

The Move to Ojai

My move to Ojai Valley came as a surprise to many of my friends and acquaintances. Certainly it was unanticipated by yours truly. For 30 years I led a satisfying, full life in Palo Alto, with many friends and associations, including the Common Ground Garden Supply and Education Center, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, the local United Nations Association, the local AAUW, WILPF, and Raging Grannies, not to mention my garden and Russian language and culture groups. Why would I ever want to move away? Only to be closer to family, of course, but the prospect was years away in my mind, to be preceded by much research and preparation.

The year 2007 was full enough, with the Kitka concert/Chernobyl-20 film fundraiser at St. Mark's in March, and an ecotour to Russia and Ukraine, and my high school reunion in July and August. But in June, the opportunity arose to acquire a property in Ojai Valley, less than 1.5 hours away from the area of Los Angeles where my daughter Holly works as a floral designer (see www.hollyflora.com). She had sent a Craigslist posting, suggesting that we "get this place and farm it together!" Naturally my curiosity was piqued, and a trip to Ojai (20 and 45 miles roughly east of Ventura and Santa Barbara, respectively) was in order.

One visit to the small mulberry and fruit orchard with livable dwellings for owners, guests, and temporary fruit pickers that was being offered for sale convinced us that it would be a great move for both of us. I would be able to live in a beautiful valley with year-round fruit from my own orchard and vegetables from my spacious garden, and Holly and her fiancé Josh would have a place where they could grow flowers organically and possibly do business in the future. Not to mention bringing their friends to go bike-riding, hiking, and even surfing just 20 miles away.

Thus, in due course I found an attorney who helped us draw up a contract with the owner, followed through with the Russia/Ukraine and Wisconsin High reunion trips, and put my Palo Alto home on the market in September with the aid of realtor/BfR supporter Sandy Harris. The house fortunately sold just as the local market began to slide, and at the beginning of October I started my new life as a grower of mulberries and other fruits.

Mulberry Haven, as we've renamed it, lies just across the (dry in summer) Ventura River from a preserve that is part of the Ojai Valley Land Conservancy. The orchard was developed by 3rd-generation berry farmer, Gordon Kennedy, who passed on to us the services of his long-time Bio-Dynamic orchardist, Kody Ryan. Kody manages the watering of the approximately 100 trees in the dry season, the pruning in winter, and the fruit picking at the various maturation times. He is currently being ably assisted in the winter pruning by Eugene McEnnis, a raw foods chef who enjoys the environment here and who rides his Cannondale all the way to Malibu for cooking stints.

Biointensive for Russia has most definitely accompanied us to Ojai. We hosted Oleg Zavarzin for 19 days in November, enabling him to attend Ecology Action's 3-Day Workshop in Willits on GROW BIOINTENSIVE Sustainable Mini-Farming. Vladimir Loginov arrived a week after Oleg's departure to help me settle in. He is also participating in various environmental and agroecology meetings during his three-month visit.

Before Oleg and I headed north to Willits at the beginning of November, we enjoyed visits to the Getty Center and the Huntington Gardens in the L.A. area, and to Meiners Oaks Elementary School – a California Distinguished School here in Ojai Valley. Oleg also helped to plan my first veggie garden here and laid out and dug two growing beds, into which I subsequently planted compost crops.

En route to Willits, we picked up interpreter Darina Drapkin in the East Bay. She performed as splendidly as ever, helping Oleg to assimilate the nuances of GB as presented by John Jeavons, Carol Cox, and apprentices Dan and Margo Royer-Miller. (See www.growbiointensive.org for the basics!). Together we also helped Oleg bond with the many other participants, including one hailing from as far away as Sri Lanka.

Following the workshop, we enjoyed a day of wonderful tours organized by our excellent hosts Dave and Jenny Watts of Sanhedrin Nursery (<http://www.sanhedrinnursery.com>):

- 1 Jason Bradford's home- and school-based sustainable food-growing and preserving models in Willits (see Jason's amazing story at http://globalpublicmedia.com/people/jason_bradford and at <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/sonoma/08.10.05/willits-0532.html>),
- 2 Willits High School with Principal Gordon Aslund, including a session with a Russian-born student interpreting for the Ecology class, and
- 3 The lovely, secluded, Emandal "Farm on a River," (<http://www.emandal.com/camp/intro.html>) where environmental education and family camps are held, and cabins are available for weekly rentals to private parties.

Oleg and I also spent an extra day at Ecology Action receiving a special consultation on soils from John, recordkeeping from Carol, and garden research from Dan and Margo. John encouraged Oleg to commit to training three more teachers in the Bryansk oblast' to teach at the basic level at which he himself is teaching, in the next two years.

On the way (already said en route above) back to Ojai, we stayed in Palo Alto for several days as guests of Elisabeth Seaman. Our activities included Oleg sharing his Biointensive experience in the Bryansk oblast' (Biointensive has ameliorative effects on the radiation in vegetables grown there) and his knowledge of global biodiversity as affected by climate change with the Russian Language & Culture, Midtown Growing Circle, and St. Mark's Environment Commission groups. We visited Hidden Villa (www.hiddenvilla.org) with Ninel and Kolya Kushchenko and the Agroecology Program at UC Santa Cruz (<http://casfs.ucsc.edu/>) with Mark and Romie Georgia. A highlight was our afternoon at the Green Festival (www.greenfestivals.org/) in San Francisco and dinner in Chinatown with Joe Jedeikin and Tamara Kowalski, both of whom had been hosted by Oleg at his school in Bryansk during our July ecotour.

Rounding out Oleg's sojourn, we visited the La Brea tar pits and the Page museum, guided by my future son-in-law Josh Beckman, who designs exhibits at the Natural History Museum in Los Angeles. We heard later from Ludmila Zhirina that back in Bryansk, Oleg spent three hours reporting and showing his photos to Viola members. The visit was a big success not only for the future of BfR, but also for the geography and biology programs that Oleg directs. Oleg shared that he is slated to move on to become director of the biology teaching program for the entire

Bryansk oblast (2 million population), so the future of GROW BIOINTENSIVE trainings there appears bright!

Due to funding and health (in the case of Irina Kim in Uzbekistan) challenges, we were unable to accomplish any of the workshops we had planned this year. However, we have not given up hope for 2008 and will try to get two spring workshops in Russia and Ukraine funded and planned (to be taught by NGO Viola members). We'll also work with our Russian partners at the Educational Methods Center in Kiev to fund a major workshop there in the fall or later, with Steve Moore presenting.

Another priority in 2008 will be to reprint the Russian translation of *The Sustainable Vegetable Garden* and to print translations of a new workshop manual and the certification booklet.

Donations continue to be needed to support the above-mentioned workshops in Kiev and Bryansk (which will cost about \$5000) and publications. Checks should be made out to Ecology Action with BfR on the memo line. BfR's address is now 912 Oso Road, Ojai CA 93023.

We were sad that we had to leave Palo Alto and the Bay Area, but expect to return three or more times a year, and were happy to have the opportunity on Sept. 15 to say farewell to many friends at the Common Ground Store and Educational Center's 35th anniversary party in Woodside (see www.commongroundinpaloalto.org/birthdayparty35.htm for details).

Yes, and we *will* welcome you as pickers, and/or honored guests, as there are several dwellings on the property and plenty of beds! For more on this idyllic valley, see www.nytimes.com/2007/11/30/travel/escapes/30ojai.html. For a year-old, outdated glimpse of our abode, see www.ojaimulberryfarm.com/, and for the "after" photos, feel free to write to me.

We look forward to your visit!

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