

Good afternoon. Thank you for coming, supporting City Farm, and honoring **me**, Steven Marx, and also toasting **me**, and also celebrating **my** contributions, as it says on the invitation.

Serving as the object of a tribute like this is painful, but under the circumstances, profitable, as I've been told.

And since the appointed occasion is **my** retirement, I'll try to make the best of your terrifying attention with some backward reflection on my 79 year-old story.

I discovered a central theme of that story captured in Kayla's unposed photo of me with the crook and sheep, placed at the top of the invitation to this event --a theme named in the word, "pastoral."

That word comes from the latin word for shepherd, "pastor." It refers to an ancient idea applying to all herders, farmers, their agrarian way of life and the landscape they inhabit.

Pastoral contains a paradox. It applies not so much to the realities of herding or farming, but to an ideal and a longing, expressed in poetry, music and art that's often contradicted by those realities.

That's why it fits my story: I'm not really a shepherd or a farmer; I grew up in apartments in NYC; I don't have a green thumb; I can't back up a trailer or maneuver a tractor, let alone repair a rototiller. And despite repeated efforts, I could never make a dollar using the talents and skills required by rural life. The only way I've been able to earn a living has been as an English teacher and literary scholar.

But nevertheless, I've always been captivated by the pastoral ideal.

I can trace that enchantment back to my parents, refugees from Nazi Germany who had in their youth been members of Naturfreunde or Nature Friends hiking groups, and who sent me, during hot New York summers, to a farm camp in the mountains of Massachusetts. That was followed by job experiences during college as camp counselor and High sierra camp helper.

While a grad student avoiding the draft, I desperately searched for an original doctoral dissertation topic and finally landed upon an obscure set of pastoral poems to decipher, written in 1576 and called “The Shepherd’s Calendar.”

After participating in the 1968 student takeover of Columbia University where I taught, Jan and I spent a summer and holidays at a rural artist’s commune in Vermont known as “Total Loss Farm.”

My last course before the losing the faculty position because of not completing the dissertation in 1970 was called “pastoral and utopia: visionary conceptions of the good life.” It drew a large student enrollment.

Soon afterward, we headed for Canada to get away from the violent government crackdown on anti-Vietnam war protestors and from the violent tactics of the protestors themselves, some of whom had been good friends. We ended up at the end of the road on the British Columbia coast, where we settled in an old homestead, found a community of like-minded “back to the land” exiles, and lived out a lot of the pastoral dream--supported by nearby junior college teaching jobs.

Nine years later, we returned to California and I finished the PhD thesis on pastoral, which led to publication, and eventually the only academic job offer I could secure at age 46--at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo—which I’d never heard of. In the title of their book about this place, Josephine Clifford and De Guy Cooper called San Luis County *A Vast Pastoral Domain*.

With its immense holdings of 10,000 acres of largely undeveloped land and its heritage of agricultural and natural resource management programs, the University allowed me to teach courses in reading and writing about the environment, that required hiking through pastures and mountains and hanging out with farmers and herdsman, without actually being one.

Just when I retired from Cal Poly in 2011, the City of SLO completed its Master Plan for the Calle Joaquin Ag Reserve. It needed a non-profit organization to manage the property by carrying out the formidable tasks of subleasing to independent organic farmers, providing educational programs for youth and offering opportunities for public engagement.

Having witnessed Jan's struggle to keep the Reserve whole, I felt it would be a sad failure not to find the financial and organizational means to implement the vision. Though keeping a low profile because of the continuing controversy, I joined with a group of volunteers who created what we decided to call City Farm.

Those words themselves seemed like an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms combining urban and rural, that echoed the paradox of "pastoral."

Along with the sense of the incredible value of its soil *and* its real estate, it's that resonance with my own pastoral ideals that's bound me to this place over all these years.

For most of them the existence of the organization that's managed the farm has been marginal. Tenants, facilities, staff, programs, and finances have come and gone, and on occasion the Board has sought a new owner or planned for liquidation. But for the last year and a half, thanks to the efforts of our amazing staff, accomplished tenant farmers, enthusiastic volunteers, devoted board, and the generosity and initiative of major donors, things have taken off.

Now, when people walk through the gate, I can see in their expressions, even behind masks, a delight and a desire that I recognize from way back. That's what's given me permission to step down and celebrate the **future** of City Farm SLO.

