

Katie Goins
Paper #3- Transcript

Katie: Alright, so first I have to ask you your name, your job title, and the name of the organization you work for; for both the farm and the construction job

JP: Well, my name is Jason Paul, I work with Andrew Schenker at Green Star farm, which is a local organic farm. I define local as; you can walk to the farm from where you live. We grow organically certified vegetables on Jenelle road and off of Glade road, which are both from the Virginia Tech campus within three miles and one mile to the separate places

Katie: Ok, umm and for the construction job, what's your job title and the organization?

JP: I only do construction because it's a skill of mine and I have free time occasionally, and I mainly only do it for people in need of a job, such as something rotting or structural. I do not personally like to do aesthetic work or to rip something down and re-do it. So I have a few jobs lined up starting in November where they have rotting boards because something is 15 years old and the seal is gone. Since I'm aware of how to fix 'em I do it, although ... you know ... I don't care what it looks like when it's done. It'll work, it'll be neat, but it needs to be functional and that's my only thing I care about. If you look at my house it's the same way.

Katie: I love your house it looks really cool.

JP: Thank you. It'll be nicer in two months when I have some free time. We are putting the whole house on stilts somewhat, because its built on a poor foundation with soil that eroding downhill, so slowly we have jacked it up and put it up on cedar, a cedar log and nine or ten locust logs that we've harvested

Katie: yourself?

JP: Yes, from forests from the area. Usually its just people who are try to, you know, make a road in town, or make a road for some sort of business or a greenway. Folks ask us to come help cut the trees down and we only say yes if we can get some wood out of it. So we go there and harvest firewood and we go there and get locust logs ourselves and use 'em for either... we'll

Katie: who is we?

JP: Andrew, the owner and starter of green star farm. We'll do it for our benefit as well. So it's time we have money we don't totally care for.

Katie: Have you know Andrew for a long time?

JP: I met Andrew when I was about six months into college, and I pursued getting a job in town while I went to school, that didn't necessarily make me money but was something I like to do, and I thought what I like to do is something that's important and that was ... food. So I choose to go work on an organic farm and the happened to be less than a mile from where I lived so I started volunteering there because at our farm we don't make enough to pay people. Number one because people we hire or who come volunteer are not always worth ... paying. But other than that you're there because you barter for your food, for the vegetables we grow, because it's a high quality. So that's why I started volunteering. And after three years of volunteering I moved away after I graduated and came back and asked him to work with him full time. And here I am and it looks like we're going to do it for a few more years in the future.

Katie: is the pay good, enough to cover the bills and stuff?

JP: Right now I don't have too many expenses in my life, at this point its ... the way our farm works is the house I live in is paid for through the farm because they grow food on my side as of the street as well. They do give me a stipend of money, and I take it all in check, which I cash, and I have not been able to spend it. I live pretty frugally. I do put some in the bank. Its not a very high salary, but you can live off of it. As my job title last year though in the future I think I will make more money if that matters as our farms grows.

Katie: are they expanding it or...

JP: We don't want to expand it... they don't want to expand it, Andrew and Lauren ... Andrew and Lauren are a married couple who run the farm. They don't want to expand it because it supports their family and that's all the care about. They don't want to make it...they don't want to make it to envelop... they don't want it to overtake their lives, but now they're starting to get folks who can also do as much as they can do, which is... growing more and expanding it, I think they're starting to see that, so we may expand it. If they don't expand it we'll expand small things on the farm.

Katie: like the greenhouse?

JP: The greenhouse ... we had a small greenhouse that probably was twenty square feet that was good for our seedlings. This year we built a greenhouse that was 40 feet by 20 feet and that was this winter between... it probably ...I asked my girlfriend Sally how long it took us to build the greenhouse and she said "two weeks!" Yeah, it may have been two weeks but it was one week of thinking, two days of doing, one week of thinking two days of doing. So two weeks of work and it was dug into the hillside so it's...it's a passive solar greenhouse.

We do other things such as plant different perennials that require high maintenance that sell for a high dollar in town, such as fig trees. We've established a

pretty good fig terrace on a south-facing slope on my side of the street. They get good afternoon sun and hopefully that's an economical cash crop.

Katie: Umm how long have you worked there?

