

MARKET MUSINGS: A very wet Strawberry Festival

By Jan Freedman

Our second Special Event of the season, Strawberry Fest, took place on Saturday in the rain which caused us some problems. Some of our programming had to be cancelled as we couldn't ask children to sit on wet benches for Storytime with the library, for example. However, our intrepid band, the Coyotes, were great sports and played almost all morning, right up until the Market closed for the day. We're very grateful to them.

As the season progresses, the farmers have more and more Ontario produce appearing on their tables. You will find strawberries galore, as well as still some asparagus and rhubarb. There are now all kinds of beautiful salad greens as well as sprouts. I brought home some beet sprouts for the first time. Also available were spring salad greens mixed with edible flowers which would make a gorgeous presentation for guests.

The next new vendor I'd like to tell you about is Providence Hill Farm.

The owners describe it as a steadily evolving project that their family has been building together over the last several years. They grow non-certified organically using a low/no till approach which focuses on amending and improving the top soils over time, rather than depleting them which can happen in traditional farming. They make extensive use of tarps and row covers to help kill weeds and to protect from insect damage so there is no need to use any chemical sprays at all. While they grow a variety of seasonal market veggies, their main passion is producing beautiful artisanal lettuces and specialty greens such as arugula, spinach, mizuna, tatsoi, chard and kale. They also have a wide selection of organic micro greens which are amazing for their intense flavor as well as for containing many times the nutrients of their fully-grown forms. In addition, they are simply beautiful.

Both Beth and Lex grew up as city kids but had the desire for a more rural, self-sustaining life style in which to raise their three children. Let's just say that they read a lot of Harrowsmith magazines in their youth!

Beth had been taught the wonders of nature and the simple rustic life by her parents who stole the family away every weekend of her childhood to a small cabin they had built. The cabin had no power or running water and Lex also had fond dreams of his grandparents' farm in rural Slovakia.

Beth and Lex finally escaped from the city to rural Schomberg in the mid-90s and enrolled the children in Waldorf education. After a couple of moves, 14 years ago they took the plunge and bought a 12.5 acre farm just outside Nobleton. Their ultimate desire was to create a lifestyle where they could be home fully for the family while comfortably supporting themselves.

Beth began an in-home dog boarding facility and Lex adjusted his company's structure to allow him to run it remotely from home. That's when they realized they had the time that most of their friends spent commuting in which to explore their interests. They always had loved gardening and loved the seasonal rituals of growing some of their own food. So, when Lex began to passionately educate himself about some of the newer methods of intensive micro farming, they were all hooked. Their sons, Griffin and Landis, help on the farm and daughter, Aurora, helps at the Aurora Farmers' Market on Saturdays. She loves this time when she can connect with the community and she gets a well-deserved rest from her adorable and active 11/2 year old son, Jack. I encourage you to find their booth in the park and try some of their exquisite greens.

The next visit from Natalie Allan is on July 7 when she will again be teaching two yoga classes in the park. Her Prenatal class runs from 9.15-10.15 and the Hatha yoga class runs from 10.45-11.45 a.m.

I will tell you more about her in my next column.

See you at the Market!