who told wonderful stories, and always punctuated my stories with, “Michael, you kill me!” in her wonderfully comedic Brooklyn Yiddish accent.



I went from Parsons Junior High School to Jamaica High School. The school was so over-crowded, we had five “split” sessions—the earliest started at 6:00 am! Since I got out early, I sometimes skipped the last class or two and went first to my favorite radio hobby store and then, bowling!

Downtown Jamaica, Queens in the '50's was very dynamic and multi-cultural, with its stores, hustles, ethnic eateries and Rhythm and Blues music. One local doo-wop music group recorded “The Japanese Sandman” that made the top 20! A friend, Michael Azar, went into his family business. Thirteen-year-old triplets, the Maggid Brothers, were still performing in the 1990's when I took my parents out for their 50th anniversary at a Queens Blvd. restaurant. “Jahn's” was a favorite of us teenagers, especially for its many ice cream flavors, and featured the Kitchen Sink: don't ask, it was huge with *everything* in and on it. The Purple Onion, across from the Forest Hills subway and Tennis Courts, was a 1950's “beatnik” coffee house and poetry reading hangout in the '50's. Later, we went to Greenwich Village or McSorley's Ale House. These coffee houses were an extension of the New York City neighborhood scene.

Before I leave the '50's, it's important to remember the issue of race, class and ethnicity affecting growing up in the '50's, in what would become Spike Lee's downtown Brooklyn movie set for his earliest films.

Being Jewish, many of my friends were also Jewish, yet some were Black and Italian. We were all just kids who grew up together—same buildings, school and neighborhood. It's hard to believe, but race *wasn't* an important factor. My closest friend, Charles, was Black—we played stickball, stoopball, and I sometimes went with him to his Catholic church on Sunday. When he was killed, falling off the back of a trolley, my mother made me promise never to “jump rides” ever again. Once, when I used the word “nigger”—the way my friends and I talked with each other—Bubbe Mary slapped me hard across my face. She shouted in Yiddish, “I'm a nigger too!” referring to her dark olive skin. She claimed we were descended from Jewish Berber tribal people who lived 600 years earlier and she made me swear on her amulet that protected her from the “evil eye” never to use that word again.

I was once invited by Tony Puglisi, my next-door neighbor, to his home for dinner. He sat next to his father, a hardworking Italian “hauler” and delivery man. After eating spaghetti and meatballs covered with rich red sauce (we only ate bland food in our home), his father turned to him and in

an unexplained rage smacked him across his face so hard he fell off his seat! Having never witnessed father-son violence or experienced my father physically hitting me, I ran out of their house crying.

When I was 12, I had a crush on Mildred—a Black neighbor my age, and asked her out on my first “date.” We walked to the RKO Fox to see the 3-D version of “House of Wax.” In the theater lobby were a doctor and nurse dressed in a head reflector and stethoscope. During the movie, I slowly moved my right hand to her shoulder and, instead of trying to “cop a feel,” the teenage thing to do, I unfortunately placed my finger near her mouth—just as an axe in the film was hurled at us. I ducked, but not in time because she bit my finger. Bleeding profusely, I ran to the lobby to see the doctor and nurse. “Hey, kid, we’re just actors!” they said. They did have Band-Aids, though, and bandaged my finger.

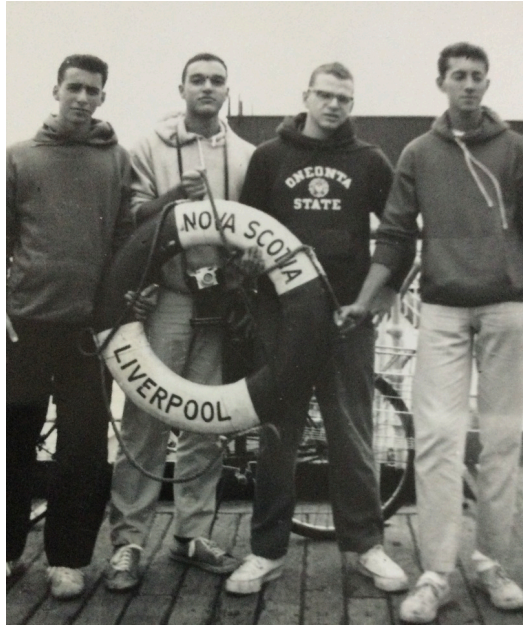
Having grown up with a diverse group of Black and ethnic friends, I was unprepared when I later encountered racism and antisemitism. In 1963, having moved to segregated College Park, Maryland, for graduate school, and North Carolina with CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) to help register people to vote in 1964, I witnessed my first exposure to hatred and discrimination between white and Black people.

Oh, one more thing. Once, on my way to shul on Saturday morning at the Fort Greene Jewish Center, I ran into a group of Black kids around 13-15 years old who stood in my path. My “street smarts” told me to be cautious, but instead, I waved and said “Hello.” I was dressed in a suit and tie, carrying a prayer book and prayer shawl bag. One of the boys said, “Hey, he’s studying to be a preacher, leave him be!” and they let me pass.

All just memories, but growing up I felt no angst, fear or threat from people of color. They were all potential friends and allies on life’s path. My fears were about people with money, social standing or the ability to manipulate others. These were the real dangers I was to face through the years, not from people who worked with their hands and bodies by the “sweat of their brow,” and who didn’t feel privilege and superiority over others. What I didn’t know at the time was that my skin color shielded me from hatred by cops, Nazis or white racists.

The summer of 1959 led to the ultimate rite of passage for us: a bike trip to Nova Scotia via a British mail ship from Boston to Halifax. Then we took a train to Cape Breton to ride the Cabot Trail in northeast Nova Scotia. I sat next to a young mining engineer and we talked about a mine that had flooded where men died (“...all their lives they dug their graves”—“Ballad of Spring Hill” by Evan MacColl). He’d been there in 1958. One thing stood out to me on our way to the trailhead. When we got off the train at a whistle stop, we were instructed to “signal” with a red kerosene lantern for the 3:00 am train to stop for us to hop on.

When we arrived at the trailhead, we started pedaling. Despite having only 3-speed Sturmey Archer gears and 35 lbs. of camping equipment and heavy bikes, we started up the Cabot Trail



for the ride of our young lives. After a day or two, two of the other cyclists dropped off and it was just Stan and me for the rest of the trip around the peninsula.

At the end of the trail, we boarded a bus to Halifax. I remember lifting the bike and gear, when my knee collapsed. I iced it, but some real damage had been done. Seven or eight years later, after playing basketball, it happened again. When I turned 60, I started running races and my knee was fine—so no lasting damage.

Two accidents occurred in my “yute” that probably had long-term impacts on my life. The first happened when I was about twelve. I was in the PS 67 schoolyard when a bunch of older boys needed to fill out their softball team. I could hit but not catch well. So, they put me way out in right field. Sure enough, a ball came my way...fast. I charged, but misjudged its speed and the ball hit me in the head. I recall seeing stars. Vince and all the other guys ran over to help me. They cheered when I was able to get up and walk home, which was across the street. I had a bump for a week or more, but seemed OK.

In the summer of 1964, I went door-to-door in a Black voter registration campaign west of Durham, North Carolina, largely on dirt roads. In these rural Southern communities poor Blacks and whites sometimes lived next door —maybe a few hundred feet apart.

At one home, the white family saw my denim bib overalls and CORE button with a white hand shaking a black one and immediately knew what I was doing. Guys were drinking beer in a nearby pick up truck with a gun rack, and I knew it would be foolish to try to run. I had a co-worker nearby but he was out of sight. My best defense, I thought, was humor.

When they asked me, “Why are you goddamn white Yankees down here to make trouble?” or something like that, I said, “I’m not a white Yankee, I’m a Brooklyn Dodger. And a Jew.” My attempt at humor (and honesty) didn’t go over well because one guy came after me with a baseball bat—and I have no memory of what happened after I got hit in the head. I have no idea if these two incidents have done any long-term damage to my brain, but what I do know is they each contributed to my determination to follow my path toward social justice and civil rights.

Luckily, I wasn’t killed, but someone, probably my co-worker, got me to Durham, where I was put on a Greyhound Bus and sent back to Washington, DC, my head bandaged. This all occurred when I had a week off from graduate summer classes, and was supposed to be writing papers.