JP: I started working in January part time (they only asked me to live in that house to work a couple...two days a week). But because with what I do is where I live, you know you wake up in the morning and you don't have anything to do on a Wednesday morning...am I gonna either help build the greenhouse or am I gonna, you know, go for a walk in the snow? And some day's I would help build the greenhouse, and some days I would go for a walk in the snow. But for the most part I chose to work so I've been full time since that January.

And the work does continue throughout the winter, there's always something you can do to improve what you do. But I've been a part of the farm for about five years now.

Katie: is there any real downtime on the farm, I know you just said there's still stuff to do but is that a more chill time?

JP: We do...it's real important to us to distinguish between...because its our farm and our decisions and our business...we try to make a certain point to decide we're going to work from these structural hours, and we're gonna work starting at nine o'clock... and we're gonna try to work till four-thirty....these days of the week, a couple days of the week. And we're gonna try to be regular about our hours, not so much about long hours, but be regular. We know what it takes to get stuff done. So we try to be efficient with the time we have, but we try to have our time off. Because with your time off you can allow yourself to think, to do your own projects which makes you happy.

Katie: Would you describe a typical day like in the summer or fall or in the busiest time?

JP: well I'll give you a couple examples

From the peak time, which is pretty much from equinox to equinox, which is, you know... March to September. Or I guess it'd be... the main growing season is from April to October. On Monday ... we have two, or really we have three places we farm. Two of which are on Janelle road in Elliot (?) Valley, and one of which is on Glade road, and they're about four miles apart. And because markets are on Wednesday and Saturday, we have to meet and pick to make those markets to provide our vegetables as most fresh as possible so on Mondays and Thursdays we'll spend all day at Emily's on Glade road. And that's a full days work on our, you know...half our property's over there, but I would say 2/3 of our vegetables are grown there, of our cash crops. So two days a week we spend full time on glade road, which is a drive for us. Sometimes we bike, its true, sometimes we bike home, we

don't need the truck there but we generally bring it Mondays and Thursdays. So, um, Tuesday afternoon, and Wednesday, and Friday afternoon which is which is less than a day before market, we go there and pick, so that's usually between 3 hours if we both go, six if one of us goes, depending on the crop you know. Peas and beans take a long time to pick, so they'll be a long, you know...if we have peas and beans ready, we'll be there for longer. In the summer time, at the height we'll be there longer because there's more crop to pick. In late fall we'll be there for less, because there's less to pick. Umm, that leaves Tuesday mornings, which I'll be at home, either just doing garden work around my home, or you know, there's some things I can pick, for Wednesday market, but generally I don't. And uh, Wednesday morning I will usually pick the stuff fresh like lettuce mix, stuff that won't really preserve as well...for market. I will pick you know a chard, any kind of lettuce green that's either you know a cooked green or a heavy green, I pick that on Wednesday mornings, or anything I have time for. And I also will prep vegetables we picked on Tuesday afternoon to bring to market. And that includes, you know if we have a beet, we have to clean it. You can't just pull the beet out of the ground and sell it because ... you have... it doesn't sell. It has to be clean and prepped and that's something we have to do and I think that's unfortunate. I'd rather just see the customers come out to the farm and pick it but, you know if you want to get the top dollar for the product you have to... provide it presentable... which is actually ...a restaurant, which is the highest dollar you can have is to have it cooked, but you know that's not they way we do it. So that's my Wednesday morning. My Wednesday afternoon is the farmers market. I... I sell and that brings me to Thursday which we spend a full day on glade road. And Friday is Friday afternoons we pick, Friday morning is more of a work around the farm kindof thing, do the tasks that need to be done, whether its take care of the tomatoes, take care of the peppers, you know, take care of the samposi, take care of anything, any crop that needs to be taken care of. Sometime we'll send one of us on Friday sometimes we'll send two of us to pick. Saturday is an early market so there's nothing to do in the morning for me but Andrew wakes up early and picks the head lettuce before market starts so it as fresh as it can be. Saturday afternoon we try to relax, Sunday we try not to work. That's our general week.

