

EXCERPTS FROM CORNELL UNIVERSITY APPLICATION
BY PATRICIA WESLEY
DECEMBER 1989

When I was eleven years old, I had an experience that opened my eyes to the realities of farm life. I spent the summer working on a small, town-operated farm, learning about gardens, produce stands, and building maintenance. I had a terrific time picking berries, hunting for overgrown zucchini in the vine beds, and weeding. My chores never seemed like hard work, since there was always a fun aspect to them. When I picked berries, I ate them as well. After a zucchini hunt, we always has a contest to see who could heave the biggest zucchini the farthest, and at least once a week there was a weed fight in the chicken pen. Farm life seemed to be just like summer camp: fun with no real hardships.

Then on a blistering hot July day, the entire summer crew gathered to herd Hilda, our sow, into the barn so that she could be "sent off." I was very excited. Hilda was an enormously large pig-an absolute porcine monster. She had just had a litter, and I had never seen her leave her piglets before. I was very curious to see how we were going to get her out of the pen into the barn.

All the summer workers lined up into two rows, with brooms, sticks, and buckets to prod, poke, and lure Hilda out. Her pen was opened, and the circus began. It took us two full hours of continous struggle to get Hilda out of her sty. Finally, Hilda trotted into the barn, holding her snout up in a very indignant manner. It was a

tremendous moment when we slammed the door shut on Hilda's stall. An impromptu pig party broke out, with everybody singing and jumping around.

After we had all settled down, and gone back to work, a large truck pulled up to our barn. The driver said that she had come for Hilda. Lynda, my boss, was very pleased. She told me that Hilda was going off to the slaughterhouse, and she would fetch a good price at the meat market. She went off to help the woman with the truck. I stood there dumbstruck.

Until then, it had never occurred to me what was going to happen to Hilda. I just presumed that she would live at the farm forever. For the first time I realized that Hilda was not a pet, and like all of the other animals on the farm, she was being raised for food. It was a startling realization. I began to see that farming was not just all fun; there was a much starker, real side to it. Farming is about life, and death, and how we control plants and animals to suit our own needs.

" The Hilda Herding Day " as I have dubbed it, was a very important one in my childhood. It showed me the realities of farm life. I began to think about farming in an entirely different, and exciting way. Farming suddenly became a way of life, and more than just a summer past time.

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"What paid or volunteer work experience has been most important to you? Why? What do you feel you have accomplished?"

I feel that my involvement with the Natick Community Farm, both as a paid and a volunteer worker, had been the most important experience for me. The farm taught me patience, the rewards of hard work, and responsibility.

I accomplished many little, yet important things at the farm. I helped to keep the garden tidy and organized, so that our crops produced maximum yield. I helped to make our roadside stand successful by making sure that our produce was sold at a profit. Finally, I helped to raise and care for farm animals, such as goats, chickens, and calves, so that they too could be used to the farm's maximum benefit.

On a more personal level, I helped teach at least one hundred children how to care for the garden and the farm animals. I have used my talents as a fund raiser to get supplies donated to the farm in order to keep a program going that I strongly believe in. I have continued to support the farm by volunteering during the maple sugaring season, in the summer program, and the Harvest Festival.

My work at the Natick Community Farm has given me a great deal of satisfaction, and a sense of purpose. I hope to carry these feelings into the career path that I pursue.

Patricia Wesley