I showed up to class without a research paper. I assumed that my history professor, John Hope Franklin, would be sympathetic to what I believed was more important than his class, so I asked for an extension. “I was in North Carolina doing voter registration and got beat up.” He valued his class more, and gave me a C or a D in the course! This was the summer the Ku Klux Klan murdered Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman and James Chaney. At Atlantic City, New Jersey, later that summer, I protested at the Democratic National Convention by holding a huge photo of Micky Schwerner.

# FARM JOURNAL 4/2/21

## FARMING DURING A PANDEMIC

My internal clock goes off at 4:45 am. Combined with falling asleep by 8:30 pm. It's not a bad night's sleep.

Yesterday I worked around the apple trees. They are about 35 years old. I've planted more recently, mostly because this is an organic farm and the resistant varieties--Liberty, Priscilla, Winesaps and Gold Rush--do best. Still, more need planting.

I'm losing my opportunity to apply an early dormant oil spray—the tractor I use has the 100-gallon sprayer attached and it's ready to go. However, rain is forecast tomorrow and Friday, then the temperature is expected to dip down to 20 degrees. I'll wait until next week when warmer weather is forecast. Then I'll use my first spray. Right now, I'm pulling weeds, cleaning up around each tree and applying a coat of clay and latex paint to the lower bark.

Justin and I walked around the farm yesterday looking at the damage to the new “high tunnel” we put in last summer. A powerful windstorm came through last week and ripped the entrance over the 80-foot tunnel, causing the plastic to rip. We'll call the Farm Trek dealer to see if they'll cover some of the cost since this seems to be a manufacturer's design defect.

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A big delight for me as a child was going to the newsstand. During a break, I'd walk up Fifth Ave. to the Gilbert Hall of Science. It was like a trip to fantasyland with its model trains, Erector Sets, artificial lightning and elaborate train layouts where children could push buttons and watch trains move through countryside and miniature cityscapes—all geared to making you want to buy A.C. Gilbert products.

If I had the time, I'd walk by the Strand Bookstore, where I loved to be surrounded by their myriad of new and used books, remainders, and the latest titles. I got back to the newsstand in time for rush hour.

At the busy corner of 23<sup>rd</sup> and Madison there'd often be a peddler/hustler selling the latest gimmicks, gadgets, clothing and whatever out of his packs and satchels—wind-up walking men, hosiery, underwear, and all at low prices. People would stop and he'd offer “deals.” “Tell ya' what I'm gonna do!” he'd connive to a small crowd. All this was done illegally since he didn't have a license, wasn't paying taxes and had no fixed prices.

When rush hour slowed, he'd motion to me—“Hey Mikey!” and shake my hand, putting in it a \$5 bill with a wink. A short time later, a friendly cop showed up. “Hey, Mikey!” he'd say, and

shake my hand... and in it would go the \$5 bill. Not the kind of action you'd catch on "NYPD Blue" or "Blue Blood." But that was happening on every corner in New York in the '50's. Uncle Milty (Berle) captured just that kind of sketch on his TV comedy hour on Tuesday nights. New York City stopped; everyone was watching.

At 8 years old, I was a "fence"—the unknowing in-between player in a racket that you could probably trace back to ancient Egypt. I thought I was special, doing something for the cop and the businessman. A privilege that separated me from the regular kids in Brooklyn!

As my grandmother got older (she worked into her 90s), my Uncle Arbie helped more often at the newsstand. He was a colorful figure in my life who looked a lot like John Garfield, a "manly" '40's and '50's Hollywood actor. His outfit was always a brown leather jacket with a fur collar. *Bubbe* Mary walked four blocks to her tenement apartment and brought back a buffet lunch for him, usually chicken soup, kasha groats with meat and potatoes and a dessert, like prune danish and hot tea. Arbie and his wife, Lil, lived in what was, to us, an upscale Brooklyn neighborhood. Rumor had it that he had some kind of side hustle, maybe "numbers running." I believe he spent time in jail for his side gig.

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Dawn is breaking here on the farm. It's *Pesach* (Passover), the ancient Jewish spring festival, and I'm not eating bread. The holiday is part of our sacred history cycle and reflects the wanderings we experienced as nomads, around the Fertile Crescent and south to Canaan, 4,000 years ago. We sacrificed the first unblemished male ram to *Yahweh*, our one God, on a hilltop, and our clan of shepherds celebrated all night. Then, 3,200 years ago, we settled in "the land of milk and honey," and raised barley and wheat. *Pesach* marked the barley harvest at this time of year in ancient Palestine. They had to remember to clean the granary of every last kernel of the previous year's crop lest ergot or some other fungal disease could infest the new crop. Forty-nine days later, we'd celebrate the most important grain harvest, wheat, as well as the first fruits of the year. We'd harvest and dance joyously, giving thanks for the bounty.

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In memory of my ancestors, for breakfast, I'm eating a Siggis yogurt (60% more protein and 40% less sugar) with a banana, a healthy combination of pungent and sour compared to the sugar-coated rice "Krinkles" of my "*yute*" some 70 years ago! (The commercial went, "You will have a circus eating Krinkles.")

It's 7:30 am, time to get out into the fields.

The weather has changed. The wind is gone and the sun is out. The temperature when I woke up was in the 20's with frost on the truck windows, but will be climbing into the 60's. Our year-round farm staff, Justin Guyer, had already filled the 100-gallon sprayer with water, mounted it

on the 70-horsepower tractor and it's ready to go. Why put off spraying until next week when the blossoms are out and could be damaged by the spraying? So, I mixed the first dormant spray of the spring. The mixture is kelp powder, dormant oil, 1 gallon per 100 gallons of water, a few teaspoons of plain soap and about 10 lbs. of "Surround," a form of clay that irritates insects and discourages them from nibbling the emerging green leaves. This also gives the fruit trees a good spring start by smothering winter mites and insects before they hatch. The kelp is a good nutrient source.



On our farm, what we spray on our trees and crops is not toxic to humans, so when the wind picked up at 10:00 am, the spray that came back on my face smelled good! I wear sunglasses that wrap around my glasses and eyes, and need no other special protective gear.

When we shopped for a new tractor last year (\$40,000!), we wanted one that was at least 80 horsepower with an "open station"—difficult to find these days because manufacturers build tight enclosed cabs, with heat, air conditioning, and am/fm sound systems. The cabs make the farmer comfortable. But the cabs also protect the farmer from the carcinogenic chemicals they spray on the crops.

I like the feeling of the wind, sun and air covering me, not some air-proof cabin, and spraying a nurturing potion that isn't toxic. A neighbor once said to me, "I taste the mix of oats, bran and molasses I feed to my mules—if it ain't good for me, I don't feed it to Jack and Jenny." Ditto for our sprays.

The mule story reminds me that the 1950's movie theaters in downtown Brooklyn had the remnants of 1940's grandeur. Going to the movies Sunday mornings at the RKO Albee was a 3-4 hour "event," not just a single picture. For 50 cents you got a vaudeville show, a magician, puppeteer or pony show; a dramatic raising of the curtain as the lights dimmed, with a piano player or sometimes a six-piece band; the newsreel of the week, a "B" movie and, finally, the movie you came to see. One of my favorites was *High Noon* with Gary Cooper and Grace Kelly.

At the movies, I'd buy a chocolate candy bar filled with nuts, raisins and Rice Krispies for 10 cents. It was really dark in the theater and you couldn't see what you were eating. The candy filled me up and my parents would be upset when I didn't want dinner. So, I stopped eating the whole bar and left the rest in my pocket. Once, I remembered the candy still in my pocket while out somewhere, took it out and discovered that the "raisins" were really maggots. I learned a hard lesson that the profits in the theater business were mostly in the concession stand and probably the owner would get "deals" on expired candy. It reminded me of the man on the corner, "Tell you what I'm gonna do..."

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Up the next morning, there's a 100% chance of rain. I had *matza brei* and coffee for breakfast. The nearly full moon is slightly clouded, the sun is reddish and it's 50 degrees.





By 6:30, I'm ready to transplant herbs in our basement/greenhouse and listen to the Charlestown, West Virginia, NPR station. I was hoping to get back to Takoma Park today because three pressing issues I'm working on need my attention. First, our farm market agreement with SunTrust Bank in Washington, DC's Adams Morgan neighborhood was not renewed and we've been scrambling to relocate. We've been selling there for 49 years! Here's the link to an article: <https://dcist.com/story/21/03/30/amid-debate-over-new-building-bank-boots-long-running-farmers-market-from-adams-morgan-plaza/>.

