

LINDA – Fieldnotes – Saturday, October 20, 2007

Subject: Harvest Festival at Red Hook Community Farm

Location: Columbia and Sigourney Streets, Brooklyn

Time: 2:30-5:00pm

[Notes are typed up on Sunday, October 21]

Tom Goodridge asked if I was interested in attending a harvest festival this weekend. He was thinking of attending as Green Man. Initially he told me I could get a look at community garden culture through this festival. He promised to send information through email. Before he did so I looked up the harvest festival, and he confirmed that this was the correct event. However, he warned that this was not the festival he was thinking of—Green Thumb did not organize this festival, and it would be held at Red Hook, a farm that sold its produce. He also warned me that it was quite far, requiring a bus after the subway. I decided to go anyway. Since Joey was around this weekend, I brought him with me.

Joey and I took the A train to the Jay St. Borough Hall stop. We walked a block and found the B61 stop. It seemed like a downtown area, with jewelers, . The white people at the stop, as well as Joey and I, stood out from the working black and brown people waiting there. Two heavysset Hispanic-looking women wore faded t-shirts over stretch jeans. A middle-aged black woman wore a frayed white kerchief over her hair. A 30-something dad with a baby and a stroller wore a warm yellow screen t-shirt and long beige cargo shorts. I only noticed what one of two white girls was wearing: a white hoodie under a white vest, jeans, and boots. Joey wore jeans and a sweater, and I wore a black warm-up jacket over brownish cotton pants.

The bus continued to pick up a similar mix of people: thin, trendy young white people and heavysset working people of color with tired faces. We drove through one neighborhood that looked completely gentrified, with expensive-looking restaurants and clothing stores. The area got more industrial towards the farm, with a few “edgy” galleries and “funky” coffeeshops. We also passed several community gardens. When we got to Van Dyke, all of the white people plus Joey and I got off, as expected. Only the white people plus Joey and I got off the bus.

We walked a few blocks to the farm, marked by a large sign. A table offered pamphlets and a binder with sign-in sheets. I took a pamphlet but did not sign the book. Joey and I decided to make a game of how many non-white people we would see. A brown-skinned man sat on a folding chair just inside the fence, appearing to be a security guard. We did not count him.

We entered the farm, which I later read was 3 acres. Immediately to our right were long rows of produce. We saw a thin Asian American girl dressed in leggings and purple head wrap walking with a white man among the crops. I quickly declared, “Any girl with a white man doesn’t count!”

85P
82P

We quickly gave up this game when the first “booth” we encountered was a canning workshop led by a round-faced African American woman. Excitedly I whispered to Joey that this might be Classy Parker, whose garden I had visited and whose possible work Tom had dangled as enticement for me to attend the festival. [Later I found out this was her, when an audience member addressed her by name.] I also recognized a thin, light-skinned African American woman as someone from Just Foods, an organization that does workshops and supports local farms, community gardens that produce food, and CSAs (community-supported agriculture, which Tom had just told me about as well).

A wood structure covered an area set up with two tables at both ends and about 15 white plastic chairs. About 25 people were sitting and standing around, watching Classy’s workshop. [The number of participants waxed and waned throughout the hour, with up to 30 and less than 15 by the end.]

The audience was mostly thin young “crunchy” white women. By crunchy I mean activist-looking types underdressed in earth-toned cotton with no makeup and flat hair. There were a few young people of color, all female, led by a middle-aged thin Asian American woman with a formidable camera. Joey had my camera, but without explicit instruction from me only took pictures of Classy and her volunteers. A few crunchy white males hung around the edges, with one ambiguously raced man who could have been South Asian or anything else sitting on the pavement. Another Asian woman sat with her white friends.

Classy was showing the crowd how to can vegetables. A dark-skinned, round-faced woman, she wore a white button-down long-sleeve shirt with the sleeves rolled up under a printed apron, and a chef’s hat. Her table was set up with a burner, a large pot with a wire rack inside, spices, a few mason jars of okra and peppers, and lots of raw vegetables. Vegetables included string beans, sliced red peppers, squash, and peeled garlic.

She asked for a few volunteers. A few people got up. Classy took mason jars out of boiling water with a wooden spoon. The canners stuffed various vegetables and spices into the mason jars. When full, Classy asked if they wanted vinegar or a pickling solution warming on a smaller burner. After the pickling solution or vinegar was poured in, lids were screwed onto the mason jars. Classy informed us that after boiling for 20 minutes, the lids would need to be tightened again, and again after cooling. The jars would then need to be stored 30 days.

Classy was quite the performer, cracking lots of jokes and telling stories. I did not take notes at the time, but on the bus ride home I recorded some of them
“gimme some love” to request applause, cheering, and whistles
“you look beautiful” to the audience
“put some *love*” into it [the jars, with “smiles” being included as love]

Stories about people stealing her jars, including her 80+year old father stealing the tomato-okra-corn mix

[Following notes typed up on Monday, October 22, 2007]