This time of year being almost November, nothing is pressing anymore. We're getting ahead of the garden work and the garden cleanup, and so we start doing construction jobs around the home. When I say construction that means home improvement that you have to get done that you don't have time for during the growing season. Or ... stuff to prep for the growing season next year, you know, time to get ahead. So this year I'm working on my fig...you know my thirty foot long group of fig tree's I planted. You know I'm tryin' to put manure in that soil I'm tryin' to build a nice terrace for them to grow and expand. Does it have to get done? No. But if it gets done that's something else that benefits us maybe in three or four years. And our house is...my house is, cause its and old house, an old coal mining house, is slowly starting to erode down this hillside, so I'm shoring it up...I'm making it more feasible. We're putting a woodstove in right now, so that wood we got that we you know...locust post for the greenhouse, locust posts for our trellises, locust posts for my home, locust posts for my firewood. I'm cutting it, I'm chopping it. Or

I'm cutting it and leaving it in stacks for my friends who come over my house and they can chop it because, someone to chop wood for a half hour with is fun, but for me to do it for hours...it's not fun. So part of what I do is educate and get people I know involved in growing food, and getting used to doing some work, because I do feel that people don't necessarily do work these days. They kinda feel like going to school is good enough for them. Personally when I was in school that wasn't good enough for me, that's why I took a volunteer job about six hours a week every Monday on the farm.

Katie: Is that what you like best about your job, getting out an actually working? Or...

JP: I have to work. I never found a challenge in school. I didn't really think it was for me. It was too slow to get to what you wanted to do. Too many processes, too many people wanted to do it. Too much, you know ... its almost like government subsidizing agriculture...there's just too much involved in what you do...there's no freedom. There's no freedom of what you want to do. My father always told me to work for myself, and that's why I do construction on the side, because it's easy for me, I know how to do it. Farming I think is the future for me. So I do it because I think it's important. And I want to...well its your own... you know if it ever comes down to it you need to be able to provide food for yourself and your family. That's what needs to get done. It's the number one, besides water, food is what needs to get done. I mean we can always deal with cold in our homes but...fire, shelter, water... I mean fuel, shelter, water and food, what else is there? Its the skills you need to survive I guess.

Katie: What did your parents do?

My father, he grew up in a coal-mining town, first one to leave, in central Pennsylvania. He had to beg to go to school and when his family allowed him to go to school, college, he pursued becoming a podiatrist. He wanted to be a doctor and he learned that, overhearing a conversation from a podiatrist, that you have a couple of appointments a day and that's all you have to do. So it gave him a lot of free time and that what he pursued and liked to do. My mother was schooled in accounting, so she worked for a big company for awhile, and then out in California my father got bit by a rattlesnake on his left wrist, and he could no longer get insured, because his left hand wasn't strong enough. It kinda shook, so we moved to the east coast where we started buying old Victorian houses on college campuses, and gutting 'em and rebuilding 'em to rent out to the highest dollar, which means more bedrooms and more, a lot of shared living space. And in New Jersey there's no laws about how many people you can have in a house, the only laws are the size of the house, which is which is 30% of the lot has...cannot ... not more than 33% of the lot .. or I think its close to 30% cannot be covered by asphalt, which is the driveway, the foundation, and any other garage included. So we put as many students as we could in the house. So growing up I was in charge of maintaining these houses, which just meant get it past the code and figure out how wiring or the roofing has to be done so it doesn't leak. So...was it fun? No. Was it fun when I look back on it? Yes. Because now I get

too see...it was almost like I was a ...I don't know I hang out with a lot of engineering students these days and they're given problems and they're like ... it's a word problem and they gotta figure out the answer like while growing up I had to figure out the problem, you know which is simpler than their engineering problems but you know at 14, how do you keep this roof from leaking? Or you know where's the problem? There's a leak. Ok, I know that, where's it coming from? Or ok, her light doesn't work. Why doesn't her light work? And you just follow the electricity back to where it goes, there's four stages on the way you know, its switch A, switch B, you know the connections and all the way down to the fuse box. Or the panel box, depending on how old the house was. So that's what we did growing up, my parents. And now my mother she does something different now she's the accounting of our business, the family business, and uh she also decided to work at the school, the local school, doing the accounting for the money for managing the middle school and the high school in our town... because of health insurance reasons. Because the school offers very good insurance reasons.

Katie: Does your job come with health insurance?

