Friday, July 28, 2017

Remarks at the Friday reception in the Ocean View Field at the UCSC Farm
By Orin Martin, Chadwick Garden manager
Part of the 50th Anniversary of the UCSC Farm & Garden’s “First 50” Celebration

“They say the first sentence in any speech is always the hardest. Well, that one’s behind me. But I have a feeling that the sentences that follow, the 3rd, the 5th, the 10th, and so on, up to its final line will be just as hard.”

Not my words, but a quote from Wislawa Szymborska, from her Nobel Prize for Literature acceptance speech. She is a Polish poet. Her words are often simultaneously ethically, sardonically and playfully serious. She’s a muse, a reverential iconoclast, after my own heart.

The subsequent sentences that follow will indeed be hard, because I’m asked to paint a picture here—perhaps a portrait, definitely a landscape—a narrative of our history across time, the arc of our trajectory. No mean feat and in 5–6 minutes.

So you might find me
• Navigating neon certainties
• Skirting thorny doubts
• Walking that fine line between loose and disciplined—much like the NBA champion Golden State Warriors, for we too rely on strength in numbers...
• And grappling with possibilities and constraints and rarely mindful of repercussions and consequences—2 great garage band names, possibilities/constraints, repercussions/consequences

For today, this weekend, is about the cohort 1967–2017 and onward. A big cross-pollination event. So sometime this weekend, 1967, go find 2017 and visa versa, and 1974 find 1989 anon, and appreciate, be appreciative, but mostly appreciate that the Farm and Garden has always been about people in successive waves doing things for people they may never know and affording others the same opportunity that was afforded them, only better—superlatives good, better, best … for cross pollination ensures biodiversity, and a broader genetic base ensures survival and adaptability of a species and hey—are we a species, or what?

But beyond those basics we want to ensure that we are a species that flourishes and creates. A “species” that has as its blueprint, individual variability and inclusion. For you, the cohort, are narratives of the story—who, what, where, when, and most definitely ask each other, “why”? “Why did you come here?” And listen to one another.

A quote from Page Smith, one of our many founding mothers and fathers, a mentor to many (including me):
“Alan Chadwick’s garden is ‘a garden of the mind’ as much as it is of the soil, and like all genuinely inspired creations it has the power to stir us to new dreams, to a new vision of what humanity and nature can do, together.”

So it is then and now and now and then and moving forward.

But inspiration has its fingerprints all over both our history and this event. So more from Szymborska:

“Inspiration is not the privilege of poets and artists. There is, there has been, there always will be a certain group of people whom inspiration visits. It is made up of all those who've consciously chosen their calling and who do their job with love and imagination." (points to crowd)
And that is you the apprentice cohort.

She goes on,
“Yes, it may include doctors, teachers, gardeners—I could list a hundred professions. Their work becomes one continuous adventure as long as they manage to keep discovering new challenges in it. Difficulties and setbacks never quell their curiosity. A swarm of new questions emerges from every problem they solve. Whatever inspiration is, it’s born from a continuous, ‘I don’t know’. That is why I value that little phrase so highly. ‘I don’t know’. It is small but it flies on mighty wings. It expands our lives to include small spaces within us, as well as outer expanses in which our tiny earth hangs, suspended.”

At this juncture, it looks like farmers, gardeners, teachers, activists will always have their work cut out for them, for our work has no expiration date and an indefinite shelf life, as it were.

So I say, be curious—always ask questions, endlessly; be infinitely inspired, for I have been and continue to be inspired by you—all of you—the cohort.

Yes, it is a cohort—a group of people with a similar feature or focus, certainly, but also like that other more original definition of cohort—1/10th of a Roman Legion/550 soldiers. You, though small in numbers, have all the thrust and effectiveness of just such a cohort, but (and a big but here) only in a more gentle, peaceable manner.

Our history is a narrative, certainly, but a narrative of grace and serendipity, the recounting of moments, blessed and inexplicable moments, when someone did something for someone else, bestowed a gift and gave something beyond what was required by circumstance (these “someones” comprise a long list), a cast of characters with character.

You all are on that list too. And it all started with the Rosetta stone, Alan Chadwick—artist, actor, gardener, and inspired visionary.
And of course, the original band of apprentices, 1967—1971/72.

So we owe all a debt of gratitude.

So I thought I might end now (and thank goodness for that, eh?). End first with a Latin quote I love (really dude, I mean, who loves Latin?).

“A posse
ad esse”

“From being possible
to being actual”

And lastly, I thought, a charge, a heartfelt admonition, a call to action, a favor, I beg of you—So I searched literature and philosophy through both modernity and antiquity, I even consulted the 9 muses, you know, Calliope and her posse. But it all came back stark, dark, empty, devoid of substance, a frightening silence—sorry, so sorry.

But no, wait, I’ve got something, probably as a result of too much time on the cruiser bike with the iPod on shuffle—the only modality I know ...

I got Eddie Vedder (post Pearl Jam), Eddie Vedder, a man whose music, if you aren’t careful, will shred your soul, rip your heart out. Eddie Vedder, a man who has made playing the ukulele cool—no mean feat.

So, a few words from his song “Rise”:

Such is the way of the world
You can never know,
Just where to put all your faith
And how it will grow?
Gonna rise up
Gonna turn mistakes into gold
Gonna rise up
Find my direction magnetically
And throw down my ace in the hole.

And I say, Yeah, rise up!
And do better
Work harder
And recklessly expend love and effort on a seemingly intractable world!
Make the world a garden.
And yeah, go on—
Throw down your ace in the hole
It’s money—as are all of you!

Thank you