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Additionally, I'm working with a group of advocates called the "Freedom Fighters," to help a prisoner sitting in a Maryland jail for 30 years for a "wrongful conviction." We are trying to get him a parole board hearing. After all, Passover's theme is about freedom from enslavement.

And lastly, residents of my community in Takoma Park, Maryland, are opposing a development proposal that is not right for our town and could force the Takoma Park Food Co-op out of business. Here is the letter I wrote to the State Highway Administration:

*I'm writing to you about the proposed development and related transportation issues at Takoma Junction.*

*I have been delivering produce to the Takoma Park Food Co-op and am a customer since the opening of the Co-op. I am also a 34-year Takoma Park resident. My farm is in South Central Pennsylvania (above Hancock, Maryland). My produce is chemical-free and outlets like the Co-op that offer affordable prices and WIC, Senior and SNAP, complement my own philosophy of providing affordable, pesticide-free produce to all income levels.*

*During the growing season, I bring my produce to the Co-op twice a week. Even during off-season, I still deliver every two weeks.*

*When I deliver at the Co-op, there are always one to three other trucks making deliveries. I, like the other folks who deliver, are usually in a hurry to get to the next delivery, so with the current delivery location, with the large parking lot, it is possible to make my deliveries in a timely manner.*

*However, I've recognized that if there was only one "lay-by," delivery would be difficult and perhaps not even possible for several reasons. The Junction is already congested and adding large trucks and even tractor trailers, to a lay-by would clog the streets even more, obstructing the bus stop and potentially creating danger for pedestrians, bikers and children.*

*I was curious about what other drivers thought about the lay-by and one said, "Forget about it!". Another said, "It's too dangerous!", and yet another said, "I'd refuse the delivery."*

*In my case, I'm sometimes allowed to deliver, if I have to, in the afternoon. But even then, we have to watch out for children, bus passengers, pedestrians and bicycles on the sidewalk. I can't imagine the magnification of these concerns with a lay-by!*

*Even though I'm a strong supporter of the Co-op, I'm afraid the liability I'd have to assume if the lay-by was the only place to park and unload might ultimately prohibit me from being a supplier to the Co-op.*

*Would you, if your office approved this plan, want to take responsibility for an accident, or God forbid, a death if this forewarned unworkable plan was approved by your office? All indicators point to the lay-by as not viable (I believe the Fire Chief is also opposed to the lay-by as an obstruction to the fire trucks rushing to an incident), so it is hard to understand why your office would approve the plan. I hope it is not because of political expediency.*

*I'm hoping you agree and put an end to this unworkable, unsafe and detrimental plan.*

*I'd be happy to testify, affirm and explain my opposition in person (or by Zoom) or with a sworn affidavit verifying that I stand by these statements.*

*Thank you,*

*Michael Tabor*

*Farmer, supplier to the Takoma Park Co-op*

*Takoma Park resident*



## FARM JOURNAL 4/2/21

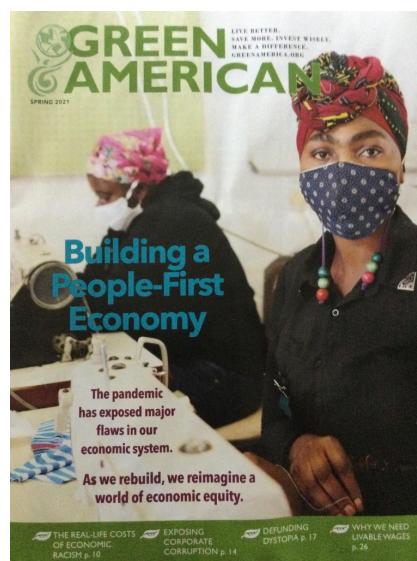
It's April 1<sup>st</sup> and Justin is near the end of his "time off" (January–March), when he maintains the farm at his own pace. Now, when I say "time off," he might choose to start working at 6:30 am each day, tediously planting 80 trays of seeds (20 trays a day), repair a tractor, work in a lower field, go to town and get a machine part or diesel fuel, replant seedlings in larger trays, clean the house and many other tasks required to maintain a farm. He's not relaxing in front of a TV! Actually, there's no TV reception on our farm, poor internet reception and no Zoom access.

Justin just had four days with his father on the farm, cutting and clearing brush and wood in the Christmas tree field and other work. His father, recently retired from the local power company in northeast Pennsylvania, has made time to be with his son. I'm impressed and a bit envious. My father put virtually no quality time aside for me or my brother. It's a deep wound. Anyway, Justin drove to DC to pick up Charmaine Peters, our 14-year farm manager. She spent mid-November to the end of March working in the DC area, painting, re-organizing homes and even relaxing a bit. This is how the farm has been operating for the last 15 years or so. Without both of them, we wouldn't be farming.

Before coming to the farm, Charmaine worked in a decently paying DC non-profit. New farm staff will start in mid-May. Their day will begin at 7:00 am with a 30- to 45-minute breakfast and staff meeting, discussing the day's tasks: crops needing to be nurtured, making decisions and other items to keep the farm running and meeting its goal of bringing healthfully grown produce to mixed income neighborhoods in Washington, DC.

Charmaine's cheery, friendly humor, organizational skills and personality keep the farm going, along with Justin's strong work ethic and ability to keep tools and machinery operating. I often hear the tractor and other machinery still humming at 9:30 pm.

Rising at 3:30 am, I read *Green America's* spring magazine, cover to cover, while drinking turmeric honey tea. It reminds us that multi-billionaire Jeff Bezos



pays less in taxes than his secretary. Or that Amazon paid zero dollars in federal income taxes on \$11 billion of profit in 2018. Or that when shopping at Trader Joe's you're possibly supporting child slavery and violators of the Clean Air Act. I plan to buy about one hundred copies of the magazine and distribute them at our farmers markets opening in June.

I drove home Thursday last evening. This morning in Takoma Park, we'll volunteer with Small Things Matter, a local non-profit which supplies enough food to help feed 400 families in our community. We volunteer 2 to 5 hours a week, but dozens of our neighbors spend 30 to 40 hours a week raising money, picking up the food, baking, cooking and securing free or discounted supplies and food from local businesses. Along with the adults, dozens of school kids volunteer. This goodwill is duplicated all around our county and country as a response to the hardships caused by the Covid 19 pandemic.

Fabrangen, the *havurah* (Jewish community) to which we belong, made a commitment more than 20 years ago to support two homeless families. Now they are no longer homeless. Their kids are grown and some have attended college. The support of these two families has endured. Other congregations support refugee families. Our *havurah* is filled with individuals and families who help keep the world in balance. Fran Teplitz, for example, a modest, unassuming, long-time Fabrangen member, is on Green America's executive team, and keeps the public informed of environmental and political concerns and solutions.

\* \* \* \* \*

An article in *Green America* about making comfortable bras, brought back another childhood memory. Our family, like most in our income bracket, shopped "wholesale" as much as possible. My Bubbe Mary had a vast underground of contacts, friends and relatives in the retail business. If I was old enough to need a bike, my mother took me to a wholesaler and bought one "at cost." Or so it seemed to me. Same with Matlaw's jewelry shop at the corner across from the newsstand. If we wanted something, we'd get it there for a special "family price."

When it came to bras, my mother had a special contact with a store on the Lower East Side. I went with her once (at a young age) and it was a very strange experience. The store, like many others in the wholesale/retail world, made no pretenses—French and Italian brands of female undergarments everywhere. Boxes piled high, no fancy displays, everything helter-skelter. That was part of the charm and attraction. But what was most peculiar was that the owner, an Orthodox Jewish man, and the expert, I suppose, did the fittings. He went back with the woman to the fitting room, without his wife or a female associate, and performed this intimate act. I couldn't grasp the concept.

At age 9 and 10, just on the edge of sexual curiosity and girls, it felt very strange. Bras were an item of curiosity and intrigue. Plus there were hints of primal nourishment and satisfaction. Shouldn't this act be in the exclusively female realm?

A male bra fitter invited guffaws along the lines of my *chutzpadik* (nervy) claim on a résumé that I once was a lifeguard in a Williamsburg *mikva* (ritual bath). Indeed, this immature little-boy approach to sexuality caused a well-regarded Washington area Orthodox rabbi to place hidden cameras in a *mikva*. He lost his job, family and congregation and ended up in prison.

