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Dear Members: this newsletter is mostly a re-print of one I sent out in 2015. I felt it was a good time to do this as we have many new members since then. There is a series of 3 special newsletters on the website (click on "newsletters" on the top area of the home page.) There you can see info about how Root Connection got started, how many acres of farmland were saved by FARM LLC, the formation of Roots of Our Times, and how Farms for Life got started. It's really worth reading, and will give you a good feeling about your efforts to support local farming way beyond your weekly vegetables and this one farm. I encourage everyone to read them, and thank you for your support.

Next week is the last week of CSA. Please come! There will be a good harvest, as well as our end-of-the season sale of all odd lots of produce that may be left over.

Pre-season Signups are due now. It's not too late can still get the discount! Remember, if you do not have the funds to pay the whole cost now, you can fill out a form and put down a deposit to reserve your spot.

Winter Shares – take part in this program and ensure that you keep up your healthy eating habits!

The rest of this newsletter is devoted to the story of Farms for Life. This year, this grass-roots organization has distributed 12 tons of local fresh produce from 6 farms, which was enough to provide vegetable meals for at least 50,000 children and adults. Please take the time to read about how this all happened and how FFL was able to donate over 56 tons of produce in the past 5 years, while at the same time helping to keep 6 local farms in business! *(the above paragraph was not updated for 2017 – but FFL continues to grow!)*

And we would love it if all of you would consider making a small donation now to help FFL continue its work. **As you carry out your bags of the healthiest food you can get anywhere, remember that just \$10 from each member would help us provide the same thing to over 6,000 additional people who do not have access to healthy food.**

Following is the letter I wrote to RC members in 2009, which got everything rolling:

ROOTS OF HOPE

Dear Friends,

October 4, 2009

Whether long-time or new friends, you have been touched in some way by your "Root" connection. Improved health, satisfaction of giving your children the best for their bodies and spirits, a sense of community, - those may be some of the ways. Or maybe you became an investor and part of your heart is glad that you now are helping to protect a place which will be an experience for those to follow. Whether you are exploring the farm with steps that are quick and nimble, or on feet that are unsteady and painful, you have the opportunity to see what should be – a humble giving – "see what I can do!" the land speaks – "See what I can give" – "Just have hope".

This winter marks the 23rd year since I first set foot on this piece of ground. Stood out in the middle of this property on a windy, rainy November day looking at 11 acres of tangled chest high weeds and nothing else. "Well, if weeds will grow this big, it should be a good place for vegetables", I hoped. And every November since then has been a season of hope renewed again. The winter will pass, and a hopeful and dedicated team will arrive in late winter to begin another season. The thousands of transplants huddled in the greenhouses will be a hopeful reminder to us of successes to come. Our eyes may look out at water still covering parts of the fields, our skin may feel nothing but numbing cold winds and pelting rain, but our minds will be seeing acres of tiny plants, huddled under their row cover blankets, painstakingly planted one by one. With feet anchored in ankle deep mud, bent over humans are seeing in each emerging patch of drying ground, the hope of vibrant healthy food once again. Sometimes when I am in my warm trailer surrounded by my empire of graphs and planting charts, I

look out into the cold and catch sight of my son Jeff, off in the distance, huddled atop the tractor, gazing at the fields that, again, are too wet to work. He is the front line – without his efforts, nothing else can follow. I wonder “What is he thinking?” Something unprintable? The hard work of another season ahead? There’s got to be a lot of hope there too- a gift received from years devoted to this patch of ground that gives so much. A life’s lesson of humility and determination.

There should be a lot of satisfaction to be had with work that has been both successful and a benefit to the earth and its people. There is, and I’m grateful. But there is this little niggling voice that keeps at me. Has for the past 15 years or so. “That’s not enough,” it says, “there is more hope to be had, but only if it is given out”. “But I did, and I am”, my ego answers, “I gave, I worked, I built this farm from a patch of weeds!” As the voice became more persistent, I thought I was answering by encouraging and helping other farmers, developing a business plan that would pay its workers a fair wage, forming Roots of Our Times to protect this farm into the future – all good things, I’m thinking. But noooooo....Niggle, Niggle, Niggle! Ideas popped up, then excuses: “I’m too busy, too old, too tired, I give to charities, we donate shares, help other farms, serve on Boards, etc, etc.” Ego said, “You should retire, travel, have fun.” The Voice answered: “Nothing wrong with that, but does hope extend to others there? Do you really want to escape me?”

