

MARKET MUSINGS

By Jan Freedman

What an absolutely spectacular Saturday we just experienced at the Farmers' Market. While it was unseasonably hot for late May, few were complaining and there was a steady flow of shoppers all morning.

It's still so early in the growing season that the farmers don't have much produce yet, but this weather will bring on the plants in short order and soon there will be more than asparagus, rhubarb and garlic scapes to join the greenhouse vegetables.

Of course, our vendors have a great deal more to offer than produce and I encourage you to walk through the Market to see what we all have available.

Now I'm going to introduce you to one of our new farmers, Alexander Waite.

Alexander is a very interesting young man, quite unlike most farmers I have met.

What he wrote about himself is so poetic, that I'm going to include much of what he said in his own words and you'll see what I mean.

Alexander is primarily a garlic farmer. His parents' farm is partly encircled by the Beaver River in Cannington, six acres of which is arable Otanabee loam where he grows his organic garlic. He is in the process of obtaining organic certification from Pro-cert.

Alexander grew up in an old school house east of Aurora where he enjoyed raw milk from neighbours and a vegetable garden every year. Healthy food, exercise and country air created an appreciation for things which fostered these values.

He studied political philosophy, logic, critical thinking, art and linguistics at university in Toronto and Montreal, desiring a classical education.

Alexander says, "Indeed I am still a hungry autodidact who loves to read and learn using many methods. A polymath, I am happy plunging into a subject of which I had no previous awareness, either building relevant skills quickly or moving on."

He has many years' experience in real estate and construction, restoring and decorating hundreds of houses before sale in Toronto.

This involvement with housing in an urban centre fostered an awareness of the need for affordable housing, and not just in cities.

Here is how Alexander describes his farm environment: "I am sitting outside listening to the symphony of spring peepers and birdcalls, including Half-Crow, our rooster. Wrens and a newly arrived oriole bring new sights and sounds to the cardinals, jays, dees and sparrows."

He adds, "Here at the riverhouse, we are accompanied by huge river otters, beavers and muskrat, mink and weasel. Blue herons wade upstream in close view from the log cabin perched 20 feet from the river's edge. Small and large hawks hover the fields and flattened grass in the morning is the only trace of deer that slept overnight. Harmony is a word that comes to mind."

Time spent in cities spawned an interest in urban agriculture. This, combined with an awareness of food (in)security and financial prudence regarding small scale farming led him to choose garlic as his crop. Garlic is the second most used spice in the world behind black pepper, and both have medicinal properties along with turmeric, ginger, onions to name but a few.

As Hippocrates said, "Let food be your medicine and medicine be your food."

Alexander's goal is to grow the most healing food possible and to preserve it in the most healing ways.

His parents create cutting and serving boards from a variety of beautiful old and often rare wood. They also make knives with handmade, jewel-like handles. Both of them are talented artists who work with various media.

I had the pleasure of meeting Alexander's mother today and can see where he gets his artistic vibe. I recommend that you make a point of visiting their booth in the park to see the boards, knives and garlic concoctions and to talk about anything from farming to sustainable living to philosophy.

See you at the Market!