I write this on the last day of *Pesach*, the eighth day of the *Omer* (sheaf of grain)—the period of 49 days between the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. This is a time to come out from the narrow place (what the word *Mitzra'im*--Egypt--means), into the light and the re-awakening of our natural world and the coming of spring.



Ancient Jews were farmers and shepherds, protectors of our surroundings. I'm mindful to be conscious of my family and their well-being, and to dear friends like Jamie Raskin and his family. They blessed us with a moving memorial service for their son, Tommy, whose life was lost December 31, 2020. Tommy, who worked on our farm, asked us as his parting words, to care for all living things, human and animal. How fitting for this time of the year.



## FARM JOURNAL 4/6/21

It's 5:00 am on April 5<sup>th</sup> on the farm and time to finish spraying the dormant oil on the fruit trees. This oil smothers the over-wintering insects and mite larvae, as well as various fungal diseases, on the apple and pear trees.. My nemesis on the farm is a pathogen called cedar-apple rust (*Gymnosporangium juniperi-virginianae*). No matter what I do, this rust fungus survives.

When I show our farm market customers the pretty-looking, perfect fruits from a neighbor's orchard, which uses a modified program that minimizes insect spray (IPM), up against our pesticide-free fruit, 90% of them choose the pretty fruit. In our culture, we have been conditioned to only accept fruit that appears unblemished, and so-called "perfect" fruit as the standard of consumer acceptance. The pesticide-free fruit is not harmful to humans because of the fungi, and they taste wonderful—I dare say authentic.

A big difference is that we farm in the humid mid-Atlantic part of the US where various plant insect hosts are found "wild" and are very difficult to control without the use of chemicals. This contrasts to the low humidity of the Northwest. We have one customer who will *only* buy the imperfect fruits, and he buys in quantity. He rides a bike everywhere and seems incredibly healthy and robust. And, to him, "pretty" fruit is a bit suspect.

Now that Passover has ended, we can return to eating leavened grains. Despite my agnosticism and belief that the reality of my deity is unknown, I find solace in my decision to acknowledge my history and ancestry, despite attempts to crush those beliefs by most of the civilizations in which Jews have lived during the last 3,200 years.

\* \* \* \* \*

My son, Ben, in Seattle, told me some people he knows are immersed in QAnon. They see themselves as part of some countercultural beliefs from the '60's and '70's! Somehow, they equate my generation's embrace of the Grateful Dead, Timothy Leary's LSD culture, and Buckminster Fuller as the new technology counterculture, based on opposing contemporary science, truth and rationality.

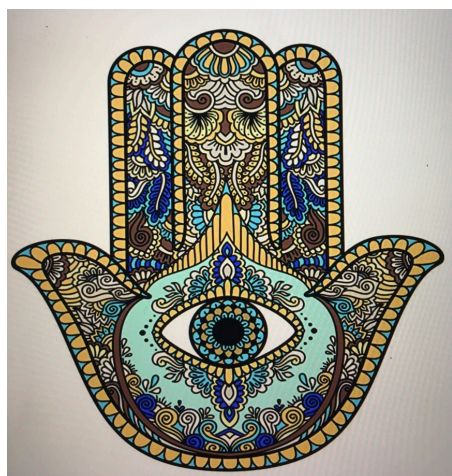
My attempt at farming is actually rooted in the '60's counterculture. Our ancestors' knowledge of science was based on their reality and insights at the time. So, if many citizens are prone to give credence to QAnon, believe conspiracy theories, honor the Confederate flag, and follow an anti-vaccine approach to our current health crisis, we shouldn't be surprised. If they chose to, they could stop listening to Fox News and get educated.

The rest of us presumably believe in a rationality rooted in the Constitution that the US was established on democratic principles and sustained by immigrants and people escaping from hunger, fear, fascism and tyranny.

However, scrape the thin layer of our reality and you can begin to see the reality imposed on us by the former president, his allies and collaborators, who have managed to convey their fantasies to a significant portion of this country.

My beloved Bubbe Mary, who had no formal education, and was isolated from a rational worldview as a child, was superstitious and immersed in the “old country’s” belief in the occult, including fear of ghosts and lost souls. The “evil eye,” present in many cultures, could be provoked, and bring evil into the lives of the innocents, especially children. Bubbe Mary never called a child pretty or handsome, for fear of bringing that child’s beauty to the attention of the “evil eye” who could bewitch them.

No question that today, the “*ayin ha ra*” (“evil eye”) can be found in isolated communities throughout Asia and Eastern Europe. Protective amulets, such as the depiction of the Hand of Fatima, are worn to fend off the “evil eye.”



We seem to be living in a world where only a thin line of rationality separates us from conspiracy and science fiction. To me, the alternative reality of the world of good and evil of my grandmother’s imagination presages that of the parallel universe created by the former president and his minions, manifested by groups like QAnon, hatred of non-whites, women, LGBTQ, etc.

## FARM JOURNAL 4/8/21

It's Tuesday morning on the farm. The temperature seems to have stabilized to 45 degrees F at night and 65-70 degrees during the days, which is good. Last year, our worst since I started farming 48 years ago, spring brought daytime temperatures upwards of 85 degrees. Then along came a killing frost and decimating all the fully-formed pear and apple blossoms. In one morning, we lost all of the apples, pears and peaches!

Yesterday I worked on the trees, pruning out dead limbs, opening wounds and scars on the trees and cleaning them out. We also cut down an old non-productive apple tree I planted nearly 40 years ago. I felt as if we needed to hold a mourning service for it and imagined a Hasidic Jewish gathering around the tree saying *Kaddish* (the Jewish prayer for the dead).

My apple guru is Michael Phillips and I'd recommend that anyone seriously interested in fruit trees read his books. My go-to guide is Phillips' *The Holistic Orchard* (Chelsea Green Publishing - \$39.95). In it he combines soil science, holistic health and traditional methods plus his wisdom. It's considered a biological, rather than chemical, approach. Phillips' idea is that apples evolved along the edge of forests and you need to encourage the soil biology and arboreal food web when raising fruit trees.

He regards a chemical approach as piecemeal and deems it allopathic rather than working in harmony with nature. He would regard my use of dormant oil as disruptive to his approach, but I've chosen to use it this year along with the "holistic" sprays – kelp and fish emulsion.

Yesterday was a long day! Starting early, it went until 7:30 pm when the sun set. Spraying apple, pear and peach trees with a nutritive mix of early sprays and then checking each tree absorbed most of the time. All the while, a gobbler echoed in a close field. Even though I used a tractor, I clocked more than 5,000 steps. After a shower, I fell into bed at 8:00, exhausted.

Before I start today's farm tasks, I'm thinking back to the path that led me to farming, starting in high school when I was choosing a college. I pondered the question of what to do with my life. A school guidance counselor suggested education and the world of teaching. Because I was a mediocre student, I needed to start excelling in grades unless I chose the world of physical labor for a living.

I had a series of jobs back then. I was a stock boy at Macy's, delivered newspapers and was a nature counselor at the Berkshire Mountain Camp Watitoh. I loved the outdoors and excelled at Boy Scouting. I enjoyed the creativity working as a courier. I traveled on buses, subways and taxis to get advertising drafts from draftsmen to clients as quickly as possible. I have fond memories of getting from mid-Manhattan to the Lipton Tea company in New Jersey in record time, having free tea and a 25 cents lunch at their employee cafeteria, before returning to the City.



I'm sure my parents prodded me in the direction of academia. In 1959, we moved from public housing to a garden apartment two blocks from Forest Hills High School. During my junior year at Jamaica High School and senior year at Forest Hills, I earned straight A's and college admittance. But, where to go? Student debt wasn't an option. New York State colleges were tuition-free, and there were scholarships for room and board scholarships based on the promise I showed. I chose Oneonta, not too far from the City but enough to give me the distance I needed.

My girlfriend, Anita, who lived across from Queens College, was my "steady" date. Before I left for Oneonta, I promised to be true to her, which I took seriously until my sophomore year. Anita was chaste, yet, being a guy, I wanted more. Plus, the male/female ratio at college was 1 to 3!

Oneonta, alleged home of the world's largest trainyard, was near Syracuse, about three hours from New York City. To me, it was a small town. Despite its size, it sustained itself with a bakery, movie house, and Malonari's Pizzeria, and an upscale restaurant or two. Bresee's Department Store had an escalator upon which townies could ride for hours and an upscale restaurant or two. Discrete couples could go to nearby motels if they wanted to stay out for a Saturday night and not be noticed.