Then BLAM!! This past month there has been no escape. Everything I saw, heard, and read seemed to have materialized just to goad me on. A newspaper article about the CEO of World Vision quoted him as saying “What does God expect of you and what are you going to do about it?” Ok, that got cut out and taped up on the fridge right above the side by side pictures of the farm in all its glory, the sickly little girl standing beside her “food supply” (a garbage dump), and the one of nearly empty food banks shelves (no healthy food there!) Alright, Yep, Fine! I got the part about knowing what God expects of me- it’s been chirping away in my head for years- it was the “what are you going to DO about it” part that I had gotten real cunning at weaseling out of.

Another BLAM! Driving along in my car, minding my own business, go to switch on the radio, fumble the button and inadvertently land on a different station, just in time to hear a woman being interviewed. Her name is Kim Meeker, and she was recounting experiences from her Ranch in Oregon, called Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch. This Ranch is for abused horses and abused kids. Within 30 seconds her voice was reaching into that part of my brain that gets niggled, and my eyes were full of tears. At the end of the program, mention was made of a book she wrote, called, (get this) “A Bridge Called Hope”, and a sequel, “Hope Rising”. I knew I had to read this woman’s words – heck, I wanted to BE this woman – at least have some of the essence of what lives in her spirit. Read on for an excerpt from one of her writings:

“Hope is not only something we should aspire to attain...it is also something we should aspire to give. It is true that every life has weights that encumber it, tying us down to only “thinking” about giving hope to those around us...instead of *actually doing it*. It is easy to become so “anchored” in focusing on our own needs that we completely overlook those within our reach who are suffering. Hope implores us to release our grip on *everything* that truly holds us back from *doing* what we know in our hearts is right. Hope is released when we begin to understand that leading others toward the “bridge” has far less to do with what we say...than with what we *do*. Simply stated, the time has come to do more than just *feel*...we must *act*. Within each heart that has ever lived...there resides a choice. We have the *choice* to take action...through greatness or humility...to shoulder with the broken around us.”

Coincidentally, the day I’m writing this is the same date that my husband passed away on Oct 4 2002. So I feel compelled to tell another story. For many years, our winter activity was to “go to the Market” (meaning Pike Place). We would do this 2 or 3 times a week. Before departing, there was always what I called the “pocket ceremony”. While I was scurrying around, (impatient as usual) gathering hats, umbrellas, shopping bags, water bottles and counting out carefully saved shopping money, my husband’s hands would be pulling currency from concealed places. (He often said, “When I die, make sure to look through everything!”) Each bill would be carefully smoothed and individually folded, then deposited into an oft-mended pocket. There was no hurrying the pocket ceremony. Reaching our destination, we would set out for “the walk”. Up Pike Place all the way to First Hill we would climb. Then down through the International District to King Station and up First Avenue to The Market. Then it was hot soup time followed by shopping time. Good place to get cheap food, like neck bones to go with the greens in our freezer. Then it was visiting time. We would wind our way back through the market as well as street corners and alleys. Friends were there, with a smiling “Hey, there, hi ya George!” for him, and a “Hello, Mrs. Thomas” for me. By my association with my husband, I was someone worthy of respect. Laden down with packages, I would be offered a seat. Could be a cherished possession like an old bucket to sit on, or a shuffling around so that I could have the end of a bench. “Here – put those bags down, I’ll watch ‘em for ya”. I could rest for a while, or wander around unencumbered (my packages as safe as if there were armed guards standing over them) while I watched the next act of the pocket ceremony. Sometime during each

conversation, my husband's hand would reach for one of the folded bills. Depending on our situation, sometimes they might be fives, tens, or in particularly optimistic times, they could be twenties. In really bad times, sadly, nothing, but the conversations were just as warm nonetheless. Whether the hands doing the receiving were trembling, strong but discouraged, sick or just worn out, the gift was human touch, laughs, a look into the eyes, hope humbly given.

