

Harvest Time

Lex Students at Organic Gleaning By Rebecca Woloch

On a greater-than-dreary October Saturday morning, cold and rain-filled, a collection of volunteers gathered at the farm "Berries on Bryan Station" (berriesonbryanstation.com) to glean the fields of peppers, onions, greens and tomatoes. Erik Walles and Gayle Tomkinson had kindly agreed to allow the harvesting of their CSA's fields with the proceeds benefiting a local soup kitchen to feed our area homeless.



What makes this unique is not simply the fact that a local farmer would allow us to harvest what was left over after his season. Not even the fact that the wonderful produce was organically grown. Nor was it that the synchronizing of food surplus with a forecasted hard freeze equated to feeding those in need. What made this day special for those involved was that it involved young people full of energy, undaunted by the weather, and filled with great pride that what they did was harvest 185 pounds of beautiful produce to feed those whose lives are less fortunate than their own.

In late September, Miranda Hileman (featured in *Ace* 7/16/09) coordinated with "Berries" to glean the fields in keeping with one of her many goals as the 2009 Compton Mentor Fellow: to promote the value of sustainable agriculture, the importance of school gardens and the reconnection we must maintain with our natural environment — where our food comes from and why it is important to know.

Miranda volunteered at Berries over the summer — assisting with harvesting and preparing baskets for the CSA members. Through her connections with the Catholic Action Center and her work on its vegetable garden located on the Leestown BCTC campus she arranged to have what could have gone to waste instead feed others.

Unfortunately, October 14 dawned miserable, cold and wet — the rain incessant and unforgiving. Temperatures hovered at 40 degrees. Miranda wore her galoshes. Erik gathered eggs and several cartons of his incredible homemade berry preserves. We got wet. Really wet. But harvested 80 pounds of

eggplant, 71 pounds of peppers and baskets of greens and dried beans.

While standing in the field covered in mud with red frozen hands I asked Miranda to not be disappointed in our numbers. It is easy to be a volunteer on a warm, sunny day but not so much when it is bitter and dismal. I reminded her (as well as myself) that "the homeless are no less hungry simply because it's cold and wet outside."

When it became evident that three people could not possibly harvest what was left on the farm we made a Plan B to return again over the weekend.

Anyone who knows Miranda knows that she spreads herself thin. More importantly, they know that she is energetic, optimistic, an incredible worker and filled with beautiful, altruistic and far-reaching goals. She's spent many a Saturday pitching in at the Dunbar Memorial Garden — a native plant community garden located on the campus of Dunbar High School that is dedicated to the memories of students who left us too soon. During that time she's formed a strong connection to us, to the students and to the many others involved in our project.

So on Saturday morning, while many others enjoyed a warm bed and sleeping in — the Dunbar Memorial Garden changed its work schedule, went to "Plan B" and several of our regulars gathered at Berries to help Miranda glean the fields. Among the crew: two Dunbar Seniors, one Dunbar Sophomore and one Dunbar graduate home on Fall Break from the University of Michigan. They chased chickens and laughed in the cold. They picked and weighed produce. They gathered eggs. They left the farm knowing that what they did was important and good and they didn't begrudge those who stayed home in comfort. They did what they did because they love hard and unconditionally. Because we've learned working together at Dunbar that we lean on each other and help each other in every way we can.

Sometimes you just have to act. We did. Next year I hope to read of incredible gleanings on farms all over Lexington with people who want their actions to speak louder than their words. In Jesse's words "that would be awesomeness" and yeah, I think it would. ■

Rebecca Woloch is the President of the Jesse Higginbotham Technology Trust, a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to continuing the work of her son, who died in an automobile accident in April 2007. The creation of the Dunbar Memorial Garden was one of her son's many projects. Gleaning fields at Berries on Bryan Station, she thinks, is something her son would be infinitely proud of her for doing. jessehigginbotham.com.



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