This was my first real taste of WASP America. I was officially told that if I were to teach, I had to get rid of the Brooklyn accent resulting from years of speaking Yiddish with Bubbe Mary and my Italian, Black and Puerto Rican neighbors and friends.

I had a Bernie Sanders accent and needed to acquire a normal, Midwestern dialect. That would take two semesters of remedial English classes if I wanted to teach anywhere in New York State.

Work on a farm is timeless. As I mentioned, there is no TV reception or cable. Even getting an NPR station is not easy. Here in southern Pennsylvania, it's evangelical talk, music, right-wing commentary and a "focus-on-the-family" style of programming. In Oneonta, I remember hearing the soft music stations unlike the rock and roll and R&B music promoted by DJ Alan Freed.

Which brings me back to the irony of those hick farm kids transferring from two-year agricultural and vocational schools to Oneonta State where they'd become teachers rather than be stuck on a farm. "Hey, wipe the shit off your boots, Wild Bill, before you come to our dorm room," we'd taunt.

So here I am at 78, spraying fruit trees, raising vegetables and feeling good about the timelessness of farm life while the hicks--retired principals or school teachers--are bouncing great grandchildren on their knees in small towns near Oneonta, such as Delhi or Schoharie. Who knew!



But my path and the world were waiting. On to graduate school, the civil rights and anti-war movements, sit-ins, arrests, confronting the power structure in national demonstrations, being fired from my first three jobs, a five-year career in the federal government, searching a meaningful Jewish identity, three marriages, three children and more.

\* \* \* \* \*

It's Thursday, April 8<sup>th</sup> at 5:15 am. Yesterday, Justin and Charmaine prepared rows and planted early vegetables (kale, spinach, lettuce and started summer squash). I finished cleaning and pruning the fruit trees. The blossoms are on the edge of the "white bud" and "bloom" stages. There's fear and anticipation during the Omer period, where fear of a killing frost, fungal diseases, and insects, including this year's emergence of the 17-year locusts looms.

We are preparing to open our farm markets on June 5<sup>th</sup> in a new location in a small Adams Morgan park across from the Line Hotel, a block from the longtime market at 18<sup>th</sup> Street and

Columbia Rd., NW. We are negotiating with the authorities for parking signs and permits. Ward 5 City Councilperson Brienne Nadeau, the Adams Morgan Business Interest Development (Kristen Barden and Brian Barrie), as well as the staff at the various DC government departments of transportation, licensing and parking, are helping with the bureaucratic process.



Neighborhood groups are struggling with saving Sun Trust Plaza from developers. It has been a public space for the community for more than 49 years. While we fully support that effort, we first needed to relocate our market to be able to serve the community, hoping that the Plaza will be saved and we can eventually return to our traditional spot.

After four days at the farm, later today I'm driving back to Takoma Park, where my wonderful wife and life partner awaits. Life is still an adventure.

## FARM JOURNAL 4/10/21

It's a Saturday morning, *Shabbat*, and the beginning of my week. It will be a long one because it's the thick of spring. I'm on schedule. There is a rhythm to farm work each year and I must accept it or stop. And that's not acceptable for a person on a path.

Once June starts, it's work for at least six days a week, maybe more, until mid-autumn when things lighten up a bit. I once worked hard to move legislation through the Maryland General Assembly. It was the first "Farm to Cafeteria" bill, and, after three years, it passed. The delegate and state senator who sponsored the bill called to tell me it was ready for the governor's signature. I was on the farm, more than a three-hour drive to Annapolis and simply couldn't take the time off to spend a day to be at the celebration and photo-op. "The only chance I'll get to take a day off from the farm is for my own funeral!" I quipped. Someone saved a pen for me used by Governor O'Malley at the signing.

My *Shabbat* morning starts with an 8:15 am spinning class at the Silver Spring YMCA. It keeps me strong during the off season so I'll be well enough to work on the farm. Sunday mornings, I take another spinning class and a core strengthening workout class on Mondays.

Esther reminds me we've got a 10:00 am meeting at our new Adams Morgan location. We finish in time to attend the end of *Shabbat* services at Fabbrangen.

Friday evening, we watched two episodes of "Shtisel," a Netflix series about Hasidic families in Jerusalem. We enjoyed the series though Esther was disappointed the series ended so soon. Now that the farm season had started my schedule is too full to indulge in binge watching. I was relieved that the older Hassidic rabbi's good hearted artistic son found meaning in a new relationship with a slightly "troubled" but decent and committed woman. He was finally able to let go of his worldly ties to his deceased wife who haunted him, and move on for his sake and that of their daughter. This is the extent of my living in a fictional world.

\* \* \* \* \*



Returning to my college experience, Oneonta was the Norman Rockwell, small town America world that I never knew growing up. It was Christian, white and Protestant. The crowd I related to at first was the outdoor club--hiking, canoeing, skiing, snow shoeing and, the activity that became a regular on weekends, spelunking.

Cave exploring became a passion. I geared up with carbide lights and helmets. We leased a station wagon or van to take us to the world of the underground. I'm not sure why I enjoyed it

so much. Perhaps it was a “return to the womb” sensation. Some caves could take 15 to 20 hours to explore. I acquired the physical stamina and technical skills to climb or repel 200 to 300 feet when necessary. I became a “cave rat!”

The other challenge was remaining true to Anita. I was raised, for the most part, by my mother and grandmother. My father was absent most of the time. According to the writings of Joseph Campbell and Robert Bly, boys raised by women become soft. They espoused a “mytho-poetic” emerging men’s “new Warrior” movement, the goal of which is to create wholistic men. I craved the need for older brothers. I think that’s what drew me to scouting. There were always older boys who I could rely on for mentoring. From my perspective, homophobia wasn’t an issue and I was taught to honor and treat women with respect.

Try to imagine, then, my reaction to a co-ed at Oneonta State who liked me and asked me out to a picnic. She was attractive, direct and alluring. After finding a secluded place near the upper campus, we relaxed on a blanket and she came out with, “Let’s fuck” or words to that effect. I didn’t know what to say. My emerging manhood said, “Go for it!” This was a dream come true. But then my inner voice reminding me to keep my promise to Anita. What to do? I tried to explain my respect for women and my promise to my girlfriend at home. The young temptress got up, grabbed the blanket and basket and said, “You stupid asshole!” and left.

And that was just the beginning of my freshman year!

## FARM JOURNAL 4/11/21

Today I'm attending an affordable housing forum via Zoom. The event is sponsored by Progressive Neighbors, an organization I co-founded 16 years ago to elect people with progressive values and integrity to public office in Montgomery County, Maryland, where I live. Our first candidate was a neighbor I've known since he was three years old. Jamie Raskin became a constitutional law professor at American University, then our state senator, and is now our Congressional representative. He led the second impeachment proceedings of Donald Trump.

Tomorrow, Monday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, I'll take my annual work trip to one of our farm suppliers, Organic Approach, whose company is located between York and Lancaster, Pennsylvania, about a two-and-a-half hour trip. From there, it's another three hours' drive to the farm. So, it will be a long day! My fear these days is the danger of highway driving. Increasingly, travel by car or truck is about the trust we put in other drivers. It's getting worse. Cell phone use aside, drivers lack awareness. Backseat children and other distractions decrease the attentiveness and concentration one needs to drive competently, respectful of those around you. Stories of drivers going through a light and hitting others while drunk, on drugs, or on the phone, are increasing. My wife and young daughter had such an incident many years ago on a neighborhood road. So, whenever I take a long trip, I feel like I'm putting my life on the line. On the other hand, when I was recuperating from my heart operation, what I hoped for most was the adventure and beauty of those trips. I'd listen to NPR or music, but focus on the road and drive defensively.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yesterday, when I called the person supporting a man who was, it appears, wrongfully convicted some 30 years ago, I found out that some of my friends and elected officials had followed through on the path to pressure the state to re-hear his case. And that's good. It's important that you can help someone in prison. In Judaism, there's a belief that if you help save *one* life it's like you've saved the world. That's also a reason to admire more modest and good people, like Rabbi Chuck Feinberg, a member of Fabringen, who works every day to help prison inmates. Why, why don't others think this is more important than reading *The Sunday New York Times* or a novel? I get overly and perhaps unfairly upset at something like this.