JP: I'm not sure if my job comes with real health insurance or not to be honest with you. I do know that we ... we do do extra things only for the sake of covering health insurance for Lauren and Andrew's family. For awhile he made scones every morning because he figured out that if he spends four hours a week every Saturday morning from three thirty to...six, ok so that three and a half hours or so... that would pay for his health insurance for his family for an entire year. I am insured through them somewhat... although I guarantee you it doesn't include dental or anything like that. Although I guess on our farm Lauren is uh [laughs] she's an apothecary...she's a witch doctor. There's a lot of people who come into her with problems for their kids or for themselves who are seeking external medicine, local medicine, getting the roughage in their system, and she'll you know, she'll recommend some of the herbs she grows and so I guess I do have ready access to that sort of medicine and such, but I...I definitely do not have a health insurance plan that a regular American would consider top of the line or even average. Although I think my lifestyle more than makes up for health insurance... do many people agree with that? Probably not, but I think its ok...at this point ...being young.

Katie: So, if you could change on thing about you job, what would it be?

JP: I wouldn't bring stuff to the farmer's market. I would make...I would like it... Listening to Joseph Saltin talk at the sustainability week on Monday at the lyric theater, he talked about the farmers market and being more than just a couple growing a couple vegetables extra and then selling them at market. You know, get out there and pursue it and make things happen, be a larger farm because that's what you need to do to feed your town to feed your area. You know, you cannot just be ...an acre, growing on half the acre and feeding somebody you can maybe... Partially feed yourself. So he's saying grow and do something with it. I'd like to see our farm grow to be more of the high quality vegetables that are grown in town that

you *want* grown locally, that you want to be able to go out and pick, you know, at one o'clock for your one thirty meal. Or you want to pick them at noon for your dinner that night. So you know our farm is more of a garden than a farm...I want to see us working more with the community gardens in town. Working with the vegetable growers. You know I mean everyone can grow a tomato plant...but I want to see us...I want to see us help those folks who never grew up growing a tomato plant, you know grow enough for them and their family more often than they can, or a better quality tomato. I want to see us grow some herbs, even basil, I mean pesto is a big part of my diet, on pizza and such. I want to see us I guess work more to help other people garden. And I want to see us help community gardens because they grow together as opposed to other small ten by ten gardens where they have six ears of cornyou know...a tomato plant...a pepper plant that produces two peppers.

Katie: [laughs] that's me.

JP: I don't think that's right. I think you should have ten families with one acre, and you can grow all the peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, squash and herbs you could possibly want, you know eggplant even. But the thing is I'd like to see our farm grow is with these community gardens I want to see us grow and teach them to grow spring and fall gardens as well. Andrew tells me that if he ever had a CSA which is a community supported agriculture, that he's rather just ...or if he...if he could...there's three growing seasons on our farm. The spring, the summer, and the fall. And if he could get rid of one of them he'd get rid of the summer crops, because to him the fall garden and the spring garden are the most beautiful. So if you ask somebody who has a garden in town, we ask them what they grow, and they'll name you know half the summer crops we grow, but they'll name all the summer crops, and you ask them how many ...how's your fall garden I ask them they had no idea.

Katie: yeah, I have no idea what a fall garden is.

They don't but we want to teach them, that you know you can provide for yourself, up to a half to three quarters of what you need...in nine months of the year you know, maybe....six...is a better number for a lot of people getting into it, but you can provide a substantial amount of your food in nine of those months. And that doesn't even get into the winter gardens we try to do. So I think there's a lot of ...you know and hour a week here, an hour a week there, if you're doing it together it works. So I'm trying to get people together to grow communally because its more efficient. Its easier to grow ... like you've grown corn you said

Katie: yeah

JP: Sure, well why half a dozen ears of corn when instead you can just drop in ten times as many kernels and bury them? Because we have techniques that, sure we don't use machinery, we do it by hand, but its just as easy to drop in you know, 124 kernels of corn, and have that many more, you know so that's 250 ears in good soil,

possibly more. So its easier to just, you know you have all these ears, which you grow in waves, which you can share. With your neighbor you know, they come into your community garden and they grow, you know, more turnips than they can eat, and they share with you and so forth. So its...I want to see people working together for growing the things that we don't have to buy. But there is a market for large farms like grain growing, you know, mass producing potatoes and onions, you know more labor intensive things that take up more of your soil, more space. You know, meat, dairy, eggs, cheese, that takes up more room. And there's room for that and those farms should be large and they should be closer, but for what we do, an organic vegetable garden,, we should be right in town where you can pick it fresh that day. I'd like to see our farm grow more as a... I don't want to say an extension agent...as a manager...

Katie: A guide?

JP: Yeah, just get people to do it themselves, help them. I think that's our skills.

Katie: is there anything else you would like to add?

JP: [shakes head]