During one trying and scary year, our youngest son had to have several dangerous medical procedures, including two brain surgeries. So our walks often would have to start at Harborview Hospital and go in reverse. Some of our Street Friends now became our Team. Concerns for whatever problems they were having were momentarily put aside in their concern for ours. I'll never forget Billy. Now, Billy was an excellent prayer, and totally uninhibited – no amount of curious looks (unfortunately, sometimes looks of disgust) by passersby could deter his sometimes loud, sometimes quiet tearful prayers for our son. Occasionally, he would launch into a spirited rendition of his favorite hymn, aptly titled "Where Does My Hope Come From?"

Then we would stand for a time, watching this homeless man, with a body that had been ravaged by diabetes, carefully reach down to the ground, (a space where his feet should have been, but were no longer,) pick up his donation box, and carefully move himself to another corner- all his possessions hanging from a knapsack on the back of his wheelchair. Hope returned.

A new chapter?

The story of Billy (and all the Joes, Nancys, Bobs and Susies out there) illustrates the devastating affect that poor nutrition has on a large segment of our population. Coupled with the abysmal job we've done in food access, education and health care, the results are seen everywhere, and talked about everywhere, from written articles to sound bites. Obesity, childhood diabetes, heart disease are only a few of the effects. Saddest it seems, are the children who are affected and then grow up with no knowledge of how to do better for their own children.

Serving the most needy are various shelters, treatment centers and food banks. In the area of feeding their clients, economics usually takes precedent over nutritional value. Fresh produce is not reliably donated, and when it is, it is of poor quality and not organic.

Farmers who grow healthy food are, year after year, struggling to keep afloat. Farming is not a profitable business, at least not this kind of farming. The net profit is so small that it only takes a small blip in business to go from black to red. If farmers had another income source, a way to sell the rest of what they grow at near retail prices, it would be a much happier picture.

Can there be a bridge?

Of The Root Connection's membership, typically 60% consists of what I call the "core group". These members reliably renew year after year. Our CSA system suits their needs and lifestyle. The other 40% need to be recruited each year and has a large turnover. If that 40% is not filled, the farm struggles financially. The farmers want to do what they do best – grow food and help people, but a good part of that gets buried under the pressures of having to deal with the constant competitive nature of the business. I am involved with 3 other farms, and they all have the same problems.

I would like to see a new non-profit started which would address these problems.

October 12 2015 present day:

After writing that letter to the Root Connection membership, people stepped forward to get involved. By the middle of 2010, we had a name – **Farms for Life** (website is farms4life.org) – a Board of Directors, and had gotten our 501c3 non-profit status from the IRS. We developed a tag line: "**Linking local farmers with those in need of healthy food**" Starting with some generous donations from individuals, and a Grant from United Way to build a cooler, we were already donating food to agencies that serve those in need of healthy food.

Since then, Farms for Life has grown from 5 dedicated volunteers to a large team who over the past 5 years have distributed over 112,000 pounds (56 tons!) of produce from 6 local community farms. We now provide weekly deliveries to 13 agencies,

which include agencies helping youth and adults to transition from homelessness, domestic violence shelters, street feeding programs, young child care centers, community kitchens, and food banks.

Farms for life pays participating farms a lower than retail price for their produce, but it is enough to cover their costs of harvesting, washing and packing surplus produce that otherwise would likely go to waste. In the past 5 years Farms for Life has put over \$150,000 in the pockets of low-income farmers which helps them stay in business. Since agencies receive this food free, they can use their already stretched budgets to fund the other services they provide while at the same time providing food that improves the health of their clients.

Blessings to all of our Root Connection family. We appreciate you!

I hope you got a lift out of reading that. Your efforts have wide-reaching consequences.

So I didn't have room to do the "Are you a plant?" essay, but I will have it in next weeks newsletter

-Claire