By the way, I love to read *The New York Times*. It's a treat and fountain of knowledge and insight. However, if that's the limit of someone's perceived activism and one neglects to learn about local politics and be a local activist, I become critical. We must be informed about who runs for sheriff, council or state delegate, and reach out to neighbors, friends and committees, for if we don't, the wrong people climb the political ladder and we end up with the polarization we're seeing now.

## FARM JOURNAL 4/12/21

It turned out to be a safe trip to Organic Approach up near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, today. Eric, the owner, also has an allopathic approach for the use of sprays, nutrients and applications on fruit trees and plants to strengthen their immune system. I got back to the farm by 5:00 pm in time to finish pruning some of the apple trees. Tomorrow is a scheduled spraying day—using some of his products, but not the fish emulsion. His belief is that fish emulsion will encourage pathogens to grow and spread ...and that includes my nemesis, Cedar Apple Rust, on apple trees.

\* \* \* \* \*

One of our neighbors in Takoma Park invites us to an Easter Egg hunt every year, an event I never experienced growing up Jewish. It's all, it seems, centered around the joy children have in finding and gathering the colorful eggs. In Judaism there's a similar hunt that takes place at about the same time in early spring—the search for the *afikomen*—a special piece of matzah necessary for the completion of the Passover seder. Although I have my own theories about hiding the piece of matzah, I've often wondered about the Easter egg hunt.

I subscribe to *Lancaster Farming*, a regional farm weekly that offers a lot of national and local agricultural news with various columns in a large, four-section format. It's a farm version of *The Sunday New York Times*.

In her April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021 column, “On Being a Farmer’s Wife,” Joyce Bupp suggests that the egg is the symbol of spring and new life, and brings to mind the daily egg hunt when you have free-range hens on the farm and no regular nesting places.

I'd add to her insight both the egg and Easter bunnies as spring fertility celebrations.

In my old Brooklyn neighborhood, there was a bakery that featured various uses of eggs during the spring—whole eggs in bread, eggs very ornately decorated, and eggs and chocolate pastries. I'm guessing it was a Ukrainian or Greek bakery.

But there's no question about it, this is and was a festive time of the year, and in days before TV and car commercials celebrating “sales events,” America celebrated the change of seasons. My mother told me that in NYC public schools they celebrated spring by dressing in fancy dresses and dancing around a maypole (did the phallic symbolism every dawn on them?).

I imagine a much more creative time in pre-WWII days, well before TV, and even when radio was still a novelty. Children and communities had to invent their own outlets for entertainment and celebration. My mother always bought a little American flag and took us to parades on Thanksgiving, Christmas day, and ethnic celebrations whenever we had a day off from school and work. I know I'm sounding old and nostalgic, but before we became digitized, it seemed a

much more unified and communal-centric America. Providing you ignored racism, sexism and nationalism, it was probably an America to be proud of and even die for (life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness).

Time to start my farm day and spray trees early since there's a 60% chance of rain tomorrow.





## FARM JOURNAL 4/13/21

Charmaine and Justin just finished their conference call with the newly hired staff. One is ready to start next week. The others start later in May and June.

We usually hire at least three staff for the season. They'll learn a lot about the basics of small-scale agriculture. This year, we're including an option to learn basic beekeeping and, possibly, mushroom raising. We've also applied for a permit to grow hemp. Hemp was a traditional crop on farms before the anti-marijuana laws were passed in 1937. It was commonly grown for rope, clothing and paper. Hemp was so useful that in the early 1600's growing it was mandatory for farmers. We'll use it, for now, as a cover crop to see how easy or difficult it is to grow.



As a learning experience, farm work is a good option before or after college. Before work and possibly partnership and children kick in, it's an opportunity for another vocation and lifestyle.

When my former wife Martha and I started 48 years ago, there were only a handful of organic vegetable and fruit farmers in the Washington-Baltimore area. Licking Creek Bend Farm was part of the movement to bring produce from a rural area to the city.



I credit Jim and Moi Crawford as among the first. I remember Jim, who, along with friends, set up New Morning Farm in 1972 near Berkeley Springs, West Virginia. He came by our farm and looked at our operation which included mules plowing the fields, 100 sheep, 12 beehives, and six to eight milk goats. He just shook his head in disbelief. Were we breaking even (cash-wise)?

And then he told us about his plans to bring chemical-free produce to a hip, alternative community called Adams Morgan in Washington, DC. There was a dirt parking lot at the corner of 18<sup>th</sup> Street and Columbia Rd, NW, where we could have a space on Saturday mornings, sell our farm products and afterwards return to the farm. It was a novel concept at the time because no one appeared to be doing it. The one exception was Eastern Market near the US Capitol, a well-established operation dating to 1885 when large gardens and farms were close to the city. I remember meeting Jim at 18<sup>th</sup> and Columbia to test out the idea. Afterwards, we sold the losing homestead operation (sheep, mules, goats, *etc.*) and enlarged the garden and, from then on, brought our own produce to the urban market. A year earlier, I sold about 39 lbs. of tomatoes to

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a DC grocery for the unheard-of price of \$1.00/lb., so I had seen possibilities. That is how it started for us.

\* \* \* \* \*

OK, now I'm getting ready to mix the sprays. After mixing up and spraying 200 gallons of the brew 'til after sunset, my day finally ended at 8 pm. I hope all the hard work bears fruit.

## FARM JOURNAL 4/14/21

Charmaine and Justin planted the early tomatoes today. In this region, we get a killing frost through May, so this is a bit of a gamble – we cover them but that only protects down to 28 degrees. The main crop is planted in mid-May. We also started summer squash a month early – they won't be ready by the time our June 5<sup>th</sup> Adams Morgan market opens but sooner than those planted in late May – our frost-free date. It's a chance we need to take.

There are many programs for aspiring or interested farm workers. “Woofing” (Willing workers on organic farms) has been around for decades. It works better for larger farms where helping out for a few weeks is useful. Folks volunteer in exchange for room and board. I know of many who have woofed around the world.

Here, though, we need workers who commit to a schedule. In exchange, we pay them, provide worker's comp, and room and board. Someone just showing up, volunteering and leaving at the height of the farm season doesn't work. We ask for references, how long they're able to work, and



their work history. The full-time staff conduct the interviews. We hope the experience will be rewarding enough for them to want to return next season. Less of a learning curve each season!

We've had a few requests from CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) members asking to come to the farm to meditate, work, bring their own food, and sometimes eat with us, but

they mostly want to be by themselves, think and maybe write. Though we don't advertise, we'll accommodate people who want a place to retreat for several days.

The average workers the last several years have been college educated women in their late 20's to early 30's wanting to learn the farm trade and have time off from office or restaurant jobs. We once had a professional “stripper” in her 20's. She met Jim and Moi Crawford's son Dylan and they travelled together in South America during the winter, after which Dylan wrote a book that included their adventurous interlude!



Another young woman who worked the farm travelled around the world with friends during the winter and then returned to the farm the next season. Seasonal farming is a grounding experience, offering a lot of time to think about the future and save money to travel off season. Hudson Lee met Lauren at the farm and now they are married and raising a family!

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During college I had no idea what I'd do with my life. The town of Oneonta exposed me to a different world. Friday nights it seemed everyone went to the local bars and drank with friends. I eventually met Roni, a woman I became close with, and a group of students mostly from the City who shared similar values and interests. We'd either go to the movies or to Molinari's pizzeria where we could sit, talk, enjoy a comic, band or other entertainers who hoped to make it big by being a part of a circuit in the northeast. I remember a female comic who had the ability to squirt a stream of water from her mouth to a partner! Molinari's served a specialty pizza on an elevated platter and was unique and tasty. I can still taste that pizza and miss it!

As a freshman and sophomore, I'd walk to the still functioning trainyard on Friday nights and ask the men gathered in the caboose if I could join them. I listened to stories and adventures from "old men" (probably in their 50's); they seemed to be from another universe.

I don't know what the college housing office had in mind, but the freshman roommate they assigned me from Syosset, Long Island was a vicious racist and anti-Semite. Despite his strict German Lutheran upbringing, he became an alcoholic and dropped out the next year. I hope he was able to recover and have a good life.

