

SKYHILL: A LOVE STORY

April 12, 2023



Member Submission By Louise Johnson

My love affair with laying hens began after I retired from teaching in Brooklyn and purchased 15 acres on a hilltop plateau an hour east of Albany. I lived alone, surrounded only by sky and distant trees. My goal was to model food as a key solution to pollution, chronic disease and climate change. And to model this by holding events and inviting PSFC members, etc., to visit this piece of nature I quickly named Skyhill. This was 2004.

I was a member of PSFC's Environmental Committee and became its upstate organizer, forming a loose coalition of upstate food coops around lobbying (we called it "informing") about problems with GM/GE/GMO food. PSFC joined with Albany's Honest Weight Coop to create NYSAGE (New York State Against Genetic Engineering), and for almost three years we worked with farmers, statewide coop members and some scientists, to repeatedly inform in every office in the state legislature about our three bills. Members of PSFC trekked to Albany for two lobby days and other events. The six

public events and resulting newspaper articles added to our outreach about GMOs. Three bills were passed in the assembly only. The Senate was a piece of work.

Our expectation was to inform, which we achieved. I learned enough about the corrupt and dysfunctional New York legislature and about the art of lobbying to realize why folks speak of the need for revolutions. That was 2007.

THIS IS AN APPEAL: URBAN RETURN-MIGRATION TO RURAL FARMLAND, THE ROOTS OF ALL AMERICANS, IS NEEDED TO PROTECT OUR WATER, SOIL, AIR, AND FOOD.

I built a barn and bought 25 laying hens which became over 300 hens in a few years. Hatching eggs led to 26 roosters in one season, and to 14 years of unique descendants of inter-bred heritage breeds. I continue to be stunned daily by the diverse beauty and “chickenalities” I live among.

I want to relate stories of chicken prowess, intelligence, problem-solving, social organization, playfulness, sharing and caring. My very out-of-date website still has a few photos. I also want to stay at Skyhill forever. But, as I approach 80 years, I have run out of stamina and am no longer able to lift and haul and run eggs to the Albany coop. I plan to take only a few hens and some fertile eggs to Maine where my daughter has moved and awaits me.





IMAGE COURTESY OF LOUISE JOHNSON



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I leave behind a legacy of two separate egg farms, with five new, unique and spacious chicken abodes (one, is also a greenhouse), a lovely stream and waterfall, more than a hundred new fruit and nut trees and shrubs, a large raised-bed garden, acres of woodland, solar panels, two passive solar homes and perhaps lots of hens in need of someone who will also love chickens.

Both rural properties were transformed from wannabe suburban houses with ridicu-

lously huge lawns to model communities of chickens moving freely among extensive climate victory gardens. This is an appeal: urban return-migration to rural farmland, the roots of all Americans, is needed to protect our water, soil, air, and food. Meaningful and fun work for retirees, and all others.

COOPERATION, AN UNDERRATED VALUE

April 12, 2023



By Cynthia Blayer

Last January, when the local temperature hovered around ten degrees, my building

and several others were affected by a nearby water-main break. No water for several days, the DEP outside drilling round the clock—first trying to locate the break and then fix it. We brought them coffee and donuts at night and thanked them. We learned that our local representative was posting updates on Facebook, through a group called Park Slope Together. I joined.

The situation was resolved and I continued to check Park Slope Together from time to time. Questions about physical therapist recommendations, restaurants, housing, lost pets and injured family members were met with numerous helpful answers. Someone wrote about their neighbor, a recently widowed woman who was deeply depressed by the loss of her husband, hadn't had a job in many years and had not handled her own financial matters. Within minutes people chimed in—one person recommended a widows' support group, another offered to craft the woman's resume. Another time someone posted about an injured street cat they wanted to help but had no car to get to a vet. Soon several people with cars asked for the location and volunteered to stop by. Someone had a cat carrier—help was on the way.

It's a good feeling to be part of a community that tries to help one another. Park Slope Food Coop was started for this reason. Almost 50 years ago, 12 friends and neighbors began the Coop, so that people in the community could work together to have healthy food available at reasonable prices.

At a recent General Meeting, some of that cooperative spirit was evident in the vote to bring back childcare, which passed 134 to 18. When some staff members expressed concern about the additional work this would create for them, the couple who presented the issue—both teachers, and parents of two young kids—volunteered their time and that of other parents they knew to make it work. They would help in any way they could—cleaning and setting up the childcare room, staffing it and starting a committee to oversee things.

When some pointed out that people needing childcare at the Coop were in the minority of the overall membership, General Manager Joe Holtz said that “as a cooperative

all voices count, even when they are not in the majority.”

And we do all get to have our say—at General Meetings, in letters to the *Gazette*, by voting. But then we have to put aside our differences and cooperate and come up with a workable solution for the greater good. The effects of lack of cooperation can be seen regularly in the outside world—mass layoffs and millions without health insurance, pollution rather than sustainability, war. But we can do better. In our relatively small community at PSFC, we can put aside polarizing anger and work together cooperatively. In the end, only cooperation will save the day.

Cynthia Blayer, a longtime coop member, has served on the Environmental Committee and as a board member of the Mid-Atlantic Food Cooperative Alliance (MAFCA).

WHY NOT CURBSIDE PICKUP?

April 12, 2023

By Louis Lavelle



Photograph by Mia Tran

I've been deeply impressed, and eternally grateful, for the hard work, dedication, and creative thinking that have gone into the Coop's response to the coronavirus pandemic. We all owe the Coop leadership an enormous debt of gratitude.