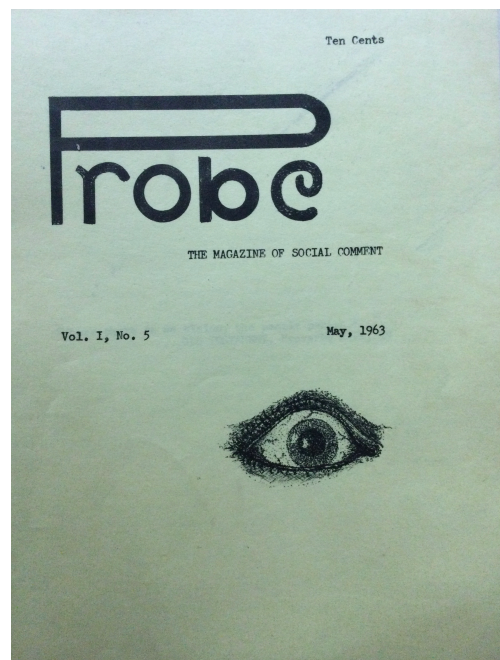
Sophomore year, I roomed with a friend named Irwin Beddell. I think he spent a few years in the army and was a little older, very decent and a bit eccentric. I remember during those cold, cold winter nights, he slept with the windows wide open and had Hudson Bay blankets. He nicknamed Roni the “waif.” I believe he had a Syrian Jewish background and grew up in the Rockaway neighborhood of Queens. We became good friends.

In 1961, we became aware of a student revolution taking place around the country: the Free Speech movement, at the University of California Berkeley, anti-HUAC (House of Un-American Activities) demonstrations, underground newspapers, protests against ABM’s (Anti-Ballistic Missiles), sit-ins at 5 & 10-cent stores protesting segregation, police with dogs attacking people of color and protest signs. Folk singers, such as Pete Seeger, and the ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax and their music became the voice of the coming revolution.

The only sign of protest at Oneonta were two women sitting in at the school cafeteria. Students seemed unaware or apathetic about what was happening around the country or world. Sorority “rush,” fraternity “hazing,” drinking and preparing for married life and teaching was the norm at the college. And the school administration wanted it to stay that way.

But several of us wanted to demand change. Jeffrey Victor comes to mind as my closest cohort. We read about underground newspapers at Oberlin and Antioch and decided we’d start one. Called *Probe*, we began publishing and distributing it around campus. It became an item of curiosity. And subversive.

We covered national issues. We sponsored a film screening about student activism, “Operation Abolition,” and wrote about anti-HUAC and free speech movements on the West Coast. We organized a demonstration in downtown Oneonta protesting a proposed tuition for state colleges. That must have gotten the evil-eye to focus on us because Jeff and I were first called into the dean’s office, telling us we’d be expelled. Afterward, college President Royal Netzer called us in and he asked, “Do you not like the way things are here? Do you want to stay or leave?” He approached me privately and suggested a way to graduate early with an accelerated course of studies. I would take a more concentrated course load, attend summer school and graduate in 3 years and then I could make trouble somewhere else and he’d be rid of me!



I liked and admired a lot of the teachers and picked the most challenging and liberal. Dr. Hobbie was my favorite. I remember when it came to addressing the issue of teachers’ unions, I was the

only student willing to debate in favor of them. Other future teachers felt it was inappropriate and anti-professional for a white-collar worker to join with the working class. Years later I went to visit Dr. Hobbie when I heard she was in a nursing home.

Lewis Curtis also stood out. He was a Quaker, openly advocating for world peace and espousing anti-war views in his sociology classes. I remember he invited me to my first anti-war protest event in Binghamton, NY and suggested I attend Quaker meetings on Sunday. Once, in his Social Anthropology class, he passed around a dish of candy on a lazy Susan. In the middle were colorfully wrapped chocolate treats, then M&Ms and, last, jelly beans. By the time it came to me, there were only a few jelly beans left. As we were leaving a student asked, "What was in those delicious chocolates?" Curtis queried with eyebrows raised, "What color was your wrapper?" "Red," was the reply. Then Curtis told the student he had eaten chocolate-covered roaches. Green was bee larvae.

I was glad to have had a few jelly beans and was reminded of when I ate maggots in the movies at the RKO Albee theater. Circling back to my life as an organic farmer, when some customers only want the "pretty" vegetables, they don't realize that pesticide-free fruits and vegetables may not be pretty, but they're tastier, more nutritious and health-promoting than the ones with the pesticides that make them pretty.

Another professor, Dr. Sider, was the youngest teacher and had a Bob Dylan-esque and creative way about him. And, Mr. Weisburger, one of the few Jewish teachers, had an incredible sense of humor and I have fond memories of his classes. Dr. Bloom was an inspiring English professor and I remember his poetry reading. There was a married couple, George and Evelyn Duncan, both teachers, and I wondered about their sitting and reading together in silence at a local luncheonette. In silence! He once interrupted a heavy necking session with Roni and me when he was showing potential parents and students around campus. He opened the door to a darkened room announcing, "and here's our music room!" Another couple had to uncouple quickly. I was so embarrassed and apologized to him afterwards.

I first met Roni in Dr. Whitaker's biology class. He was a crafty old New England Universalist Church member and loved to enchant students with his use of sexual innuendos. He later ran off with a female student before the end of the semester! A scandal followed because he left his wife and the college. Doc Whitaker taunted me and Roni in class. I was an "A" student and she was a "C" student but he recognized her intelligence and paired us on purpose in study sessions. What followed was her blossoming academically and in a relationship with me. I'm sure he chortled. In fact, I think he did so openly in class. It turns out he viewed it humorously. The next year, Roni and I were inducted into the "Bell and Dragon" Honor Society together and competed academically. She became my steady and I had to gently break that news to Anita, which wasn't easy because she was my first "true love."

Jeffrey and I roomed in the same house when we student taught near Utica. He was an avowed atheist, although unmistakably Jewish. A crucifix with a bloody Christ figure hung over his bed.

He asked the strict Catholic landlady to remove it and, when she asked why, he said he was an atheist. She dropped everything and ran upstairs to rescue the bloody crucifix. After that, we stopped being served edible breakfast and were treated badly. Jeff attended the Unitarian Universalist Church on Sunday mornings and invited me to join him. We read from the New Testament and sang traditional hymns. Jeff liked the UU minister whose name was Hunter Leggett. I really liked his wife who had been studying with Timothy Leary and his hallucinogenic LSD experiments.

After services, we went back to campus to enjoy the special Sunday dinner of roast beef au jus. We were properly dressed in our church clothes for this special meal in which formal attire was expected. Coming to Sunday dinner after church made me feel, for the first time, like a *real* American.

It was providential that I maintained my Jewish identity and didn't abandon my heritage by becoming a humanist or Buddhist, not that there's anything wrong with that, but I have witnessed some folks leaving their Judaism because of feeling shame in their difference.

Years later, I briefly attended early morning Zen Buddhist Za Zen meditations. I told Roshi Suzuki I had a difficult time bowing before the Buddha because all I could visualize was the actor Charlton Heston as Moses preaching, "You must not bow before foreign idols." Roshi said, "You must explore more deeply the depth and mysticism in your own heritage before moving on to others – not your parents or today's Judaism. Go deeper, my son, and you'll learn the truth."

## FARM JOURNAL 4/17/21

We're past the middle of the month. Sadly, it's getting cold again on the farm with temperatures dipping into the 30's. The fear on here and in our region is a about devastating dip below 20 degrees like last year. We're still in the Omer period of fear and trepidation. If I had a calendar, I'd know the exact day of the counting, but I don't. However, I know it's the 5<sup>th</sup> of Iyar according to the Jewish calendar and the Torah portion this week is Tazria-Metzora, a double portion, about Moses instructing our people about purification after birthing, plagues, leprosy and sacrificial food and animal offerings. If we were attending Fabrangen, I know I'd comment that I was pretty sure I was the only person present who had slaughtered a lamb and a chicken and I would make an appropriate reference to the Torah portion. But there's only a Zoom service and we often shul hop from Reb Mark Novak and Reb David Shneyer's Jewish Renewal services to Fabrangen's more traditional service.

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Back in Takoma Park, I'll start the day writing, followed by a workout at the YMCA. Later, we'll attend a community protest about proposed development at our food co-op (TPSS). The developer, along with the support of the Takoma Park City Council, is renegeing on its contract and closing the parking lot next to the store where trucks deliver food. Even though today is *Shabbat*, we have to support our political and philosophical belief by "praying with our feet" and go to the streets with our community. To us, that's the real holiness of the day.

This process I'm going through in recalling the past, is fascinating to me. I've never been in analysis, yet I'm thinking about trying LSD with professional support to probe for deeper memories. I've spoken to a friend, a psychiatrist and fellow men's group member, about a guided regression.

For instance, one of my memories is that I'm sitting in my office at the US Office of Education in 1967 and I get a phone call, "Is this Mr. Michael Tabor?" "Yes," I say, assuming my friend Steve Trachtenberg was on the other end of the line. "I have President Lyndon Baines Johnson on the line and he'd like to speak with you." "You're bullshitting me, right Steve?" I say and I hear, "No, (Johnson breaks in), this is the President of the United States speaking," in his unmistakable Texas drawl. Did this truly occur? I'm reaching out to historian, friend and former White House fellow, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and the LBJ library for verification of the call, the meeting that followed and its aftermath.

The episode was complicated and possibly unauthorized interference by the President in Department protocol. This was not like the abuse we've seen during the last four years, but probably outside the line of what is acceptable. Johnson's office intervened in helping advance legislation I proposed for migrant education and other antipoverty programs. LBJ is long dead and the event is well beyond the statute of limitations.



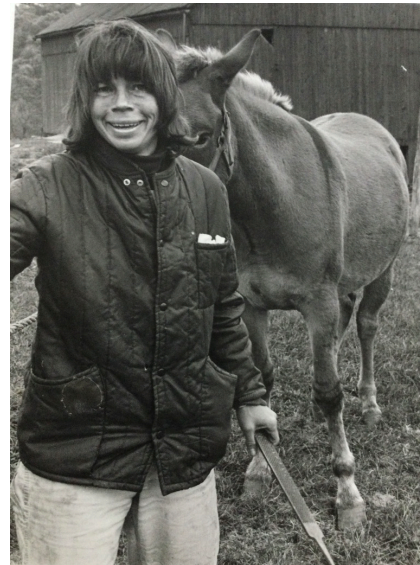
There's more to cover in this saga about a Jewish boy from the housing projects of Brooklyn: two marriages before finally meeting my *basherte* (soul mate), my children, Chad, Ben and Adina. And the high points on my path – the rage of the '60's, attempts at a vocation and finally finding farming. A trip of a lifetime volunteering with Catholic Relief Services to work with farmers in the tribal areas of Tanzania. Now I'm about to take a bike trip with Ben from Pittsburgh to Washington before he relocates to Southeast Asia for an indefinite period of time to help stabilize an e-bike factory. My life so far has been quite an adventure. I look ahead to more.



## FARM JOURNAL 4/18/21 End of Volume 1

I started keeping a farm journal at least 20 years ago, documenting techniques we used to grow our vegetables, fruits and Christmas trees, what worked and what didn't. Last year I focused on the history of this farm, its beginning as a diaspora kibbutz, and my own transition to becoming a farmer. When we started in 1972, like most urbanites I feared and even felt alienated from the land and animals. Like my father who began dentistry school at Columbia University before he followed his bliss and became a photographer and teacher in New York City vocational schools, I had a fear of blood. Curiously, after the kibbutz and commune collapsed in 1972, I and my then wife Martha, with the help and generosity of several neighbors in Thompson township, Fulton County, Pennsylvania, became full-time neophytes encountering agriculture.

We began by buying about 100 sheep, five goats, chickens, pigs, guinea fowl, ducks, a horse, a mule, *etc.*, plus three 30 to 40-year old tractors, each costing less than \$2,000. Next thing I knew I was performing episiotomies (surgical enlargement of the vulva orifice for newborn lambs), complicated birthing procedures, castrations on baby pigs, goats and lambs, and a whole megillah's worth of blood and guts. I mimicked the skills gleaned from untrained generous neighbors of veterinarian procedures and observations of local vets (a vet visit cost a lot and we couldn't afford it) that provided me with this informal "education," coupled with experience from my own trial and error and common sense.



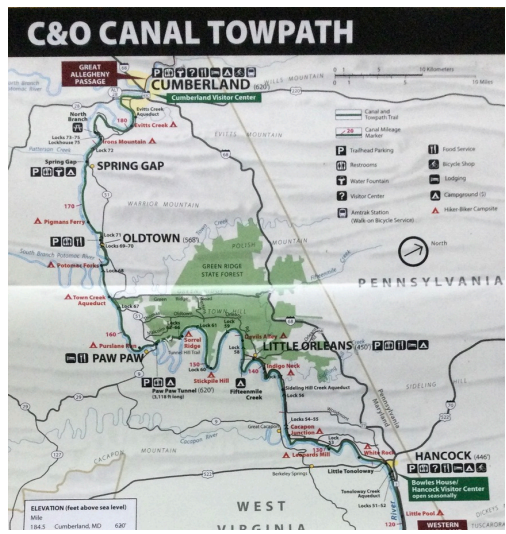
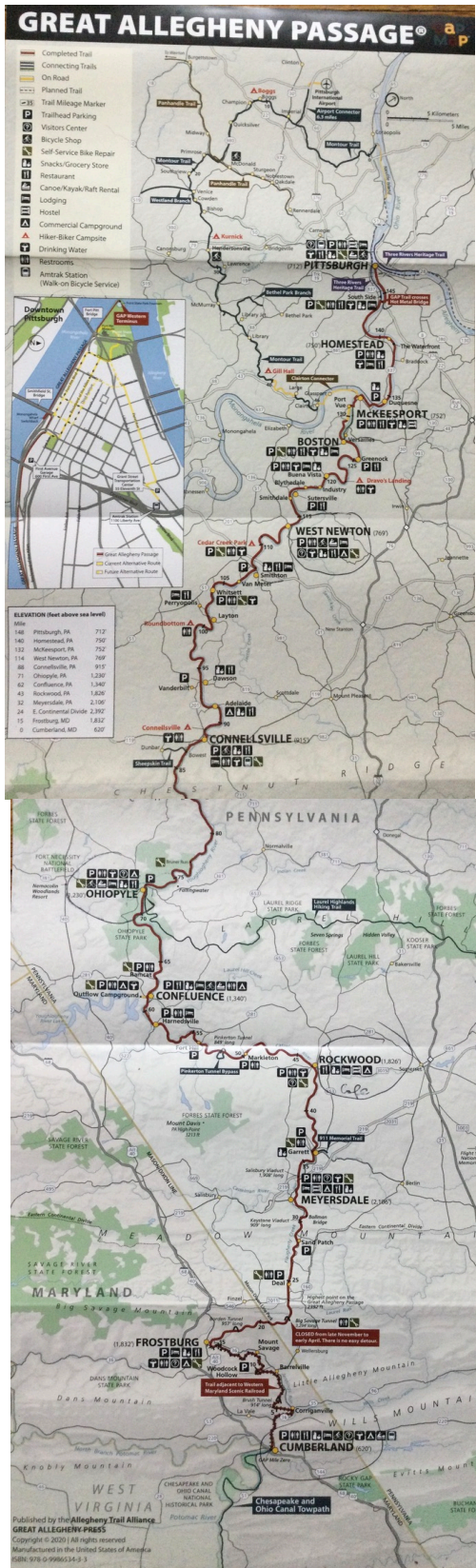
The heritage was there. It just needed to be re-discovered. The oral history of my family farming, goes back at least 600 years to Portugal and, before that, tribal Berber Jews in Morocco. Wipe away the last few generations and the Industrial Revolution, and there's agriculture in all our genes. We just have to access it and let it unfold. (That definitely includes Jews--after all, one of the most well-known, even to people who've never met Jews, is Tevya from "Fiddler on the Roof," who was in the dairy business and milked cows for a living).





So, this journal is about my life's So, this journal is about my life's experience, including Chad, Benjamin and Adina. And it emphasizes not the neurotic or sarcastic parent you'd find in Woody Allen, Philip Roth or Larry David's histrionics that portray Jews comically attempting to adjust to American life. But I, your father, feel a purpose, agenda and life experience that I feel are worth hearing. Or so I hope.

Now, I'm off on an e-bike adventure with my son Ben. More to come.....!







Copies of **Farm Journal** can be purchased at our farm stands for \$10. This book was printed and bound by Community Printing, Takoma Park's friendly and expert printer, established in 1973.